

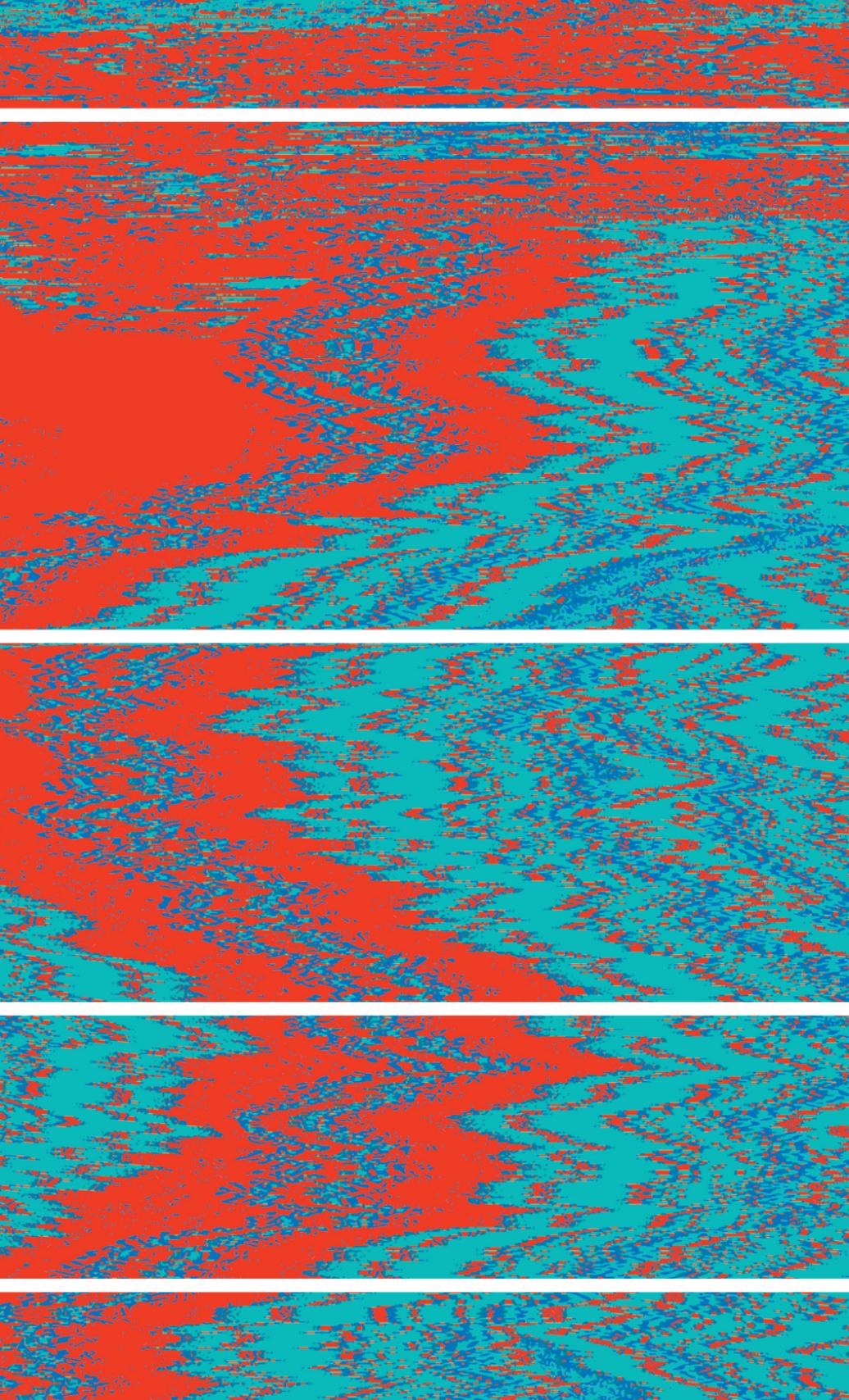
PERSPECTIVES

IN A WHILE OR TWO WE WILL FIND THE TONE

Essays and Proposals,
Curatorial Concepts,
and Critiques

Bonaventure Soh
Bejeng Ndikung

ARCHIVE BOOKS



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*In memoriam of he who laid
the foundation, whose sidenotes
and stories set the tone, and
whose writings and perspectives
still and will for ever echo
and serve as bearing.*

*Pius Bejeng Soh
Storyteller, Wordsmith,
Rhythmanalyst, Father*

1944–2020

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Introduction

The exhibition space and exhibition making, physically and psychically speaking, to me, have always been spaces of and for deliberations and critique. Spaces of critical thinking and of experimentation. Spaces through which and in which certain socio-political phenomena, cultural or economical paradigms could be reevaluated and certain norms, in theory and practice, could be challenged, renegotiated and proposals made anew. In these spaces of negotiations, which I have previously written about (in the essay *Defiance In/As Radical Love: Soliciting Friction Zones and Healing Spaces*) in relation to Mary Louise Pratt's notion of Contact Zones, one must appreciate the possibility of transcending the urge to preach harmony or synchrony to the choir, but also imagine such spaces as cognitive and physical spaces of dissonances and slippages, of disharmony and *décallage*, of marking time and stepping aside or backwards in an effort to gain another vantage point or field of view. In fact, maybe one of the tasks—surely not the only—of making exhibitions is devising tools and paths and strategies on how to gallop off the frame, if not to detonate it completely.

In the past 15 years of making exhibitions and especially in the last 10 years of doing SAVVY Contemporary, writing exhibition proposals, doing what one might call art critique, thinking through the works of artists and thinking together with artists, lectures on arts and the sociopolitical have allowed me the possibility of deliberating on the kind of world I will like to live in and even more so the kind of world I will like to leave behind for my children and my children's children. The exhibition format, which to me inherently means 'writing' of different sorts, has been a crucial space for, inter alia, a. establishing a politics of referencing, b. creating relations, c. Putting philosophy in action, d. reassessing historical narratives in our post-colonial moment and neocolonial continuum, e. reflecting on the repercussions of socio-political, -economical, and -technological on our identities—racial, gender, sexual, diasporic and otherwise, f. deliberating on the intersections between the natural sciences, technologies and the arts by practicing extra-disciplinarity, g. Sourcing out other spaces of knowledges by thinking through the body in what I have called 'corpoliteracy', as well as exploring idioms, the sonic, proverbs and names as epistemic spaces, and h. most especially renegotiating notions and beings of aesthetics.

This work, like every other praxis, doesn't come from nothing and wasn't built in a vacuum, as the curatorial practices of especially Simon Njami and Okwui Enwezor, as important forebears have shaped, for me, the ways the exhibition space and curatorial practice in general have become spaces for critical cogitations. This book is a selection of 22 essays, concepts, proposals, lectures produced in the past five years for varying occasions. Too often such texts are dispersed in various catalogues and readers, in magazines and as book chapters, or simply disappear in the jungle of the internet faster than one can think. So this book should be considered an effort in re-reading these texts and putting them together as a body of work stretched out over a period of time, as well as reflection on consistency. This book, *In A While Or Two We Will Find The Tone* is the first in a trilogy of collections of proposals, published and unpublished texts from the past years. Book two will be a collection of monographic essays on artists' practices that I have accompanied. Artists whose works have inspired me and whose works have been the guiding line and backbone of my curatorial practice.

Artists for whom I have served as sparring partner, and vice versa. Book three is a collection of three long texts, one of which has previously been published as a pamphlet and two unpublished long essays. Perspective: a. the art of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface so as to give the right impression of their height, width, depth, and position in relation to each other, b. the appearance of viewed objects with regard to their relative position, distance from the viewer, c. a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view—seems thus a rather befitting space and series within which these collections appear, as these works together, are perspectives unfolded together with many artists and collaborators at SAVVY Contemporary and beyond, that have considered curatorial practice as much a poetic as well as a philosophical practice, taking seriously the architecture and rhythm of poetry, as much as implementing tools of DJing to feel the sociopolitical and economic ‘pulses’ within our world today, use the exhibition format as a possibility in ‘echoing’—as in reflecting sound or resounding—certain issues of interest, and ‘fading’ these different topics that touch the nerve of time, until we find a tone that resounds with something one might call humanity, and hopefully ‘hook’ the beholder and collaborators to this tune and tone that might permit us to be just a bit more humane.

04 November 2019

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

The following essay was first delivered as a lecture on the 29th of April 2017, in the context of the symposium “How does it feel to be a problem” for the Parliament of Bodies (curated by Paul B. Preciado), the public program of documenta 14. The Parliament of Bodies emerged from the experience of the so-called long summer of migration in Europe, which revealed the failure of both representative democratic institutions, and of ethical practices of hospitality. It took W. E. B. Du Bois’s question “How does it feel to be a problem?” as an interpellation geared towards the “99%,” and took into consideration the process that African philosopher Achille Mbembe has called “becoming black of the world.”¹

1. See Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

An Alignment of Contested Bodies and Spaces. On Alterity, Asynchrony or Heterogeneity

I would like to start with a few disclaimers:

1. This essay is not a rhetorical exercise.
2. It is also not supposed to be intellectual masturbation.
3. This piece is not the first piece making this call, nor will it be the last.
4. It also doesn't claim wholeness, as this piece has holes, rugged surfaces and hiccups, and it is crooked rather than straight.
5. This piece is a call. A call for coalitions, a call for renewed alliances, a call to step out of our comfort zones.

It is no coincidence, I think, that this congress takes its cue from W. E. B. Du Bois' pertinent question—how does it feel to be a problem?—in his iconic work *The Souls of Black Folk*.²

In the following, I would like to think about what it means to be a problem, and complicate the question of being a problem.

To embark on this, I think it is worth taking a step back, and asking the obvious questions:

To/For whom are we actually a problem?
How did we become a problem?
What machinations have been put in place to maintain or continuously present us as the problem?
For whom is it actually a problem that we are a problem?
And, most crucially: How do we stay problematic?
As in, if we are the problem, and the other side that made of us a problem is the nonproblem, why should we aspire to be the non-problem?

Act I

They came by sea,
Innumerable like the surfs they came,
Dressed in sea-green robes
And cloaks of frothy white lace.

—S. D. Cudjoe, *Reincarnation* (pt. 1).³

In “The Forethought” to *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois identifies the problem as the *Negro problem*, a key concept of the book which he bluntly articulates as follows: “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”⁴

2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010).

3. First published in *Donga*, no. 3 (November 1976).

4. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 5.

This statement had already been formulated by Du Bois in 1900 when he attended the first Pan-African Conference in London organized by the Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams.

It is also important to note that, that same year, Du Bois “curates” or assembles an exhibition on black American life and economic development for the Paris *Exposition Universelle*, and is awarded the grand prize.⁵

It is certain that the problem of the twentieth century was indeed the problem of the color-line, just as it still is the problem of the twenty-first century, and was the problem of the five centuries preceding that of Du Bois. So, while I fully acknowledge Du Bois’ observation, I suggest that we look at the genesis of the race-line and acknowledge that as race was constructed through colonial and capitalist endeavors, gender, sexuality and other contested concepts, bodies, and spaces too were being constructed. Which is tantamount to saying that the problem line one might want to draw is more a humanity-line than a color-line. By this I mean that the driving forces and mechanisms implemented in the construction of the concepts of race, gender, sexuality, and class to serve the purposes of capitalism—as well as that of its equivalently ugly cousins: colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white supremacy—were indeed aimed at defining who is human, and who is not human enough. It goes without saying, for example, that to have been able to enslave a human being or colonise a people, people had to be made inferior through a process of dehumanization. Thus, the problem of our age, an age particularly defined by the machinations and reverberations of coloniality was and is the humanity-line. For, how sure are we that we are or have become human, and at what point were we re-humanized? It goes almost without saying that dehumanization is not a oneway process, for in the process of dehumanizing the other, you dehumanize yourself.

5. See W. E. B. Du Bois, “The American Negro at Paris,” *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol. XXII, no. 5 (Nov. 1900): 575-577.

As Du Bois himself put it:

The second thought streaming from the death-ship and the curving river is the thought of the older South,—the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle, God created a *tertium quid*,* and called it a Negro,—a clownish, simple creature, at times even lovable within its limitations, but straitly foreordained to walk within the Veil. To be sure, behind the thought lurks the afterthought,—some of them with favoring chance might become men, but in sheer self-defence we dare not let them, and we build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through.⁶

That *tertium quid*. That *third thing* that is indefinite and undefined, that unclassifiable space of uncertainty inhabited by uncertain bodies. If thought together, if they align, these uncertain bodies would give new meaning to and define for themselves what that uncertain and indefinite space is or might become. The *tertium quid*, as a newly constituted entity, exceeds the sum of its original parts, that is to say, it becomes something beyond existing conceptions of time, space, and body, beyond given meanings, beyond chance and intentions.

(This is where I disagree with the most respectable Franco “Bifo” Berardi. It is not true that the double-headed monster can be reduced to Le Pen and Macron and that there is no third option.⁷ There is always a third option, which is the *tertium quid*. Which is me, and you. The question is how do we make this third option *act*?)

The question at stake here is how to appropriate, hijack, and sequester that contested space; and what kind of forces would be needed to release that space from the firm grip of capital?

6. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 97.

7. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Questions about the Double-Headed Monster That Is Destroying Life on the Planet, and How to Deal with It,” The Parliament of Bodies, documenta 14, April 28, 2017.

Act II

They came and went, and yet more came,
By night they came
On their fateful journey nowhere,
Weaving eternal patterns on the golden sand.

—S. D. Cudjoe, *Reincarnation* (pt. 2).

It seems of the utmost importance to expand on the entanglements between capitalism, colonialism, and the construction of contested concepts, bodies, and spaces by zooming in on the constructions of race and gender.

In his reflections on the *Coloniality of Power; Eurocentrism, and Latin America*,⁸ Anibal Quijano puts a spotlight on the genesis of the concept of race. According to Quijano, in the process of identity construction of a new spacetime called modernity, a new power model, a new regime of governmentality emerged. This regime is essentially based on a method that differentiates between two sides, the conqueror and conquered, manifested in the concept of race. In other words, the later efforts to biologically justify the inferiorization of some in favor of the others was crucial in the justification of conquests, colonizations, superimposition of certain knowledge systems and the destruction of others, and not least the massive exploitation of resources. As Quijano points out, the process of racialization required for modernity was accompanied by “the constitution of a new structure of control of labour and its resources and products,”⁹ facilitated by serfdom, slavery to the service of a capitalist system of accumulation. It is racialization as part of the machinery of conquest and colonization, of master and slave, that led to the categorization of social identities like Indians, Blacks or Mestizos as inferior, and led to the transformation of geographical identities like Spanish or Portuguese into racially connoted identities of superiority and domination.¹⁰

8. Anibal Quijano & Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.” *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1 no. 3 (2000): 533-580.

9. *Ibid.*, 534

10. *Ibid.*

These racial constructs were later harvested and spread by what is now known as Europe. Although it started as a mere tool for social classification of colonizer and colonized, a phenotypic trait, namely the color of the skin, soon became the core element for racialization. Blacks became the principal exploited group on whose shoulders, or through whose hands, capitalist economies, welfare states and Western civilizations were built. The inferiorized race, as much as the inferiorized sex, became the “executor” of nonpaid or unwaged labor. This connection between capitalism, labor, race, sexuality, and the nation-state is evident, historically and in our contemporary, in many places, but especially in the prison-complex.

Though this has been widely discussed, it is worth dedicating a few words to these connections. In Genevieve LeBaron’s 2015 paper “Slaves of the state: American prison labour past and present,” she writes about how prisons in the USA reflect the unequal and highly racialized social order in society, as the majority of prisoners are working class people of color, mostly incarcerated for minor delicts. Historically, the architect of the transition from slavery’s plantation industry to the prison industry is the nation state, evident in the Virginia Supreme Court’s declaration in 1871 that prisoners were “slaves of the state.”¹¹ The racial and class-based consequences of such a declaration is visible in the statistics of the the U.S. Bureau of Justice that in 2008 reported that one in three black men would go to prison in his lifetime. With regards to wages, LeBaron explains that the state of California pays its inmates that as fire fighters \$2 a day compared to a non-inmate fire fighter that earns \$34.44 per hour, making U.S. prison labor to be one of the most corporeal forms of neoliberal discipline drawing in “the unemployed, disenfranchised, and discriminated against, trapping them into disciplines of precarious waged labour.”¹²

11. Genevieve LeBaron, “Slaves of the state: American prison labour past and present,” *Open Democracy*, 23 April 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/genevieve-lebaron/slaves-of-state-american-prison-labour-past-and-present> (accessed 8 February 2019)

12. *Ibid.*

This is how the racial ideology discrimination survived in the prison industry in America, and even in the context of waged labor in the capitalist economic systems.

Through racialization, vulnerable and dispensable bodies have been created and cultivated through the subjection to the power of capitalist accumulation. These bodies were meant to be the problem, inhabiting contested spaces like the plantations, the household, the prisons, the streets, and the refugee camps of the world. The problem was to be inherited from one generation to the other in an effort to maintain the coloniality of power as an instrument of subjection, subjugation, and domination.

As the coloniality of power was manifesting itself through the coloniality of race, coloniality of gender was also being put in place, and gender too became an instrument of colonial subjugation, with capitalist and colonial powers being the common denominator. As María Lugones puts it in her paper *The Coloniality of Gender*, “It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color.”¹³ Otherwise, as Kimberlé Crenshaw¹⁴ and others have argued, the dominant in each group prevails as the norm, that is to say the category “women” is understood as white bourgeois women, “men” is understood as white bourgeois men, “black” is understood as black heterosexual men etc. Thus the necessity to look at these questions and how they intersect. With the concept of coloniality of gender, Lugones analyses “racialized, capitalist, gender oppression”¹⁵ that reign since the inception of coloniality until today, and that coexist together with ecological, spatial, sexual and social hierarchical constructs.

13. María Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender.” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, vol. 2 (Spring 2008): 4.

14. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Critical Race Theory*, eds. K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller & K. Thomas, (New York: The New Press, 1995): 357–383.

15. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” *Hypatia*, vol. 25 no. 4 (Fall, 2010): 747.

To drive her point further in on how colonization, capitalism, as well as Eurocentric knowledge dissemination led to gender differentials when, in precolonial times and spaces there were none, Lugones calls onto Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. Oyěwùmí elaborates on how an oppressive gender system was imposed on Yorùbá society, showing how colonial gender binaries encompass the subordination of females in every aspect of life.¹⁶ An observation that has also been made in relation to indigenous American communities, especially with regards to matriarchal societies and “Third gendering” (Paula Gunn Allen). As Oyěwùmí points out, “the Yorùbá categories *obinrin* and *okùnrin* as “female/woman” and male/man,” respectively, is a mistranslation. [...] these categories are neither binarily opposed nor hierarchical.”¹⁷

Oyěwùmí summarizes these findings as such:

The very process by which females were categorized and reduced to “women” made them ineligible for leadership roles. [...] The emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted, in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. [...] The creation of “women” as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state. [...] It is not surprising, therefore, that it was unthinkable for the colonial government to recognize female leaders among the peoples they colonized, such as the Yorùbá.¹⁸

16. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

17. *Ibid.*, 157-180.

18. *Ibid.*, 124.

Act III

By land they came, the living dead,
To tidal threshold of new life.
I heard mysterious voices
Beyond my mother's heaving breath,
Beyond the wind's gentle tread
On the depth of the night.

—S. D. Cudjoe, *Reincarnation* (pt. 3).

In 1949, W. E. B. Du Bois visited the Warsaw Ghettos, where he saw firsthand the debris of the war and the Nazi occupation. Back in America, he wrote a seminal essay entitled “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” published in 1952 in the magazine *Jewish Life*. He writes:

Three years ago, I went to Warsaw. I knew something of the disorder of this world: the howling and the shots of the racist riots of Ku Klux Klan; The threat of the police and the courts; Abandonment and destruction of human settlements; But nothing in my most overflowing imagination matched what I saw in Warsaw in 1949. If I had not seen it, I would have said that it was impossible for a civilized nation with religious feelings profound and eminent religious institutions, with its literature and its art, could reserve to its fellow beings the treatment which Warsaw had undergone. It was a complete, planned, total destruction.¹⁹

In this essay, Du Bois reflects on issues of identity, race, resilience, and resistance, and importantly, acknowledges that after having witnessed the Warsaw Ghettos—and *becoming aware of the Jewish problem of the modern world*—there was a need to reassess and review his statement, made 50 years prior, that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”

19. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto.” *Jewish Life*, vol. 6 no. 7 (1952): 14–15.

This essay is a document of solidarity at a time of extreme precarity in which Du Bois recognizes in the Jewish cause (of that time) the “negro cause.” Du Bois’ paper starts with an anecdote about his first visit to Poland when he was a student in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century. In his account, Du Bois tells us how, upon lamenting about racism in America, his university colleague Stanislaus Ritter von Estreicher dared him to visit Poland if he wanted to see what racism actually means. And Du Bois took him up on the challenge. An anecdote worth sharing with you; in Du Bois’ own words:

Starting from Budapest, I had crossed Hungary to a small town in Galicia, where I intended to spend the night. The coachman looked at me and asked me if I wanted to stay “unter die Juden,” “among the Jews.” I was a little perplexed, but I said “yes.” So we went to a small Jewish hotel, on a narrow street, away from the central path. There I became aware of another problem of race and religion that I did not know about the treatment and segregation of a large number of human beings. I made my way back towards Krakow, being more and more aware of the problems affecting these two human groups; Then, I returned to college, very pensive about my own race problem and its place in the world.²⁰

I think the points I am trying to make here are based on Du Bois’ realization that the color-line was a limitation and that there was a need to widen the scope of resistance to include other peoples and religions who, too, have been othered and made into “the problem.” It is important to note here that, genealogically, similar methods and practices have been employed in the construction of the other, or the inferiorization of other human beings—be it along racial, gender, class or sexual lines. Furthermore, Du Bois also realized that not only the machinery of production and maintenance of the other as other is similarly constructed in different situation... but also that the machinery of destruction of the other seems comparable, if, for instance, we look at the Herero and Nama genocide alongside the Shoah.

20. *Ibid.*, 14.

And the machinery of containing and denigrating others is comparable, for instance if we look at the *Code Noir*—the Edict Concerning the Negro Slaves in Louisiana, issued by Louis XV in 1724 consisting of fifty-four articles—imposing specific obligations, prohibitions, and details regulating marriage, religious instruction, burial, even clothing and subsistence, punishment, and manumission of slaves. Interestingly the very first article of the *Code Noir* decreed expulsion of Jews from the colonies, while Article III prohibited the exercise of any other religion other than Roman Catholicism.

Act IV

Until at cockcrow, Nature sang,
And Dawn beckoned me enchantingly
With dew jewelled hands.

—S. D. Cudjoe, *Reincarnation* (pt. 4).

So, if the mechanisms used to produce, maintain, exclude, and destroy contested bodies and spaces are similar, or at least are different tentacles of the same ugly Hydra, then I will like to propose the following possibilities of engaging with this reality: In a recent lecture, held at the Southbank Centre in London, on assimilationism, white feminism, toxic masculinity, intersectionality and the prison industrial complex, activist Angela Davis stated that:

We always use as our standard, those who are at the centre of the structures we want to dismantle. And so why will women want to become equal to men, why would black people, and Latinos, and Arabs, Muslims want to become equal to White people? Why would the LGBTQ community want to become equal in the context of heteropatriarchy?²¹

21. “Angela Davis in Conversation,” Women of the World Festival, Southbank Centre, London, 12 March 2017, <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/blog/angela-davis-conversation> (accessed 8 February 2019)

And:

It seems to me that we will have finally made some progress if “women” who have always been marginalized from the general category women, which has been about white middle-class women, if those who have had to struggle could become the sign of that category. And what would it be like to have say a black transwoman who has been involved in struggles against violence, struggles against the prison industrial complex, what would it be like for that woman to stand in as the sign of the category—woman.²²

So, if the norm of “womanhood” is to be understood and embodied by the white bourgeois woman, then we should reject womanhood; if the concept of “manhood” should be understood as and incarnated by the white bourgeois man, then we must disapprove of “manhood”; if “black” is to be understood as the black heterosexual man; then we strictly repudiate this blackness; if sexuality is to be understood as heteronormative sexuality, then we reject sexuality, and especially heterosexuality; if patriarchy is the model system of governance for our families and societies at large, then we denounce patriarchy and the societies built to accommodate such a system; and if humanity is to be understood and embodied by those agents of capitalist and neoliberal economic systems that dehumanized other humans in order to maximize profit, then we strictly deny being human. For, if these categories cannot be rendered more layered, our only choice is to hold onto the idea of the *tertium quid* as a form of resistance against categories that violently simplify, or suppress our ability to act, think, and create alliances. If we cannot complexify categories, then we choose to stick to and give new meaning to the *tertium quid*.

If these aforementioned categories pledge for homogeneity and synchronicity, as we see in discourses of a homogenous *Volk*, of a singular *Leitkultur*, of building walls and banning

22. *Ibid.*

religions, then we must create and claim spaces of heterogeneity and asynchrony, spaces that readily accommodate a multiplicity of bodies, languages, cultures, and ways of being.

One of the greatest fears existing, especially in Western societies today is that the political and economic structures of power are losing grips over the machinery of alterity. That is to say, not only is there a fear that the way people were othered over the past centuries no longer functions as effectively as it used to, but also the fear that the “ghosts” of histories, histories that have been fabricated to accommodate white supremacy, and are based on oppression and subjugation of the subalterns, are coming back with a vengeance. It is the fear of the uncertainty of what or who the embodied *tertium quid* is, and what it can do that has provoked, or better resuscitated such nationalistic sentiments and has produced the situation we are experiencing today in the West as much as everywhere else. The fear of the “bad hombre” stems from the uncertainty of how far the “bad hombre” can really go, and is he trying to avenge or just trying to claim back his dignity? Are the hundreds of thousands of people called refugees, descendants of former dehumanized people, flocking to Europe today not only to seek for the proverbial greener pastures, but to claim their dignities, histories, humanities and most especially resources back?

The former standards of whiteness, heteronormativity, and the great nation seem to be crumbling, this is why it would seem to me that there is an increasing desire to make certain nations great again, be it the U.S., Poland or Australia, this desire is supported by racism and fascist sentiments. On their way down, they will clutch at a straw. But by radically denying those standards, and by rejecting those norms that lead to the denigration of others, we might take away that last straw. By radically refusing to accept certain terms and constructs, our power will know no doubt.

Secondly, we recognize that in that space of the othered, in those contested spaces inhabited by contested bodies, in those spaces of alterity there cannot be any hierarchy.

This observation was famously made by Audre Lorde in her 1983 article “There is no hierarchy of oppression,” in which she stated:

I was born Black, and a woman. I am trying to become the strongest person I can become to live the life I have been given and to help effect change toward a livable future for this earth and for my children. As a Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult, inferior, or just plain “wrong.”

From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sizes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression. I have learned that sexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over all others and thereby its right to dominance) and heterosexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving over all others and thereby its right to dominance) both arise from the same source as racism—a belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby its right to dominance.²³

To summarize or reiterate the point made earlier, sexism, heteronormativity, racism actually do share an earlier source, which is capitalism and colonialism. Thus, to be able to resist these forces of oppression, there is a pressing need to make coalitions of contested bodies and spaces. This non-hierarchical alignment, if done consciously, is bound to succeed, because we are more, we are stronger,

23. Audre Lorde, “There Is No Hierarchy of Oppression,” *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 219.

we have developed antibodies due to the already lived oppressions, and most especially because we are the avant-garde and because without us there is no modernism, and without us there is barely any capital. This coalition must embody and reflect the heterogeneity, the asynchrony and the diversity of the world. Like Julius Eastman wrote at the very end of the scores for *The Moon's Silent Modulation* (1970): “we have delivered ourselves from the tonal.”²⁴ This space of coalition must be a contested space wherein the contested bodies have delivered themselves from the unilaterality of tonality, and wherein atonality and a polyphonies are affirmed, and lived.

In bell hooks’ “The Oppositional Gaze” (1992) she describes “spaces of agency [that] exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. [...] In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating “awareness” politicizes “looking” relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist.”²⁵

These spaces of agency are exactly the alignment of contested bodies and spaces, wherein the othered bodies enjoy and exercise the privilege of looking back and taking care of each other acknowledging differences, but without status or power gradations.

If this is halfway practiced, the farmer in the countryside in the U.S. will recognize that it is not the “bad hombre” who is his/her enemy, and the factory worker in the Ruhrpott, Germany, or Birmingham, England, or Valenciennes, France will realize that it is not the migrant or refugee who is his/her enemy, but rather capitalist economic structures of power that, in the end as we are experiencing today, produce fascism.

24. Julius Eastman, *The Moon's Silent Modulation*, 1970.

25. bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” *Movies & Mass Culture*, ed. J. Belton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 248.

It is not by chance that in 1969 when the Black Panther Party called for “The United Front Against Fascism” congress, they defined fascism as “the power of finance capital” which “manifests itself not only as banks, trusts and monopolies but also as the human property of FINANCE CAPITAL – the avaricious businessman, the demagogic politician, and the racist pig cop.”²⁶

If nation states look horizontally rather than vertically, Greece will recognize that it can learn from the austerity measures imposed on Cameroon by the common vertical structure, which is the International Monetary Fund. If the industry worker in America looks horizontally, she/he will recognize that they have more in common with a Congolese factory worker than with the Trump family, despite their shared Whiteness.

If I look horizontally, I will see that what happened to Halit Yozgat in 2006 in Kassel could have happened to me.²⁷ I think the work done by the many minds of the NSU Tribunal including Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Forensic Architecture, Ayşe Güleç and more, wherein that make coalitions with antifascists groups all over the world in order to understand how neofascism takes shapes in other geographical spaces, so as to better combat fascist structures ideologically and judicially, is a form of horizontal coalition-formation.

26. See <https://dukeupress.wordpress.com/2017/01/26/theblackpantherpartyandblackantifascismintheunitedstates/>

27. On April 6, 2006, twenty-one year-old Halit Yozgat was killed in a family operated internet café in Kassel's Nordstadt. Halit became the ninth victim in a string of racially motivated murders of immigrants conducted by the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU, or National Socialist Underground). A Hessian secret service agent, Andreas Temme, was present during Halit's murder but claimed that he neither heard the gunshots, noticed the sharp smell of gunpowder, nor saw Halit's body behind the counter when he left. See the investigations, research and activism of The Society of Friends of Halit as participants in The Parliament of Bodies, public programme of documenta 14.

So, this is a call to look horizontally and create horizontal coalitions. The horizontal coalition is **not** charity and it is **not** solidarity, which are both concepts that have a power gradient connotation.

It is a call for an equipoise!²⁸

28. Max Roach, "Equipoise", *Members, don't git weary*, Atlantic, 1968.

The following essay revisits and remixes the exhibition proposal for “Giving Contours to Shadows,” co-curated with Elena Agudio and Storm Janse van Rensburg. The project took place in 2014 in four organizations in Berlin: SAVVY Contemporary, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Gorki Theater and Gemälde Galerie Berlin. A revised version of the text was published in *Neue Rundschau*.

“Giving Contour to Shadows”—which also travelled to Morocco, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa—was structured into five distinctive conceptual chapters, which were understood as alternative trajectories through which history could be reflected upon: “Unthinking the Chimera,” “Sequestering History,” “Pre-Writing History,” “Performing and Embodying Histories,” and “Wandering through Histories.”

In alignment with Wilson Harris’s concept of the arts of imagination, “Giving Contours to Shadows” brought together artists, art workers, and intellectuals from various fields to challenge the singular notion of History with a capital *H*, or mono-History, and deliberate on philosophies, strategies, and methods of disentangling the sovereignty of mono-History, to explore histories that are imprinted in psyches and bodies rather than written and, most importantly, to reflect upon and investigate the partiality of the images we see. The artists and thinkers reflected on the multiplicity of histories and how these could be sequestered, alternatively disseminated, embodied, and freed from the straightjacket of power machinations.

If History is a Shadow, Then How Do We Give It Forms? Revisiting “Giving Contours to Shadows”

“History [with a capital H] ends where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together.” History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone “made” the history of the World.

—Édouard Glissant, *The Quarrel with History*.¹

My concern has always been with the way histories are too often narrated within the scope of a linear mono-directionality, and disseminated as a monoculture. This kind of singular History with a capital H is what I will like to call mono-History, and it is this depiction and reduction or simplifications of histories, which I intended to challenge.

The logic of history, one could easily claim, has been held hostage in bodies of “facts.” These bodies and the historical “facts” they incorporate, get themselves washed up, polished, massaged, and caressed at regular intervals, in what is called the act of commemoration. This act of remembering and marking the past, as structured to particular time references, and as framed by objects of memory—statues, videos, writings, photographs—has become in contemporary society the obvious way of living history.

1. Édouard Glissant, “The Quarrel with History,” in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia., 1992), 64.

In 2014 alone, when we did the exhibition and research project, history was lived and re-lived on varying degrees and intensities, with the commemoration of the 130 years of the Berlin Congo Conference, 100 years of World War I, 75 years of World War II, 70 years of D-Day, 25 years of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and many more. As it is common knowledge that history and historical facts—as concrete as they might be portrayed in history books—and the privilege to write history are some of the most prestigious chalices, earned or seized by any victor or person in power, every history commemorated must thus be seen and appreciated only through the prism of the writer. The culture of commemoration, which stands here as an effigy of all formalized forms of histories, thus fortifies certain histories and at the same time further conceals already silenced histories. Histories imprisoned within such time and space bodies thus need to be liberated towards alternative, more fluid, and less static narratives of histories. This might be what the Martinique-born poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant meant when he talked about the fact that history cannot be left in the hands of historians only.² Glissant was especially concerned with the complexity of certain histories, for example, the histories of the Middle Passage, that is, those histories that laid ground for the triangular trade, the transatlantic slave trade in which millions of Africans were kidnapped, or purchased, and shipped to the New World by Europeans. These histories that are defined by physical and psychic brutalities, histories full of interruptions and distortions in their flows, as everything that belonged/belongs to the people that lived and still live these histories—cultures, languages, philosophies, etc.—is defined by interjections, nonlinearity, and opacity. It is understandable that such histories cannot be left for historians alone to narrate, nor engrained in static bodies of historical narration, but should be expressed and elaborated using other tools. In his seminal essay “History, Fable and Myth,” another Caribbean poet and thinker, Wilson Harris, gives us a possible tool when he suggests that in a bid to go beyond being merely local historians, Caribbean writers must develop a new philosophy of history that relates to “the arts of the imagination.”

2. *Ibid.*, 61-67.

Asked how this philosophy of history may lie buried in the arts of the imagination, Harris explains:

Unless one is sensitive it means that the history that one becomes involved in is a history that imprints itself on us so remorselessly that there seems to be no capacity within the body politic to revise the nature of sovereignty. It becomes wholly locked in a model of sovereignty which is historic. But, in fact, is this what history is saying when one looks deeply at the traumas and problems and residues of history? History, after all, is not only what is written; there are many areas of history that are not written at all, but they are still imprinted in the psyche. And if history leads to a condition in which you have an implacable sovereignty, it means that the very best within the tradition is vitiated.³

Taking into account these non-written histories, or going beyond such histories that have been trapped in bodies of monuments and concepts of commemoration, Harris also declares:

I feel that history has much more to offer us than what we accept in terms of total images, that history has another side in which it is saying that the total images are partial. And if we see this, we have another clarity within another area of another kind of clarity other than the apparently lucid pole of history, which dominates us so absolutely that it could lead to the vitiation of tradition. What is best in a tradition? What is best has to do with all these various roots which stretch away and make it possible for us to move out into areas and take risks.⁴

It is exactly at this juncture that the research and exhibition project *Giving Contours to Shadows* comes in, as an effort to identify alternative trajectories through which histories can be narrated

3. Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 151.

4. Wilson Harris, "Shamanism," Interview by Micheal Gilkes, 7 July 1977, in Marion C. Gilliland, *The Art of Wilson Harris* (PhD. diss., University of Florida, 1982), 225.

beyond that lucid hegemonic narrative of history, that history coloured by the paintbrushes of the empire or the metropolis over the colonies, that history that epitomises the philosophies of power, racial, political, and economic gradients. In alignment with Harris's concept of the arts of imagination, *Giving Contours to Shadows* brought together artists of various mediums, art workers, and intellectuals of varying fields to deliberate on philosophies, strategies, and methods of disentangling the sovereignty of History with a capital *H*, to explore non-written histories that are still imprinted in people's psyches and bodies, but most especially to reflect upon and investigate the partiality of the images we see or think we know, and consider as the whole. In this light, the project was indeed about identifying the different channels through which histories could be channelled, or the variety of forms in which multitudes of written or unwritten histories could be moulded. It was about taking risks of narrating into the unknown. In their multidimensionality, histories can only be understood as a concoction of some truth, fiction, and silenced voices. History is thus like a ghost that lingers, in indecision, between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the darkness of night and the light of day, between the planets of truth and those of lies. The arts of imagination, which as Harris believes could resolve the cleavage between historical conventions and the arts by exploring new forms such as synchronicity, the shaman figure, and the "eye of the scarecrow," could be one possibility of taming that ghost or the language through which histories are expressed. And as the eighteenth-century Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau so aptly described in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*: "But the most energetic language is the one in which the sign has said everything before one speaks."⁵ Since artistic expression is one of the languages in which all is said symbolically without uttering words or before one actually speaks, "Giving Contours to Shadows" was a platform to imagine the past and the traces of history without necessarily articulating "how it really was," but by taking control of and abstracting memory. It is this abstraction of history that lays the foundations for mythologies, which in turn are designed to become canonized history.

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 290.

Unthinking the Chimera

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.

—Derek Walcott, *The Sea is History*.⁶

In an effort to analyze why no one saw the Haitian Revolution coming, and why so little was written about that very important slave revolution of 1791–1804 in the French colony of Saint Domingue that led to the foundation of the Republic of Haiti, the Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues in *Silencing the Past* that this act that was to become history was purely “unthinkable” by the people in power.⁷ Thus the question arises: how can one write a history of the “unthinkable”? The ontological foundation on which preponderant Western historical narratives were built hardly had space for any other narratives, thus, anything considered “impossible” and “unthinkable” could not be considered of historical value. Here Trouillot, inspired by French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, describes the concept of the unthinkable as “that for which one has no adequate instruments to conceptualize” and “that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions were phrased.”⁸

To “unthink the chimera of history”—as proposed by Trouillot—requires placing a spotlight on discontinuities, ruptures, and varying timescales. It requires favoring an archipelago of histories—personal and individual histories—where adaptation, pidginization and creolization represent the prevailing forces.

6. Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History,” in *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948–2014* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), 256.

7. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

8. *Ibid.*, 82.

By placing a spotlight on discontinuities, ruptures, and varying timescales, *Giving Contours to Shadows* tried to offer tools to ‘unthink the chimera’ of history, as proposed by Trouillot, and to favour an archipelago of histories, personal and individual histories, where adaptation, pidginisation, and creolisation represent the prevailing forces.

How can predominating narrations of history and the construction of a single historical canon be confronted with a multiplicity of histories? What are the methodologies that can be put in place to recognize narratives that were swept under the rug because they were considered unthinkable, and how can art deal with them appropriately? Putting mainstream history into parentheses, interrupting, or suspending it for a second also means questioning its ownership, keeping in check its crimes, its abuses, and offenses. The intention was neither to judge the iniquities of a certain non-objective historical narration, nor to accuse the abuse of power exercised by those that had power and the luxury to write history, but rather, by so doing, avoid the danger of becoming hostages of our own histories.

Sequestrating History

Not history as a grandiose or confused movement of the destiny of peoples, nor as the monumental heaping together of culture and barbarity, nor as an adventure of events, but history as the simultaneous presence of its millions of histories, present history, presentified history.

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Technique of the Present*.⁹

There have been, indeed, countless debates on the ownership or possession of history. These debates range from the playful-earnest gender and terminology-related dispute of “history” against “her-story” to a conceptual, geographical, and even power-related altercation as to whether the fifth-century BC historian Herodotus was the “father of history” or if the eighth to fifth-century BC Chinese chronicle *Spring and Autumn Annals* was the point of departure of history.

9. Lecture given by Jean-Luc Nancy in January 1997 at the Nouveau Musée during the exposition of On Kawara’s works, *Whole and Parts. 1964–1995*.

Whoever or whatever the progenitor of history might be is rather irrelevant at this point in time, but what these disputes might reveal is the fact that some think themselves left out of the narration of history, some consider that an “other” claims the right of writing the history over other “others,” or some suppose that whoever wrote a certain history misrepresented others. Thus, the necessity to sequester history from its purported “owner” and recounting it in a culturally more appropriate manner, taking into account the gender, geographical, philosophical, social perspectives of the narrator in question.

By sequestering history, the simultaneous presence of millions of histories, present and presentified histories, as described by Jean-Luc Nancy, in all their nuances and colors, thought and expressed in a multitude of languages, contained by a plurality of forms and lived by diverse peoples can be narrated. So the moment of sequestration of history is that moment foreseen by Édouard Glissant in the “The Quarrel with History” when he wrote about where History [with a capital *H*], a fantasy of the West, ends. That is at that point “where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together.”¹⁰ The transition from capital *H* to small *h*, from a singular History to plural histories would be at the crux of any sequestering endeavor.

Pre-Writing Histories

Histories are fictions—something made of the past—but fictions whose forms are metonymies of the present. Histories are metaphors of the past: they translate sets of events into sets of symbols. But histories are also metonymies of the present: the present has existence in and through their expression. The present—social reality, the structures of our living—has being through representations of the past in coded public forms. We read or hear histories in this double way. We know in them both a present and a past.

—Greg Dening, *A Poetic for Histories*¹¹

10. Glissant, “The Quarrel with History,” 64.

11. Greg Dening, “A Poetic for Histories,” in *Performances* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 37.

Any attempt to rewrite history could easily slip into the abyss of failure. What is written can hardly be rewritten in the formal sense of undoing what was already disseminated as the right. And if there is the slightest chance that history has in the past been fictionalized to suit the purposes of groups, then history might as well be constructed, i.e. the history of the future can thus be written, which is something fiction writers and artists often do. In an interview, Wilson Harris discusses a deeper sort of concentration when writing imaginative fiction that is beyond what he describes as “daylight concentration.” He gets philosophical, saying that when the historical ego is moved, broken, or altered in this process of creating fiction, it allows for the intuitive self to emerge:

This intuitive self comes up, strikes at the historical ego and then creates something which has a future beyond the comprehension of the writer himself. And, it has a past also which is much deeper and stranger than the writer understands. So his fiction reflects in some strange active way a mysterious past as well as a future. Now that means that the fiction has an objectivity that is not the objectivity of daylight consciousness. It is not on the surface of the mind, it is much deeper and the synchronicity thing seems to me to sustain this. It means that the images, the structures which we see around us are not as absolute and sovereign as they appear to be.¹²

Prewriting histories is that process of tapping into those deeper unconscious pasts to imagine a future. It is a space to imagine mathematical extrapolation possibilities of past and present images that exist in the subconscious, as well as in public memory to thereby create another whole. Prewriting histories also offers a space to accommodate the super and supranatural. For example, it would accommodate the concept of the medium who mediates between the living and the dead, as is the case in many cultures, or other so-called witchcraft processes.

12. Wilson Harris, “Synchronicity,” interview by Marion C. Gilliland and Ivan Van Sertima, 25 July 1980, in Maion C. Gilliland, “The Art of Wilson Harris” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1982), 189–90.

Prewriting histories could also be a space to imagine the future of the human in the sense of the state beyond being human, beyond expressing the norms of humanity in relation to form, ethics, language, intellect, or social concepts associated with humanity. That is to say, it might be the space for the re-conception of the human, as proposed by some post-human theorists.

In any case, Greg Dening rightly considers that histories are fictions, and he specifies the entanglement to the present by proposing that the forms of these fictions are just metonymies of the present.¹³ Prewriting histories is an effort to structure, shift, and shape various categories, forms, ideas, and images of pasts and presents, as well as their metonymies into a future conditional tense.

Performing and Embodying histories

Writing as it is understood as a method of recording of knowledge and memory, as a mode of communication through the usage of certain signs and symbols, has always been part and parcel of Western and non-Western cultures and traditions. While some cultures have favored the writing with an open alphabetical code with ink, coal, or otherwise on stone, clay or wax tablets, or paper, others have preferred more coded signs and symbols, encoded and expressed orally or through bodily patterns, scarification, gestures, body languages, and postures that are passed on for generations. Through these processes, histories have always been narrated. Nigerian scholar Esiaba Irobi addresses the body as a site of historical discourse, and broader issues of performativity.¹⁴

13. Dening, "Making a Present Out of the Past: History's Anthropology" in *Performances*, 34.

14. See Esiaba Irobi, "The Problem with Post-Colonial Theory: Re-Theorizing African Performance, Orature and Literature in the Age of Globalization and Diaspora," *Sentinel Literary Quarterly (online)*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2008); and "The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics and Reason in the Caribbean Basin," *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006).

By focusing on how the repertoire of embodied memory can offer alternative perspectives to the “written” archive,¹⁵ Irobi offered theoretical and practical channels for the reconsideration of embodiment in and of historical processes. Among many critics of reductionist writing and archiving processes, Jacques Derrida suggested that “writing is unthinkable without repression,”¹⁶ while Achille Mbembe, in “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” stressed that “the archive is primarily the product of a judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged “unarchivable.” The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status.”¹⁷

It is in their ontology that the acts of writing and of archiving include practices of erasure and foreclosure. In the preface to “In Other Words,” Pierre Bourdieu makes some reflections about oral exchanges, and notes: “Written discourse is a strange product, which is created in a pure confrontation between the writer and “what he or she has to say”, outside any direct experience of a social relation.” He continues: “The major advantage of an oral exchange is linked above all to the very content of the sociological message and to the resistances that it arouses.”¹⁸

It is along the path of these resistances that *Giving Contours to Shadows* represented an attempt to challenge the idea of the archive, and to focus on orality and practises of embodiment of

15. “Written” or “writing” in most cases will simply refer to the conventional form of writing on objects.

16. Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 226.

17. Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, C. Hamilton, et al., eds. (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 20.

18. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), vii and ix.

knowledge and memory, tackling alternative mediums or vehicles through which history can be articulated. Orality and embodiment defer the objectives of pedagogic mnemonics, while inserting mistakes, pauses, and interferences to show the arbitrary nature of historical accounts.¹⁹ They also allow a process of transfer, transforming the archive into something active and not static, existing in the interaction with the environment and with the public, and assuming the possibility of intersubjectivity in the making and telling of histories.

In “The Philosophy of the Sea,” Irobi uses Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s redefinition of phenomenology to show, from an African and African diasporic epistemic and performative perspective, how this concept is best understood not through abstract thinking or intellectual-sumo wrestling or literary textbook-bound knowledge but through the experiential, physical dimension of embodied performance as obtained in many African and African diasporic working class, religious, social, and political communities. I will highlight how the body itself, in African and African diasporic cultures, functions as a somatogenic instrument as well as a site of multiple discourses which absorbs and replays, like music recorded on vinyl, epistemologies of faith and power grooved into it by history. An Igbo proverb states that when we dance, we express who we were, who we are, and who [we] want to be. Time is compressed and telescoped teleologically to contain and express the past, the present, and the future in one fluid kinaesthetic moment.²⁰

On the pathway of Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of the “body schema” and “sedimentation”—in art historical perspective also relating them to Aby Warburg’s *Pathosformeln* and “engrams”—*Giving Contours to Shadows* explored the consideration of the body as a platform for encoding and decoding history, a platform that is alternative to the conventional practice of writing, able to encapsulate memory and to transmit histories.

19. See Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance and the Ruses of Memory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 135–166.

20. See Irobi, “The Philosophy of the Sea.”

Wandering through histories

The mere act of wandering, be it through histories or something else, is in itself a great act of endurance filled with temptations, joy, sadness, and other extreme emotions. Associations with wandering range from the Old Testament example of Moses and the Israelites journey in the wilderness from Sinai to Kadesh for forty years, to contemporary understandings of *flânerie* as a form of leisure or freely pushing oneself to experience one's limits.

In these extremes, the performative act of wandering has to do, on the one hand, with the act of experiencing, of using all of the senses to encounter history and nature, and, on the other, wandering through histories implies a cognitive encounter with concepts and ideological constructs that have framed historical narratives. It is worth relating this to Francisco Varela's concept of the "embodied mind," whereby "the phenomenological approach starts from the irreducible nature of conscious experience," and the "lived experience is where we start from and where all must link back to, like a guiding thread."²¹ Michel Bitbol endorses Varela's integration of the physical and the psychical when he wrote: "Indeed, the starting point of Varela's neurophenomenology is no abstract internal realm, but lived experience in its entirety, human life in its full depth and extent. The starting point of neurophenomenology is *embodied human life*, embedded in an own-body which is both seeing and seen, and is thereby inextricably connected to an environment made of alter-egos and inert objects."²²

"Wandering through Histories" provides a possibility of physically and psychically linking to history through a lived experience of walking, seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, and encountering histories. But this physical and psychic act was also about

21. Francisco J. Varela, "Neurophenomenology: A Methodical Remedy for the Hard Problem," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1996): 334.

22. Michel Bitbol, "Neurophenomenology, an Ongoing Practice of/in Consciousness," *Constructivist Foundations*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2012): 166.

getting off the beaten track and going astray and engaging in a spatial-historic experience. It was about taking another trip into the unknown and discovering the hidden or untouched histories and beauties in that space. It aptly embodied the state of mind of the exile and the diaspora. And as Glissant so precisely formulated: “In the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.”²³

23. Glissant, Édouard, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press., 1997), 20.

The following text was written as a proposal for a research and sonic exhibition project (co-curated with Kamila Metwaly and Marie H el ene Pereira) for the Dakar Biennale 2018. The project seized the chance to deliberate on non-anthropocentric relations, knowledge systems, and ways of being in the world, as prescribed by Halim El-Dabh’s album, *The Dog Done Gone Deaf*. The exhibition also served as a platform for deliberations on, and experimentations as to what is, and where is, sound art in contemporary African art, putting a spotlight on transdisciplinary artistic practices between the visual, performative, installation and sonic mediums.

The exhibition paid tribute to one of the greatest composers from the African continent, and worldwide, Halim El-Dabh. By encompassing the musical dexterity, sophistication, and complexity of El-Dabh’s artistic oeuvre, the project reveals the way he integrates allegories, myths, and pluriversal cosmogonies in his compositions in an effort to reflect on and disseminate sonic epistemologies. The exhibition brought together El-Dabh’s scores, notes, compositions, paintings, and theories, as well as archival material of his performances and listening stations of his pieces. Ten other artists from across the African continent were invited to relate, pay tribute to, get inspired by, and reflect on El-Dabh’s practice—which spanned from electronic music, ethnomusicology, compositions for dance and theater, and sound installations—as well as on the narrative nature of his compositions, and his interests in allegories, myths and legends.

Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog – The Dog Done Gone Deaf: Exploring the Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.

—Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.¹

So, it's the energy and vibration that I'm working with. That's what I want to materialize, with the harps, with new sounds of the orchestras. This is the thing I want to express more, the energy that comes from the frequencies of colors, and how to relate to it and how to materialize it. There's a huge energy there. It's always good to work with musicians in an open way, to explore the relationship of color and art to sound and noise and elements of vibrations, to project them, to create a vibration that is positive and in line with the Earth's positive vibration. Maybe that's too much to ask for?

1. Jacques Attali, "Noise: The Political Economy of Music," trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

You know, the philosophy of ancient Egypt says that everything in life, everything in the environment, has a feeling, and that's a whole different thinking process than our modern Western one. For them, the sun itself had feelings, and it can reflect back and forth.

—Halim El-Dabh, *Unlimited Americana: A Conversation with Halim El-Dabh*.²

Rocks are her (earth's) ears recording all of her events
from the beginning
My earth body returns to hers
Where the earth worm also sings
Inside/outside vibrations
My bones resonate
My stomach, spleen, liver, kidneys, lungs and heart resonate
The organs are sound
Contain sound

—Pauline Oliveros, *The Earth Worm Also Sings*.³

2. Halim El-Dabh, "Unlimited Americana: A Conversation with Halim El-Dabh," interview by Tommy McCutcheon, *Music & Literature*, June 1, 2017, <http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2017/6/1/unlimited-american-a-conversation-with-halim-el-dabh>.

3. Pauline Oliveros, "The Earth Worm Also Sings: A composer's practice of deep listening," *Leonardo Music Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, (1993): 35–38, muse.jhu.edu/article/617723.

Take I

In the foreword to Denise A. Seachrist's *The Musical World of Halim ElDabh*, Akin Euba writes that he regards Halim El-Dabh as one of the most important modern African composers, one of the world's leading exponents in the theories of "African pianism, intercultural composition and creative ethnomusicology."⁴

Euba set the pace by placing El-Dabh in a genealogy of some of the best African composers in the diaspora over generations like Samuel Coleridge Taylor, William Grant Still, and Fela Sowande, or at par with J.H. Kwabena Nketia, and at the same time in line with creative ethnomusicologists and composers such as Mikhail Lysenko and Béla Bartók.⁵ Seachrist in her postscript, like Euba, questions why El-Dabh has been omitted from "virtually all past and current general music history and literature textbooks for music majors and non-music majors alike,"⁶ especially taking into consideration the fact that El-Dabh had already attained prominence in the New York musical scene in the 1950s, studied with Aaron Copland, Irvine Fine, and Luigi Dallapiccola, collaborated with the likes of Otto Luening during his work at the legendary *Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Centre* (upon its founding in 1959 where he composed the unique electronic music piece *Leiyla and the Poet*), worked briefly for Igor Stravinski, composed and performed with the likes of Alan Hovhaness, played with Henry Cowell and John Cage, or composed for Martha Graham, amongst others. How could someone like El-Dabh vanish into oblivion?

4. Akin Euba, foreword to *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh*, by Denise A. Seachrist (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), ix–xv.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh*, 191.

A man whose legendary 1949 composition *It is Dark and Damp on the Front* had already brought him international recognition before any formal music training, whose *Sound and Light of the Pyramids of Giza*, composed in 1959–60 still plays daily at the pyramids, who travelled the African continent meeting the likes of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Hailé Selassié, and collected sounds and instruments around the continent and the diaspora. As Tommy McCutcheon points out “it’s difficult to look at any area of avant-garde music-making that he [El-Dabh] was not at the very forefront of, in some way or another, at some point in his career [...]. Since an excerpt of his 1944 work *The Expression of Zār* was released on CD in 2000, as *Wire Recorder Piece*, he has increasingly gained credit for being perhaps the first composer to use the techniques that Pierre Schaeffer would later (1948) formalize as *musique concrète*.”⁷

As Fari Bradley describes, “*Expressions of Zaar (Ta’abir al-Zaar)* by Halim El-Dabh premiered in an art gallery in Cairo 1944; among the first known work ever composed by electronic means, and also the first intended for electronic presentation. Based on recordings of women chanting at an Egyptian healing ceremony, a sound perhaps as prevalent in 1940 Cairo as canal boats were in Schaeffer’s Paris at the time, *Expressions of Zaar* played out on a magnetic tape recorder (a shorter composition of the work became known as *Wire Recorder Piece*, 1994). The resulting sound, rather than a premonition of Fluxus montages of the machinery of industry and travel as Schaeffer’s had been, was the melded overtones of combined female voices conducting a *zaar* healing or exorcism, a ceremony common to parts of West Asia and North Africa.”⁸

7. El-Dabh, “Unlimited Americana.”

8. Fari Bradley, “Halim El-Dabh. An Alternative Genealogy of Musique Concrète,” *Ibraaz*, November 30, 2015, <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/139/674717249719021568>

It is crucial to revise the way histories are written, and from what vantage points they are narrated. It is primordial in our times to offer other and complex narrations, genealogies and derivations other than the one written by those with the facilities and possibilities of power. Only so would we be able to study and appreciate the technologies, experimentations, denotations which El-Dabh implemented early on, and through his career as a composer and artist. That said, we also need to pay attention not to fall into the trap of wanting to be the first, or placing El-Dabh as the founder of. And it is especially important that we do not reduce El-Dabh and his lifelong practice as composer, musicologist, educator, and investigator to a collation with Pierre Schaeffer and *musique concrete*. Halim El-Dabh is much more and will not be pigeonholed.

Born in Cairo, Egypt in 1921 where he studied agriculture and practiced in the field, he attended the *First International Ethnomusicological Congress of Arabic Music* (Cairo, 1932) where he witnessed Bartók and Paul Hindemith. He emigrated to the U.S. to study at the University of New Mexico, Brandeis University, and the New England Conservatory of Music. He is University Professor Emeritus of African Ethnomusicology at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, and has also taught at Howard University and Haile Selassie University, where he organized the Orchestra Ethiopia. As an ethnomusicologist, he has researched in Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, as well as in the African Diaspora—Brazil, Jamaica, and the U.S. El-Dabh has written for African instruments and African themes and his works in opera, symphony, ballet, orchestra, chamber, and electronic music are inspired by African and Asian cultures.⁹

9. <http://www.halimeldabh.com/bio.html>

Take II

You wake and keep praying throughout night
Dogs also keep praying throughout night
They are superior to you
They do not stop barking
and ultimately sleep on a dirty pile of waste
They are superior to you
They do not leave their master's door even if
they are beaten by shoes.
Bulleh Shah! perform good deeds otherwise dogs will
supersede you.
They are superior to you.

—Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri (Bulleh Shah)

El-Dabh has widely implemented and explored folktales, legends, and myths in his compositions. Since time immemorial, legends and myths—be they complete fiction or half truths—have played an important role in human societies and cultures worldwide, essentially addressing humanity's concerns of its origins, its being in the world and its relation with other animate and inanimate beings with which it shares space and time. Legends and myths have served as moral compasses for societies, framing what is considered ethical or not, good and evil as embodied by each culture's pantheon of mythic characters. It is thus not surprising that myths became precursors of religions, informed and influenced literatures, arts, music, and languages, as well as philosophies and sciences from around the world. It has been claimed that myths are a reflection of various societies' shared consciousness.

In El-Dabh's oeuvre, one finds compositions like *Leyla and the Poet* (electronic composition with tape, 1959) based on the poem of "Layla and Majnun" (Nizami Ganjavi, 1141–1209); *Bacchanalia* (excerpt from Clytemnestra ballet, for string orchestra, 1958) in reference to Roman festivals of Bacchus and to Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon and queen of Mycenae; *Ramesses the Great: Symphonie No. 9* (for string orchestra, 1987); *Bahai: Father of the Orishas* (concerto for trombone and orchestra, 1981); *Go Down Moses; the Planet Earth is the*

Promised Land (for voice, instruments, 1991); *Ogún: Let Him, Let Her Have the Iron* (for voice, instruments, 2000); *The Eye of Horus* (dramatic music, 1967); *Lucifer* (Ballet, 1975)... just to name a few.

In *The Dog Done Gone Deaf* which he performed with The Barking Dog Sextet, El-Dabh narrates the legend of the Navajo indigenous American people on the relation between man and dog, who are best friends. Man fell in an abyss and dog came to man's rescue, risking its own life. After man was saved, man turns around and bullied the dog. The dog got fed up, covered his ears and the dog done gone deaf. But dog eventually pitied man and forgave him, as they found out that the homo sapiens and the canines are both earthlings. Listening to El-Dabh's presentation in this conceptual album, one can't fail to think of the bigger picture. The abuse of hospitality and generosity by generations of invaders and colonialists in the Americas and all over the world. El-Dabh animates the listener to reflect on non-anthropocentric knowledges and on our dependence on other earthlings, for our survival is only guaranteed by some other beings, as Bulleh Shah points out. The album is tonal exploration, a convocation of transcendentality and the mystical, a journey through the experiences at *The Dawn*, *The Fall of Man*, *L'Abîme*, *Out of The Abyss*, *Emergence*, *Canine Reflection*, and *Canine Wisdom*. Listening to the music of El-Dabh one gets flashes and sparks in the back of one's mind of Navajo legend, but also of Thomas Mann's *Bashan and I* (1916) or Patrice Nganang's *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* (2001) as they so vividly explore the man-canine complex and the effort of seeing the world allegorically through the canine vantage point.

Take III

Listening to, reading about, cogitating on Halim El-Dabh's sonic oeuvre that spans eight decades, a couple of philosophies of the sonorous crystalize. These include but are not limited to:

In 1949, El-Dabh composed a piece entitled *Evolution and Decadence*, which explored the idea of music evolution and the notion of musical and tonal emergence, and decay.

Seachrist writes about the 1949 interview by A. J. Patry with E-IDabh in which the latter reflects on simple sounds, a single tone, and explored the evolution of the tone through time and the different elements of the universe until the single sound converged with other sounds, postulating that there was only one tone in the world and all sounds came from that single pitch. The idea of an *Ursound* that later divided like a fertilized egg. El-Dabh's research led him to explore how sound from ancient Egypt migrated to Europe and influenced the sound of modernity. "ElDabh's new philosophy dealt with how the elements that cause a tone to emerge are also the elements that cause it to decay [...] as the tone evolves it simultaneously begins to decay."¹⁰

Mekta' in the Art of Kita (1955), for example, embodies El-Dabh's compositional philosophy with respect to the fact that irrespective of what generates a sound, the sound is meaningful. That is to say that his interest lied in the exploration of pure sound and the combination of instruments of a symphony orchestra to attain different sound spectra, textures, and expansions of the instruments. The title of the piece embraces the Egyptian poetry notion and structure that the whole (*Kita*) is part of the unit (*Mekta*) and the unit part of the whole. The concept is geared towards the listener rather than the composer, as each listening session is a shared experience between the listener (*Kita*) and the performer (*Mekta*). According to Seachrist, El-Dabh's harmonic style is characterized by the fact that in order to break the regimentation of tempered tuning, he determined that a new harmony evolves from "frictions," i.e. dissonances around points of unison in superimposed melodic lines. This allowed him to manipulate tones without tuning the piano, thereby accepting and working the instrument within its confines.

10. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh*, 19.

In *Meditation on White Noise* (1959) for electronic tape, El-Dabh explored the physicality and materiality of noise, from which he could chisel out a sculpture. By collecting and meditating on sounds he found in his quotidian like vacuum cleaner, cars, train, and even to the human ear inaudible sounds, El-Dabh worked on the transformation of potentially harmful noise to enhancing and positive sounds.

As a music teacher, El-Dabh developed a system of teaching music through color notations devised for piano, based on an ancient Egyptian musical notation system using colors. Being synesthetic, El-Dabh always related colors to specific sounds and vice versa. In *Harmonies of the Spheres: Ten Nations Rejoice* (1991) for wind symphony El-Dabh implemented this method of notation using varied colors in circles of varied sizes.

The relation to sound, color, and movement in space was also explored in *Tonography* (1981). Inspired by Egyptian and Ethiopian chants, the piece examines new possibilities of performing artists to experience their bodies in relation to tone and space. “Movement-gesture in the process of generating sound, help shape the production of tone. Sound tones after inception shape up the space. The musician follows the tone in gesture movements to delineate the action of his tones in space by the guidance of a language of symbols and designs.”¹¹

El-Dabh had previously worked on the relationship between sound and space when he was involved with the Theater of Sound and Movement. For Ina Hahn’s theater piece *Extension* (1966), *Meditation on White Noise* (1959) was used. In an interview he states that “sound generates space which is then captured by movement,” and that “when sound comes into conception it has three parts, the attack, then growth, and decay.”¹²

11. From *Tonography* title page.

12. Carl P. Snyder, “New Concept in Theatre Getting Showing Here,” *Gloucester Daily Times*, May 25, 1966, I. 14.

Take IV

Feeling the Frequency of Color

In the middle of the live session for *The Dog Done Gone Deaf*, El-Dabh invites the audience to close their eyes and breathe together in order to engage in a collective participatory performative moment, in an effort to experience the color frequencies. This animation to share a time and space of synesthesia very much speaks of El-Dabh's navigations between the sonic and visual arts, and his affinity to extra-disciplinarity.

In his career, El-Dabh has done numerous collaborations with performing artists and always had an interest in the visual arts. It is remarkable that in 1944, El-Dabh's work *The Expression of Zār* was exhibited in an art gallery in Cairo as an installation artwork of recorded material. This was preceded by many years of experimentation with noise since the mid-1930s. As he says "in the late 1930s I did work with noise, to discourage crickets. [...] I didn't want them to eat the corn [...] I would take pieces of scrap metal, hang them from a pole, and they would have, like, wings to them. When the wind came they would vibrate and hit the pole and create noise."¹³ Such experiments are epitomic to most avant-garde artistic movements and artists in the early half of the twentieth century. While it is very difficult to find where and how El-Dabh was/is involved within the visual arts, once in a while, one stumbles on clues like for the composition *Pirouette* (combination of manipulated audiotape and sound sculpture) in *Crossing Into The Electric Magnetic* (2000), which is said to have been recorded in a New York art gallery circa 1974. Of his numerous collaborations with performing artists, it is worth mentioning *Clytemnestra ballet* (1958), *A Look at Lightening ballet* (1961–62), *Lucifer ballet* (1975), *One More Gaudy Night ballet* (1961) with Martha Graham; *In the Valley of the Nile ballet* (1999) with Cleo Parker Robinson; *Theodora in Byzantium* (1965) with Rallou Manou; *Yulei, the Ghost* (1960) with Jerome Robbins; *Extension theatre piece* (1966) with Ina Hahn.

13. El-Dabh, "Unlimited Americana."

Take V

The aims of putting the spotlight on Halim El-Dabh and his over eight decades of experimentation and composition—more than five decades of researching and teaching—are manifold.

First and foremost, this research and exhibition project *Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog / The Dog Done Gone Deaf* will be a possibility of presenting—for the first time within a visual art festival in Africa—Halim El-Dabh's compositions, scores, archive materials, photography, and paintings in the framework of the Dakar Biennial.

By providing listening stations, the exhibition will offer the possibility of a wide African audience to listen and appreciate El-Dabh's electronic music, music for chamber (single and multiple instruments), percussion ensembles, string orchestra, orchestra, concerto, wind ensemble, choral music, dramatic music and film music. Sounds collected by El-Dabh from around the African continent and the diaspora will also be made available for listening. The aim is also to assume our responsibilities of narrating our own histories and defining our own milestones and pillars within a framework of a PanAfricanist ideology.

This exhibition is an effort to re-establish a genealogy of modern arts and sound arts in Africa and beyond, and contemporary sound artists, painters, video and installation artists are hereby invited to relate, extrapolate from, get inspired by El-Dabh's practice—his compositions, installations, theories and research.

This exhibition also envisions installing two musical pieces in a market place in Dakar. This should imply a coming back. Both pieces were recorded at a market place in Dakar in 1962 and in 1967, wherein El-Dabh improvises with a Mbira at the market place after meeting with president Léopold Senghor in Dakar, Senegal.

This text was written for SAVVY Contemporary's *We Have Delivered Ourselves from the Tonal. Of, With, Towards, On Julius Eastman* (co-curated with Antonia Alampi) which consisted of an exhibition, program of performances, concerts, and lectures that deliberated around concepts beyond the predominantly Western musicological format of the tonal or harmonic. The project looked at the work of the African American composer, musician, and performer Julius Eastman beyond the framework of what is today understood as minimalist music, and within a larger, always ever-growing understanding of it. Together with musicians, visual artists, researchers, and archivers, the exhibition explored a non-linear genealogy of Eastman's practice and his cultural, political, and social weight while situating his work within a broader rhizomatic relation of musical epistemologies and practices.

We Have Delivered Ourselves From The Tonal – Let Sonorities Ring – Julius Eastman

A Prologue

Light streams through the darkness,
opening the caves
light sorrow
light cannot shine where no light is
Truth is light and darkness
More light more light
More light more light
Light is not darkness

—Julius Eastman, Notes in the score for
The Moon's Silent Modulation.

One can't help but think of the metaphor of light that has so much informed and still runs through the veins of what one might want to call "Western civilization." It is the strong craving, or the rhetoric thereof, to beguile that light from the biblical invocation "let there be light," and transpose it into the world that led to the Age of Exploration. It is the paradigm of "seeing the light," which implies an "awakening" that is at the core of the concept of the enlightenment project, the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. That age in which knowledge was light, and light was truth, manifested in the rationality of the social, economic, political, and religious. An era in which to "dare to know" meant escaping from the platonic cave into the light of the day, and that quest for light consequentially led to the scramble for "a place in the sun"—arguably another effort to get more light.

For light to shine where light is, one might either need to create more darkness, thus the construct of the journey in “the heart of darkness,” or one might need to shed even stronger light. One of many possibilities of shining light where light is, is through nomenclature, by giving names to things that already exist, by reinventing the already rolling wheel. To say that abstraction is modernism’s greatest innovation and that abstraction was founded by Kandinsky, Léger, Delaunay, Kupka, and Picabia in 1911–12¹ is making light shine where light is. To claim that La Monte Young’s “Trio for String” (1958) is the starting point of minimalism² is making light shine where light is. Composer Dieter Schnebel even went as far as justifying the apparition of minimal tendencies in arts and music in North America based on the fact that America simultaneously represents the New World and the Wild West, which implies an orientation towards the future, without demolishing existing structures, and embracing a pioneering spirit of experimentation.³

More light more light
Light is not darkness

In his seminal lecture on “The Minimalist Impulse in African Musical Creativity,” Kofi Agawu states that:

among the wonders of African creativity, is the ability of certain individuals to spin large tracks of musical thoughts from a minimum of resources, 2 or 3 pitches, a pair of contrasting timbres, or nuggets of distinctly shaped rhythms. This minimalist impulse is widespread through out Africa [...] anyone familiar with traditional African music will readily call to mind styles and idioms animated by extensive

1. See the exhibition “Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art,” MoMA, 2013, <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/inventingabstraction/> (accessed February 18, 2019), and *Inventing Abstraction 1910: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, ed. L. Dickerman (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013).

2. Alex Ross, “Julius Eastman’s Guerrilla Minimalism,” *The New Yorker*, 23 January 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/23/julius-eastmans-guerrilla-minimalism> (accessed February 18, 2019).

3. Dieter Schnebel, *Denkbare Musik. Schriften 1952–1972* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1972), 144.

or even obsessive repetition. In so far as the minimalist manner is constituted by repetition [...] thinking through these familiar repertoires once again as intentional actions motivated by a minimalist aesthetic. In other words, I want to make explicit through denomination the minimalism that has been implicit all along in African musical studies.⁴

If one were to take the aforementioned minimalist tendencies and impulses seriously—handing over the term “minimalism” to the inventors and bringers of light—, and if one were to believe in the migration of the sonic, as well as the impact of sonority on spaces and subjectivities, as enablers of most of the sounds that have defined the twenty and twenty-first centuries, then one could look at or listen to Julius Eastman’s work within this genealogy. This is to say that if Africans in the new world brought with them the sounds that were to become the Negro Spirituals, the Blues, Jazz, Funk, R&B, Hip Hop etc., then there is no reason to think that they had left their minimal tendencies behind.

The “extensive or even obsessive repetition,” as Agawu puts it, that characterizes African minimal music since time immemorial, is also a characteristic feature in Western minimal art and music of the mid-twenty century. While it is justifiable and fair to think about Julius Eastman’s work within the trajectory of Eva Hesse, Dan Flavin, and co, as Ellie M. Hisama⁵ does in her reading of Briony Fer’s discourse of “strategies of remaking art through repetition,” and how “seriality and subjectivity are inextricably bound,”⁶ Eastman’s work is also calling for a complicated interconnection, challenging obvious references and situatedness within broader histories and geographies.

4. Kofi Agawu, Kofi, “The Minimalist Impulse in African Musical Creativity,” Lecture at the Centre for Music Studies at City University, London, 10 April 2013. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GAB_XQe1Us&feature=c4-overview-vl&list=PLxQJVf2uThd2_Lg21f5eXn_6Wxhi567nm (Accessed 18 February 18, 2019).

5. Ellie M. Hisama, “Diving into the earth: the musical worlds of Julius Eastman,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 260–286.

6. See Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

All this to say that one of the core objectives of this research is to look at Eastman's work beyond the framework, or what is today understood as Minimalist music with a capital *M*, within a larger, always gross and ever-growing understanding of minimalist music—i.e. conceptually and geo-contextually. The crux thereby is to explore a nonlinear genealogy of Eastman's minimalist practice, or situate his work within a broader rhizomatic relation of musical epistemologies and practices. Besides the minimal tendencies, indices for this will be looked up from his scores, choice of instruments (in *The moon's silent Modulation*—vibraphone, bamboo sticks, piano, tambourine, finger cymbals), usage of voice, but also interviews by and writings on Eastman.

While the technique of repetition, this most important element of reduction in Minimal art and music, can be perceived as a mere technique or tool, as seen in Philip Glass's varying repetitive patterns and static harmonies or Steve Reich's continually unaltered repetitions, or Eastman's serial organic repetitiveness,⁷ Fer and Hisama interpret a personalization and politicization in this mode and approach of serial repetition:

Her (Fer's) discussion of Hesse's approach to serial repetition as an art that was "personal" resonates with my understanding of Eastman's compositional use of repetition, a process that permits a gradual unfolding of the deliberately politicised sonic field. This politicisation is suggested by the titles of some of his untexted compositions, which can redirect one's hearing in specific ways.

7. See Eastman's introduction to his Northwestern University concert, 1980, where he states: "These particular pieces... formally are an attempt to make what I call "organic" music. That is to say, the third part of any part (of the third measure, or the third section, the third part), has to contain all the information of the first two parts and then go on from there. So therefore, unlike Romantic music or Classical music where you have actually different sections and you have these sections which for instance are in great contrast to the first section or to some other section in the piece... these pieces they're not... they're not exactly perfect yet. They're not perfect. But there's an attempt to make every section contain all the information of the previous section, or else taking out information at a gradual and logical rate." Julius Eastman, *Unjust Malaise* (New World Records, 2005).

For example, the title of his haunting *Gay Guerrilla* (1980) invites the listener to engage with a complex set of issues regarding sexuality and politics, a listening experience that is enhanced when we consider Eastman's music in relation to his life as a gay African American who walked on the edges of the American new music scene of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸

With this, hisama heralds another core element of this project *Let Sonorities Ring – Julius Eastman*. Namely, to read Eastman's work not only within its musical sensitivity, structure or texture—(ar)rhythmic, (dis)harmony, phonic—but also consider Eastman as a political being who saw his work as a medium to deliberate on the sociopolitical, economy, religion, as well as issues of gender, race and sexuality. While race and sexuality were very important and played a primal role in Eastman's compositions, they were not the only topics Eastman dealt with, which is the impression one gets when one peruses articles and narrations about Eastman today. Especially with the rhetoric of the “rediscovery” of Eastman within the music and visual art fields, which in itself sounds like giving light to darkness, Eastman is particularly portrayed—if not reduced to—his blackness and his gayness. Why reduced? Because in these contexts there seems to be an element of surprise about the culmination of black, gay, and composer as adjectives for one person. Often, there seems to be a fetishisation of this blackness and gayness, which is observed in the number of times Eastman's *Nigger* series or *Gay Guerilla* have been played to a wide audience, without taking the pains to contextualise why Eastman composed these pieces, and what “nigger” and “guerilla” meant to him, although Eastman, in a 1980 Northwestern University concert, addresses the usage of these terms.

It's necessary to look beyond these reductions and complications by looking at Eastman's practice as a composer, conductor, choreographer, pianist, performer and vocalist in relation not only to his person, but to his society and time at large.

8. See Hisama, “Diving into the earth,” 261.

Looking at his compositions, it is evident that spirituality and religion played an important role in his practice. In the scores for *Our Father*, which might be his last composition (available), Eastman wrote what seems to be a prayer, a litany:

O God my fa(ther)/ Holy spirit/ Great God Holy Ghost
Spirit of Truth Great/ God All Knowing Good Be/ Fore
The Words Were There Was Only God/ God After The
Worlds Came To Be There Is/ Only God Glory To/ God
The One The Only The/ Lord Is Glorious In His Saints
He Is/ Glorious In His Verse He Is/ Glorious Before Time
He Is Glorious In/ Time Glory To/ God The Almighty
God/ O Lord Forgive Me Thy/ Will Is Always Done
O God/ My God have mercy/ Your servants are weak
Our/ Father who art in hea/ven hallowed be thy name.⁹

Other works like *Praise God From Whom all Devils Grow* (1976), *The Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc* (1981), *Buddha* (1984), *One God* (1985–6) reveal an *Auseinadersetzung* with the spiritual and the transcendental beyond fixed confessions.

Eastman touches on the economical especially in *If You're So Smart, Why Ain't You Rich?* (1977). But it is the intersection between economy and knowledge, the tension between the cognitive, intellectual, and the economic that also makes this piece worth more scrutiny. In an earlier exhibition project also titled *If You're So Smart, Why Ain't You Rich?* (2014) in Marrakesh, we explored how sound becomes haptic, tactile and textural in arts, society, politics, and economy, as well as cogitating on "Knowledge Societies." Eastman's famous introduction to the Northwestern University concert in 1980 about his usage of the word 'nigger' should also be analyzed within the intersectionality of economic, race, and class contexts. "I feel that, in any case, the first niggers were of course field niggers. And upon that is really the basis of what I call the American economic system. Without field niggers you wouldn't really have such a great and grand economy that we have. So that is what I call the first and great nigger, field niggers"¹⁰ said Eastman, making a fundamental

9. Julius Eastman, score for *Our Father*, 1989.

10. Eastman, *Unjust Malaise*.

point about the basis of the capitalist system, as we know it today. The point Eastman is driving through is that the privileges of a welfare state, economic and social development, politico-economic stability were built on the backs of that dehumanized being, derogatorily called the “nigger.”

In the complete statement one then deduces a sophisticated discourse on race in a few words:

There’s a whole series of these pieces ... and they’re called ... they can be called a “Nigger Series.” Now the reason I use that particular word is because, for me, it has a ... is what I call a basicness about it. That is to say, I feel that, in any case, the first niggers were of course field niggers. And upon that is really the basis of what I call the American economic system. Without field niggers you wouldn’t really have such a great and grand economy that we have. So that is what I call the first and great nigger, field niggers. And what I mean by niggers is that thing which is fundamental, that person or thing that attains to a basicness, a fundamentalness, and eschews that thing which is superficial or, or, what could we say—elegant. So a nigger for me is that kind of thing which is ... attains himself or herself to the ground of anything, you see. And that’s what I mean by nigger. There are many niggers, many kinds of niggers.¹¹

The reference of the “nigger” as person or thing refers to that dehumanization process inherent in the construction of race, at that point when some human beings were just resources, goods, objects, labor forces. But Eastman’s usage of “nigger” is an empowering one, or at least in his intentions. Hisama points out an interview with Jeff Bloch in which Eastman says: “I admire the name ‘nigger.’ It’s a strong name. I feel that it’s a name that has a historical importance and even protects blacks. [It is] the most real part of whatever you’re into. You can’t wear Gucci shoes and be a nigger.”¹²

11. *Ibid.*

12. Bloch, Jeff, “Black Musician’s Song Titles Censored by FMO Protest,” *Daily Northwestern*, 17 January 1980, cited in Hanson-Dvoracek, A. “Julius Eastman’s 1980 Residency,” 80. Elsewhere in his study, Hanson-Dvoracek attributes the quote to the *Evanston Review*, 10 January 1980.

Eastman's compositions *Dirty Nigger* (piece for 2 flutes, 2 saxophones, bassoon, 3 violins, 2 double basses, 1978); *Nigger Faggot* (also known as NF—a piece for bell, percussion, strings, 1978); *Crazy Nigger* (unspecified instruments, usual version for 4 pianos, 1978) and *Evil Nigger* (unspecified instruments, usual version for 4 pianos, 1979) are prove of the depth in which he went to explore the concept, history, and being of the “nigger.”

Maybe the *Nigger Faggot* piece serves as the transition between Eastman's reflections on race and homosexuality by using two words that embodied the violence faced upon being black and gay.

Besides the well-known *Gay Guerrilla* (1979), it is not unlikely that other compositions were indirectly or directly thematized issues of homosexuality, like *Four Songs with String Quartet* (1969), pieces for voice and string quartet including *There Was a Man* (1969); *Speed Me Life's Fluid* (1969); *To Those Who Live Without the Liquid Love* (1969); *Baby, Baby, Baby* (1969); *Touch Him When* (1970) and *Five Gay Songs* (1971).

Now the reason I use Gay Guerrilla, G-U-E-R-R-I-L-L-A, that one, is because uh ... these names ... let me put a little subsystem here. These names, either I glorify them or they glorify me. And in the case of guerrilla, that glorifies gay. That is to say I don't ... there aren't many gay guerrillas. I don't feel that ... Gaydom ... does have that strength. So therefore I use that word in hopes that they will. You see ... I feel I don't ... At this point I don't feel that gay guerrillas can really match with Afghani guerrillas or PLO guerrillas. But let us hope that at some point in the future they might. You see, that's why I use that word guerrilla. It means... A guerrilla is someone who in any case is sacrificing his life for a point of view. And you know if there is a cause, and if it is a great cause, those who belong to that cause, will sacrifice their blood because without blood there is no cause. So therefore that is the reason that I use “gay guerrilla,” in hopes that I might be one if called upon to be one.¹³

Here too, Eastman appropriates that term gay and breaths dignity into it. He uses the opportunity to call for a gay guerrilla of the

13. Eastman, *Unjust Malaise*.

future, and offers himself for that cause. The references to the PLO and Afghans make clear where Eastman situates the cause on a political scale.

A deep listening of Eastman, and a proper look at his scores, reveal a quest to defy the conventionality of music and strive towards the atonal. It is known that Western classical tradition is based on the tonal. By trying to complicate, deny, or expatiate on the notions of the harmonic, tonal hierarchy, the triadic, or even the tonal centre, Eastman's compositions explore strategies and technologies of attaining the atonal, e.g. through his serial repetitions. Here too, one might be tempted to see Eastman in the legacy of Bartók, Schoenberg, Berg and co, but here too, it is worth shifting the geography of minimal tendencies and minimalism in music.

It is worth listening and reading Eastman's music within the scope of what Oluwaseyi Kehinde describes as the application of chromatic forms such as polytonality, atonality, dissonance as the fulcrum in analyzing some elements of African music such as melody, harmony, instruments and instrumentation.¹⁴

Though Eastman shouldn't be reduced to the dichotomy of tonality versus atonality, there is still the need to research how Eastman tries to shed light into tonality, which is deeply embedded in Western civilization.

Light streams through the darkness, opening the caves
light sorrow
light cannot shine where no light is
Truth is light and darkness
More light more light
More light more light
Light is not darkness

At the very end of the scores for *The Moon's Silent Modulation* (1970), Eastman writes: "we have delivered ourselves from the tonal."

14. Oluwaseyi Kehinde, "Dissonance and Chromatic Inflections in Traditional African Music," *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2011).

The following essay combines two texts that were originally formulated within the context of the project *That Around Which the Universe Revolves*, an international collaboration between QDance Centre (Lagos), FFT (Düsseldorf), Njelele Art Station (Harare), Kampnagel (Hamburg), HAU Hebbel am Ufer and SAVVY Contemporary (Berlin). The first text is an edited version of the opening speech of the public program, which took place at Hebbel am Ufer Berlin in December 2017. The second reformulates the concept proposal for the project as a whole.

That Around Which the Universe Revolves takes its cue from Lefebvre's attempt to synthesize a new scientific field of knowledge through rhythm analysis. Lefebvre recognized rhythms in our everyday life, in our movements through space, our interactions with objects in space and in interactions between the biological and the social. *That Around Which the Universe Revolves* used this stratification as a starting point for artistic reflections on natural, cultural, spatial, and conceptual heritages.

That, Around Which the Universe Revolves. On the Rhythms of Memory, Times, Bodies, and Urban Space

Act I: Being Rhythmical

Rhythmanalysis gave us the tools to try to read the history of a people, its collective memory and understanding of what a society has inherited from its ancestors, how it cultivates or cares for what is inherited, and how all of the above manifests in space.

From Lagos to Düsseldorf, to Harare, to Hamburg, and lastly to Berlin, we set out to engage with urban settings as places to create knowledge from, not about—taking their animate and inanimate dwellers as sites of epistemologies.

In Navigating Through These Spaces and Times

We engaged with secret rhythms—that is to say physiological and psychological rhythms—that facilitate recollection and memory, be it in a oral, written, embodied, or otherwise form, wholly encompassing the said and unsaid.

We explored the terrain of the secret, tried to tickle out lost or suppressed memories, which could be expressed performatively, photographically, or sculpturally, trying to make this context of inaccessible movements and temporalities somehow accessible, but not necessarily transparent or blank.

We engaged with public rhythms—that is to say social rhythmic phenomena like festivals, but also traffic congestions, city noise and more.

We engaged with fictional rhythms—verbal and gestural constructions, and cultivation of myth.

We engaged with dominating/dominated rhythms—that is to say we were interested in the power gradients manifested in spaces. How did cartography, mapping, architecture become tools of power, and particularly how are the remnants and ruins of the colonial enterprise still exercising power and framing societies today?

We began with Lefebvre, but soon after we were thinking of drummer Babatunde Olatunji who once said, “Where I come from we say that rhythm is the soul of life, because the whole universe revolves around rhythm, and when we get out of rhythm, that’s when we get into trouble.”¹

Then we were invoking Sterling Allen Brown who, like Louis Armstrong, talks about being “rhythmical:” “I have a marvelous sense of rhythm not because I am a Negro but because I am rhythmical Or, as Louis Armstrong says, ‘rhythmical.’”² Thinking about the rhythm of time-spaces and bodies in spaces, we called upon Kei Miller’s *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, wherein the Rastafarian debates with the cartographer on the importance of mapping spaces:

The rastaman thinks, draw me a map of what you see then I will draw a map of what you never see and guess me whose map will be bigger than whose? Guess me whose map will tell the larger truth?³

1. Babatunde Olatunji, *The Beat of my Drum: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

2. Sterling A. Brown, *A Son’s Return: Selected Essays* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 13.

3. Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Manchester: Carcanet Pres, 2014), 19.

It is this larger truth which is not so obviously seen in spaces that was most interesting to our research. So how does one think of the rhythm of space if one is of a particular race, or gender, or class?

What does breathing mean today or what is the rhythm of breathing in the age of Eric Garner? It's not a matter of arrhythmia. He said, "I can't breathe!" In the last months and years we have been experiencing a massive shift towards right-wing fascist politics all over the world. Some people have said we are living in dark times. What is this fascination about light and darkness with the latter being the negative? What about us, who, as Ralph Ellison put it, have been condemned to invisibility? What if that invisibility, or as you might call it "darkness," is the space we have sought comfort in? That space in which you can't see us, but we can see you and most importantly we can see us, as in each other? No, we are not in an era of darkness, but of light. That is to say, a shift to the radical Right is a state of over- or hyper-illumination. That is to say, a state where some of us are made hyper-visible and thus subjects, or prey to a system that puts a spotlight on us. So what is the rhythm with which we can navigate spaces in these times?

One recent morning, I was riding the bike with my son as a white guy stopped us and sprayed tear gas directly into my face. The question is how do we teach our sons and daughters the art of analyzing the rhythm of hate, xenophobia, racism, fascism? How do we teach them the rhythm of defense, both physically and spiritually?

What is the rhythm of the black body? Not as in dance or groove—as you would like to reduce it to—but as in what it costs. Rhythm as value. Body as resource. I heard someone ask once at a demonstration concerning the horrors of modern day slavery within the recent economy of migration, "How can an iPhone cost more than a human being?" That is the groove, the rhythm of an age where humans have been re-devalued once more to mere goods.

So, what then is the rhythm in spaces where men of all races and classes have become predators and women their prey, as we see with the rampancy of sexual harassment and more?

How do women navigate such spaces and times? How do we navigate the world in such an age?

I would like to end this act with a quote from my friend and colleague Kamila Metwaly. She posted the following on Facebook:

For years I have been harassed by men, intimidated by them, touched inappropriately by them, abused, thought of less and needing to constantly protect myself, prove myself and in all that be somehow diplomatic. And I am so tired. It's been only a couple of years now that I started taking more space for myself as a woman on the street, at work, among friends, at home due to the fact that I've surrounded myself with beautiful women and people who helped me out of a depression that I've suppressed for many, many years.

Act II: The *Quotidien* in Delimited Space And Time

Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*.⁴

The French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, in his posthumously published essay “Historical Memory and Collective Memory” (1950), stressed the distinction between collective memory and history. He asserted that history aims at attaining an objective and universal truth cut off from the “psychology of social groups while every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.”⁵ This interconnection of a people’s or society’s memory and a specific space and time was also a driving force behind the

4. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 15.

5. Maurice Halbwachs, “Historical Memory and Collective Memory” in *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980): 84.

works of sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, renowned *inter alia* for his reflections on the politics of and production of space—representation of space and spaces of representation, as well as spatial practices—and his critique of the “quotidien.” In his posthumously published *Rhythm-analysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Lefebvre puts a spotlight on the concept of rhythm, in his effort to synthesize a new scientific field of knowledge through rhythmanalysis.

In general terms, Lefebvre recognizes rhythms in our everyday life, in our movements through space and our interactions with objects in space, i.e. in every interaction between the biological and the social. In this seminal work, Lefebvre tries to renegotiate the understanding of urban and rural space, things, media, politics etc. through the concept of rhythm. It is about analyzing everydayness, the mundane, the repetitive, the “interference of linear and cyclical processes,” just as much as the cycle of life, and all these supply “the framework for the analyses of the particular, therefore real and concrete cases that feature in music, history and lives of individuals or groups.”⁶ Might this imply that rhythmanalysis is a possibility to read both the history of a people, its collective memory and understanding what a society has inherited from its ancestors, how it cultivates or cares for what is inherited, and how it bequeaths this inheritance to the next generation? Can the call to watch one’s eco- and geo-systems in a natural heritage scheme be understood through the concept of the rhythmanalyst—just like the call for the preservation of both tangible and intangible attributes of any group of people, and their technologies, architecture, and industries? In “The Critique of the Thing,” which could and should be understood as a critique towards physical and non-physical entities, Lefebvre writes about the possibility of “crossing the notion of rhythm with those of the secret and public, the external and the internal.”⁷

6. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 25.

7. *Ibid.*, 27.

Thinking with the Body in Lived Temporality

The rhythm analyst will have some points in common with the psychoanalyst, [...] He (sic!) will be attentive, but not only to the words or pieces of information, the confessions and confidences of a partner or client. He will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises, which are said without meaning, and to murmurs (rumeurs), full of meaning—and finally he will listen to silences.⁸

In *The Rhythm Analyst: A Provisionary Portrait*, Lefebvre gives a vivid description of who the rhythm analyst could be. He portrays an individual who looks at the intrinsic by listening to his/her body and who is open to the extrinsic by appreciating external rhythms, without any “methodological obligations.” The corporeal plays a very important role in this concept, as the “body serves as a metronome”⁹ ready to perceive rhythms without perturbing them nor distorting time. The body, according to Lefebvre, is a collection of rhythms with different tunes that result from history, facilitated by the calling on all senses, drawing on breathing and blood circulation, just as much as heart beats and speech utterances are landmarks of this experience. These embodied histories, in the form of rhythm, enable the rhythm analyst to “hear the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm.”¹⁰

Artistic Practices and New Urban Epistemologies

At the hands of artistic practices within the rhythm analysis framework, new and surprising knowledge about the urban quotidian can be produced. Everyday urban activities become

8. *Ibid.*, 29.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 30.

an investigation into silenced histories and epistemologies, or a protest against demarcations and exclusions that shape urban spaces. The complex circulations and mobility of bodies, things, information and sounds within the entities of cities, as well as between them, challenge the conception of “situated knowledge” as a series of simple and direct relations between places, subjects and epistemologies.

Act III: Rhythmographies, or How to Navigate the Kwats, Mapangs and Sisonghos

It must have been eight hours. Or maybe six or ten hours. Traveling from one African city to another is a matter of elasticity. Time is elastic. Geography is elastic. The physicality of space is particularly elastic.

So we left Yaoundé approximately six, eight or ten hours ago. Ironically, though we were leaving Yaoundé, we had the sound of André Marie Tala’s 1977 hit *Je vais à Yaoundé* (I am going to Yaoundé) blasting out of the car. That too is the epitome of rhythmography, but what is more interesting here is the embodiment of opposites. Leaving Yaoundé and playing *Je vais à Yaoundé* is like saying “On est ensemble (We are together),” when one says goodbye in Cameroon. It is the celebration of a coming and being together upon separation. So leaving Yaoundé one needed to hear:

Où vas-tu, paysan, avec ton boubou neuf
Ton chapeau bariolé, tes souliers éculés
Où vas-tu, paysan, loin de ton beau village
Où tu vivais en paix, près de tes caféiers
Je vais à Yaoundé, Yaoundé la capitale
Je vais à Yaoundé, Yaoundé la capitale
Où vas-tu, étudiant, tout de neuf habillé
Ton blazer à la mode, ton pantalon plissé
Où vas-tu, étudiant, le regard conquérant
Délaissant ton pays, ton beau bamiléké

[Refrain]

Je vais à Yaoundé, Yaoundé la capitale
Je vais à Yaoundé, Yaoundé la capitale
Par la Mifi et le Ndé, de Badjoun à Bafia
Je vais chercher là-bas, une vie meilleure.¹¹

But six, eight or ten hours later we were about to descend the station hill into Bamenda. As we left Ngola and drove through Obala, Monatele, Ombessa, Bafia, Ndikinimeki, Makenene, Tonga, Bagangte, Bandjoun, Bafoussam, Mbouda, Babadjou, Santa, and finally into Bamenda, the rhythms ranged from Bikutsi to Manganbeu to Mbaghalum to Afrofunk, Afrobeat and Afro-HipHop. Each village, city, vegetation, people invoked and embodied the spirits of their lands in their music. But now driving into Bamenda, it was Jovi time.

J'suis Bamenda et puis quoi ? (et p8 koi)
Tu as mon macabo et puis quoi ? (et p8 koi)
Tu ndem Eto'o et puis quoi ? (et p8 koi)
Va chier aux rails et puis quoi ?
(Va chier aux rails et puis quoi)
Va chier aux rails et puis quoi ?
(Va chier aux rails et puis quoi)
Va chier aux rails et puis quoi ?
C'est ça qu'on mange ? (C'est ça qu'on mange)
C'est ça qu'on tchop ? (C'est ça qu'on tchop ?)
Va chier aux rails et puis quoi ?
(Va chier aux rails et puis quoi ?)
On vit au kwat et puis quoi ?
(Et puis quoi? Et puis quoi ?)
Je fume le gué et puis quoi ?
(Et puis quoi? Et puis quoi ?)
Tu bock la veste et puis quoi ?
(Et puis quoi? Et puis quoi ?)
J'ai quatre ngas et puis quoi ?
HEIN Perika you no be boss, I beg no make mame
I laugh

11. "Et P8 Koi," Kamer Lyrics. <https://kamerlyrics.net/lyric-562-jovi-et-p-koi>. Accessed May 4, 2019.

You aint money shit,
Between me and you, you be na handicap.
Bang for your ears, (hein) Ma rap don turn be na slap.
Only bolo all time, man no get time for frap.¹²

The sound of a movement through the words of Jovi. The chants of a people segregated by the powers that be. The reality is that it took six, eight, or ten hours because as soon as one left the Francophone Cameroonian geographical space and got into the Anglophone Cameroonian space, the rhythm changed. The change was a physical change of vibrations caused by the non-road, and the thousands of potholes that the car had to navigate in and out of. Which is to say that on the tarred roads from Yaoundé to Bafoussam, one comfortably did a 3.5 hours drive. Fifteen years ago, one could do Bafoussam to Bamenda in forty-five minutes to an hour. Today one needs three to seven hours depending on rain or shine. Space in such a context is embodied. Driving on such roads is visceral. One feels the bowels churn. It seems as if the government of the country has neglected that part of the country for so long, and allowed the roads to completely deform, as a means of aiding digestion. With every pothole not only is a mastication process hastened, but also the mechanical process of digestion is stimulated by the rough jumps in and out of pits.

It is the stigmatization of people from Bamenda as rebels, agitators and anarchists that has led to the nation-wide usage of the term Bamenda, not only as a geographical space, but also a synonym for rebellion and leftism, and even as an insult. That's why Jovi asks the question, "Je suis Bamenda et puis quoi? (I am Bamenda and then what?)." But if there has been any political change in Cameroon in the past twenty-five years, it is thanks to Bamenda. We may not forget the days of the great Kotto Bass from Douala, who in his Makossa-Soukous crossover "Yes Bamenda" sang, "I no fit forget you, dat tam weh a dong cam fo you you dong keep me fine Bamenda eh manyaka. Bamenda eh I no fit forget e you."

12. <https://kamerlyrics.net/lyric-562-jovi-et-p-koi>. Accessed May 4, 2019.

But here we were trying to drive down the Bamenda Station hill, listening to Jovi, and suddenly this voice. This voice with a strong British accent interrupted the song with a “please turn left.” We looked at each other, looked at the navigation device, and then it insisted “please turn left now.” Now, the issue of turning left, while driving down a steep hill is not what one wants to do any day. Growing up in Bamenda, I remember being extremely scared in the car, clinging to my parents’ seat, as they drove down that hill. Many a time, while on the hill, one would see the carcass of a car, that didn’t make the curve on time, or whose brakes failed or for whatever reason, found itself downhill. Since those days, trees have been planted along the very curvy drive down the hill to serve as additional brakes and reduce the deaths upon an accident.

This is exactly where, while negotiating our way downwards, the navigation system advised us, or indeed insisted that we take a left, which would mean a plunge of some hundred meters.

I have always been very suspicious of navigation systems. I have always been suspicious of cartographers and geographers. All those who look at land in terms of figures. Those who want to map. To make visible and measurable. Those who see land in terms of resources, in terms of what can be gotten from the land. Those who treat land as passageway, instead of dwelling place for peoples and spirits. I have always been suspicious of those who tell me to turn left, even though I have to move straight on.

Cartography and mapping, as well-intentioned as they might want to seem, are always in the business of claiming and managing power, in the business of simplification of complex sociopolitical, economic, and political issues, in the business of making invisible and worthless many things important to us the people to whom the land is sacred, and in the business of making visible some of those things that are indeed sacred to us.

I am with Critical Cartographers who, though they do not aim to invalidate maps, make visible the incestuous relationship between political power and geographic knowledge.

There isn't neutrality in maps and mapping, as mapping has always been a tool for dominating groups to have political and economic control over dominated groups. It is thus not only time that is money, mapping, too, is money. Historic as well as recent mapping projects like Google Maps serve as means to project desires onto land, as well as crystallize—often for sheer economic reasons—interests projected onto landscapes by the powers that be. Knowledge on a piece of land is knowledge about oil, water, coltan, copper, plantations and more resources. Cartography as a discipline serves, amongst others, this purpose, no matter how hidden the agenda may be.

The issue with cartographic and navigation tools, is not just their embeddedness in and flirtations with power, it is also their reliance on the dominance of the sense of sight. While we tend to put much value on what we see, the things in the world that can be seen are actually significantly small in comparison to the things we can hear, feel, smell, and sense spiritually. In the situation of driving down the station hill, not only could the GPS navigation system not smell, nor feel, nor hear, it couldn't even see properly. Such is the case that thanks to GPS on our phones, in our cars and on our computers, our sense of direction and ability to navigate spaces have been outsourced to these devices. Downtown in Bamenda, aka Abakwa, where there are hardly any street names and hardly any cardinal coordinates, any GPS is as good as a fish on land. In Abakwa we go out to visit our friends on a time scale more accurate than any clock, which is the position of the sun, or after the rain. Then when we get into the kwat, the mapang, or the sisongho, we find our ways by orienting ourselves first and foremost through the smell. We follow the smell of the Achombo houses. That fresh smell of fried puff-puff and cooked beans.

As my friend put it:

When you pass dat first mamy Achombo e house, you go fo ya right. Conner road you go see some electric pole. You mak lek say you wan pass the electric pole, but you no pass am. You look fo ya left.

You go see the second mamy Achombo e place.
Dat place weh plenty pipo di always stand fo ouside.
When you pass mamy Achombo you go see some
tap. Dat tap di work na only fo evening time. Dat
mean say if you cam fo evening you fit ask any of
dat pikin dem wussi wa house dey.
If you cam na morning morning time just pass the
tap then look pikin go fo ya right until you see dat
durty place. Pass dat durty place until you rich for
dat store weh e di sell sim card. Wa house just dey
na fo back dat store.

This too is rhythmography — the drawing of the rhythm of a space. This rhythm is shaped not only by the mapping of the space in terms of length and width, but the smells of the Achombo house, the rubbish piled by the street side, the smell from latrines, as much as the scents of jollof rice, waterfufu and eru, achu or ndole that happily escape the kitchens of mothers and grandmothers cooking. This rhythm is informed by the people that will interrupt and talk to you kindly or hastily. It is informed by the Okada driver cruising by in what he imagines to be the speed of light, but the rhythm is also marked by the sound of car engines and horns that constantly create a mechanical soundscape across the city of Abakwa.

To navigate the kwats, the mapangs or the sisonghos of most African cities, one needs to sharpen one's sonic, olfactory and visual bearings beyond the banality of the GPSs of this world.

Maybe this too was what Henri Lefebvre was thinking of in his reconceptualization of the notion of “Rhythmanalysis” in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*.

What emerges in the concept of “Rhythmanalysis” in relation to Rhythmography is thus the point of encounter between the rhythm of the rhythmanalyst and the rhythm of the space they find themselves in. Rhythmography is the connections of the dots that make this relation, and that are informed by smells, spirits, sounds, visuals in the space and its visual and

non-visual vicinities, while taking into consideration the animate and inanimate dwellers of the space as sites of epistemologies.

In the kwats, the mapangs or the sisonghos, darkness is the norm. Visibility, sensuality, sensibility and smells reign in the darkness.

This text was written for the project *Every Time A Ear di Soun*, a radio program initiated in the frame of documenta 14. The title of the project is pulled from Mutabaruka's 1981 single of the same name.

The conceptual point of departure for the project was the thesis that, especially in "oral cultures," history is carried by the physicality of the sonorous and transmitted to the body. The project looked at various waves of Africans, and their auditor phenomena, as they moved into the diaspora. In particular, the project reflected on sonic genres such as Afrobeat, Benga, Bikutsi, Isicathamiya, Soukous in Africa, Gnawa, Liwa or Mizmar in North Africa and the Middle East, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues or Hip Hop in the U.S. and Europe, Shango, Kadans, Zouk, Rumba, Meringue, Reggae, or Calypso in the Caribbean. The project also encompassed "bodily music," such as sound poetry, beatboxing, gumboot dance, tap dancing and even belly clapping.

Every Time a Ear Di Soun¹ – On the Historicality of the Audible and the Embodiment of Sound-Space

The beat has a rich and magnificent history
Full of adventure, excitement, and mystery
Some of it bitter, and some of it sweet
But all of it part of the beat, the beat, the beat
They say it began with a chant and a hum
And a black hand laid on a native drum
Bantu, Zulu, Watusi, Ashanti, Herero, Grebo, Ibo, Masuto,
Nyasa, Ndumbo, Umunda, Bobo, Kongo, Hobo, Kikuyu,
Bahutu, Mossi, Kisii (Kissi/Kisi), Mbangi, Jahomi, Fongo,
Bandjoun, Bassa, Yoruba, Gola, Ila, Mandingo, Mangbetu,
Yosee, Bali, Angoli, Biombii, Mbole, Malinke, Mende,
Masai (Maasai), Masai, Masai

—Max Roach & Abbey Lincoln, *All Africa*.²

The age-old debate on the appropriateness, accuracy, legitimacy of the narration and depiction of histories through writing or through orality, as pursued by historians and philosophers alike, is also a debate of principle between visual and auditory cultures. Whether the one is more accurate or important than the other is rather secondary or irrelevant at this point. Of importance is rather a deeper exploration of the direct and indirect histories, the spaces and the impacts that are or can be created by and with any of these mediums of vision or auditory.

1. Mutabaruka, song title of dub poetry, 1981.

2. Max Roach, “All Africa,” in *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite*, Candid Records, 1960.

This radio project “Every Time A Ear di Soun” explores sonority and auditory phenomena, as in voice, speech, sound, and music, as a medium through which histories can be conveyed, putting a spotlight, but also going beyond that which is heard, and venturing into how and where sound is heard or perceived, and as a way to write counterhegemonic histories. This project deliberates on the embodiment of sound, as well as how sound creates and accommodates psychic and physical spaces, but also how through sound (not as causality, but as bond), a synchronicity emerges and reigns between bodies, places, spaces, and histories.

In cultures with so-called “oral traditions,” histories transmitted through narration freely assume the forms of identifiable or non-identifiable vocal utterances, speech, sound, and music, including instrumentation. In this multiplicity of forms of expression, that more often than not, merge into a perceived singular platform of expression, the many layers of the platform carry various energies and histories into the world. When Babatunde Olatunji talked about the evocative power of the trinity in drums, namely the spirit of the tree that gives the drum’s frame, the skin of the animal plus the spirit of the drummer, he basically described the material and spiritual layers that come together to produce a sophisticated auditory phenomenon that sometimes frames or is the oral tradition.

The thesis put in the room is thus that when vocal utterances, speeches, sounds, and music are produced and shared, histories are shared too, not only from mouth to ear, but completely perceived by and encoded in the body through the physicality of sound waves, and passed on from one generation to the other. This possibility of understanding orality and embodiment through auditory phenomena as a means of sharing knowledge and archiving memory in/on a moving and vulnerable body that exists within a specific time and spatial context will be at the core of this project.

Sonority is the “groove of temporality”³ that makes the epistemological basis of the visual and written historicity vibrate. Sonority is a bodily means of telling stories, which functions

3. See Alexander G. Weheliye, “The Grooves of Temporality,” *Public Culture*, vol. 17, no. 2, (2005): 319–338.

outside of a visual and written logic, goes beyond it, and indeed can neither be grasped by nor fully understood through it. It is as subtle as it is powerful, in the way it reshapes our perspectives and the intersections of time, space and place we are able to imagine, the futures we are able to think of, not only on a cognitive, but also on a sensual level. Many attempts to establish alternative histories, and for that matter, futures—from the Chimurenga music through dub poetry to jazz—have been born out of the necessity not only “to redeem a history unwritten and despised, but to checkmate the European notion of the world. For until this hour, when we speak of history, we are speaking only of how Europe saw—and sees—the world.”⁴

In his essay “Of the Sorrow of Songs” James Baldwin explores the powerful nature of the sonorous in redeeming and retelling histories, as well as their reluctance to be understood and ruled by anyone who does not feel and comprehend the histories they emerged from in the framework of jazz music and culture. He claims that nobody who does not understand the auction-block, who cannot see that the Middle Passage was the demolition accomplished in the name of civilization, and cannot face the atrocities that came with it “can never pay the price for the beat which is the key to music, and the key to life. Music is our witness, and our ally. The beat is the confession which recognizes, changes and conquers time. Then, history becomes a garment we can wear, and share, and not a cloak in which to hide: and time becomes a friend.”⁵

In his seminal publication “The Philosophy of the Sea,” Esiaba Irobi harshly accused G. W. F. Hegel and Edmund Husserl of never really fully understanding what phenomenology really means or how it functions as *an act of community and a tool for social, spiritual and political engineering of diverse peoples of the world*. Irobi used Maurice Merleau Ponty’s redefinition of the phenomenon to show how—from an African and African diasporic epistemic and performative perspective—phenomenology could be understood through the experiential,

4. James Baldwin, “Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption,” in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 120.

5. *Ibid.*, 124.

physical dimension of embodied performance as practiced in many African and African diasporic communities. Irobi expatiated on how the body in African and African diasporic cultures “functions as a somatogenic instrument as well as a site of multiple discourses which absorbs and replays, like music recorded on vinyl, epistemologies of faith and power grooved into it by history.”⁶ The analogy of music on vinyl here is in no way accidental, as the expression of any auditory phenomena gets encrypted not only in memory but also in the body, and through reiterations in performances of the “quotidien,” in dance and other rituals, the past is conveyed to the present and catapulted to the future. The transition and interconnection between the vocal utterances, speeches, sounds and music to performativity and an embodied experience within space and place is the core of this project. So, while Irobi proposes that: “... the Africans who were translocated to the new world lost their names, their languages, their geographies and original communities but they still replicated syncretized versions of indigenous African performance forms such as Abakua, Candomble, Lucumi, Bembe and Carnival based on African theories of festivity and ritual performance,”⁷ it is worth considering that most of these rituals are framed and modeled, motivated and driven, enlivened and animated by auditory phenomena like vocal utterances, speeches, sounds and music. In his very significant philosophical thoughts on sound and music, Jean-Luc Nancy touches on a very important mechanism affiliated to auditory phenomena and especially resonance, when he writes about the “methexic” character of sound: “the visual is tendentially mimetic, and the sonorous tendentially methexic (that is, having to do with participation, sharing, or contagion), which does not mean that these tendencies do not interact.”⁸

6. Esiaba Irobi, “The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics and Reason in the Caribbean Basin,” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006).

7. Esiaba Irobi, “The Problem with Post-colonial Theory: Re-Theorizing African Performance, Orature and Literature in the Age of Globalization and Diaspora Studies,” in *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2008).

8. Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press., 2007), 10.

It is this ability for auditory phenomena to instigate participatory moments and create spaces of exchange, and their ability to infect others that makes the medium an especially appropriate medium for a transmission of histories beyond words. With the concept of “contagion” Nancy ventures into the phenomenology of sonority by further describing the sonorous as something that outweighs form by enlarging it, by giving it an amplitude, a density, as well as a vibration or undulation. The sonorous must find its way in space before reaching the body that serves as a receiver. The sonorous thus leaves marks as its waves meander through spaces in their becoming and in places as they metamorphose. For an appropriate understanding of how space and place can be perceived, it is worth considering Gascia Ouzounian’s definition in her paper “Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body”:

I consider space to be the *multiple and hybrid settings*—whether physical, cultural, social, personal or political—*of production*; while I imagine place as *the moment-to-moment relationships between different elements of a network* (i.e., “topology”). Place focuses the particular, the situational and the momentary, and is therefore always in flux and subject to change. Space, on the other hand, is used to describe more general and sedentary forms of organization. However, because space and place produce one another, there is an ongoing interplay between the particular and the general, the momentary and the lingering.⁹

The sonorous could serve as a broker in the dynamic interplay between time, place, space, and the embodied. This determines how the body navigates within its political, social, economic, and psychic space.

We are called upon to engage in/with histories carried by the physicality of the sonorous and transmitted to the body. The embodied sound encrypts itself into a corporeal archive through performativity and reiterations. The auditory phenomena of vocal utterances, speech, sound and music codefine a space and place and cultivate an historicity.

9. Ouzounian, Gascia, “Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body,” *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2006), 72.

This text was originally published in *aneducation*, a publication which accompanied and reflected on the education program for documenta 14. *aneducation* aimed to complicate the politics of ‘knowing’ as institutional practice—namely, its genealogies and the power relations it imposes. It was not only about knowledge, but also about the daily embodied practices of listening, walking, gesticulating, performing, doing, reading, and being in dialogue with others. An open ecology was needed, and developed in conversation with artists, local publics, and associated organizations, drawing on many practices as processes for learning. This was realized in core questions concerning what shifts, drifts, and remains.

Corpoliteracy – Envisaging The Body as Slate, Sponge, and Witness

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹

But they jeered one and all and said:

This is only the night of bonfires
We need dancers around the blaze
Acrobats and drummers, stilt dancers
And, listen carefully, lest you forget.

—Olu Oguibe, *The Youth Who Dances*.

An Igbo proverb states that when we dance we express who we were, who we are, and who we want to be. Time is compressed and telescoped teleologically to contain and express the past, the present and the future in one fluid kinaesthetic moment.

—Esiaba Irobi, *The Philosophy of the Sea*.²

1. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 181.

2. Esiaba Irobi, “The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics and Reason in the Caribbean Basin,” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006): 3.

In a December 2017, as part of the symposium *That Around Which the Universe Revolves. On the Rhythmanalysis of Memory, Times, Bodies in Space*,³ filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha proposed rhythm as the door between body and mind. She later expatiated on this proposal, referring to the concept of the embodied mind common to many AfroAsiac philosophies. I have been thinking of rhythm within this analogy: everything that leads to or induces a rhythm, facilitates a passage through, an inscription in, a writing on, a recording, and a spelling on and of that embodied mind.⁴ If the body is the mind, then it has the capacity to learn and memorize. Every movement in space and time—be it a walk, a dance, or otherwise, every gesticulation, every exercise of the muscles and the cells that make up the body—is possibly remembered. But every intervention on the body—scarifications, tattoos, scars, or injuries—triggers the process of memory.

I explore the possibility of a corpoliteracy—an effort to contextualize the body as a platform, stage, site and medium of learning, a structure or organ that acquires, stores, and disseminates knowledge. This concept implies that the body, in sync with, but also independent of, the brain, has the potential to memorize and pass on/down acquired knowledge through performativity—the prism of movement, dance, and rhythm.

It is common practice that when the Nguemba people—like many other peoples on the African continent and beyond—dance, they invoke and embody certain totems important to particular families or societies at large.

3. Trinh T. Minh-ha, “On Fourth Dimension,” Lecture at HAU, Hebbel am Ufer for SAVVY Contemporary’s project *That Around Which the Universe Revolves. On the Rhythmanalysis of Memory, Times, Bodies in Space*, December 3, 2017.

4. As Henri Lefebvre points out: “Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm.” The body, according to Lefebvre is a collection of rhythms with different tunes that result from history, facilitated by calling on all senses, drawing on breathing and blood circulation, just as much as heartbeats and speech utterances as landmarks of this experience. See Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury., 2013).

The elephant, lion, monkey, or snake dances not only mimic typical movements of these animals but also convoke the spirits that connect the human to his/her animal. These dances, which are usually performed in groups, then serve a purpose beyond that of mere entertainment and pleasure: the dances become sites that enliven rituals, spaces of spiritual communication and bonding—the bodies that perform are the tools through or with which the rituals are practiced.

To the accompaniment of ritual music, the movements of the legs, arms, and rest of the body invoke certain spirits, and through repetition and reiteration, a certain degree of automation is achieved. Dance becomes a means through which rituals are expressed—or better still—dance is the ritual. Through dance one can communicate with certain spirits and convoke them for the purposes of worship and appeasement. It is no surprise that in the performativity of dance, more often than not, the dancer is catapulted into a temporary state of ecstasy. The etymological roots of ecstasy are not unimportant: “elation” comes from Old French, *estaise* (ecstasy, rapture), derived from the Late Latin *extasis* and the Greek *ekstasis* (entrancement, astonishment, insanity; any displacement or removal from the proper place). It is this rapture, displacement, and removal from a particular space—in dance, the displacement from one’s own body, the possibility of an out of body state—that becomes very interesting: trance as state; transcendence via the exalted state of body and soul when dancing.

Besides the spiritual and ritual aspects of dance, performing has obviously been a way for people to write or encode their own histories. Wars or other challenges faced by a group of people take form as dance moves, or are integrated into costumes and music. Battle techniques, loss of life, or moments of victory are re-performed, passed from one generation to another, as with the Mbaya dance or Capoeira. Group dances often reveal moments of encounter. Encountering of a new religion, for example, can lead to the appropriation of those religious signs, as happened with the appearance of the Catholic cross in the Pépé Kallé and Nyboma dances. Encountering new technologies also gives rise to dance moves: arms open wide can symbolize a plane; or the move in the Pédalé dance in dancers mimic cycling.

There is more work to be done exploring the body's performative role as in dance with respect to the conservation, portrayal, and dissemination of peoples' histories and that of places and events—dance as a method of historicity, an alternative writing of history, as historiography. The challenge is to acknowledge dance performance as a medium—in its own right—that can reflect with veracity, authenticity, and actuality historical knowledge claims.

Through dances like the Juba, the Chica, or Calenda, one learns about particular times in history: repressions, racial relations, resistances, resilience, and more. The body of the dancer is the witness. The witness's narrative—especially when the witness is silent—occurs through performativity. Every performance is to a certain degree a re-experience and re-witnessing, rather than just observation. Through dance the observer becomes witness.

It is this oneness of the observer and observed, inside and outside, that makes dance as a method and practice particularly interesting at this juncture. In Osho it is said that while the scientist is an observer, the mystic is a witness.⁵ The dancer too could be considered a witness in this light: their ability to perform the processuality of making histories, and offer testimony, collapses the separation of inside from outside.

Through dance and the accompanying music, socio-political realities are embodied, portrayed, and sometimes even processed psychologically and somatically. During the avian influenza outbreak in West Africa in 2008, DJ Lewis released a popular track in the Ivory Coast called *Grippe Aviaire*; the dance moves in the music video spread like wild fire among the young and old alike. In nightclubs, offices, public spaces, people dangled their half-raised arms, eyes wide open, evoking movements of chickens with bird flu. Another Ivory Coast artist DJ Zidane, that same year, at the height of maltreatment of prisoners in Guantanamo on the other side of the Atlantic, invented the Guantanamo dance.

5. Osho, "25. Consciousness is Contagious," in *Socrates Poisoned Again after 25 Centuries* (New York: Osho International., 1988)

Teenagers gathered in public spaces dancing as though hand-cuffed or crippled. Art engulfed sociopolitical reality, histories and knowledges were embodied in dance, as were societal sentiments, traumas, joys, and fears. Dance is not about the individual, but the community—the commons. As Léopold Sédar Senghor—the poet, philosopher, and politician—put it:

“Je pense donc je suis”; écrivait Descartes. ...

Le Négroafricain pourrait dire: “Je sens l’Autre, je danse l’Autre, donc je suis.” Or danser, c’est créer, surtout si la danse est d’amour. C’est, en tout cas, le meilleur mode de connaissance.⁶

[“I think, therefore, I am,” Descartes writes. ...

The NegroAfrican could say, “I feel, I dance the other, therefore I am.” To dance is to create, especially if the dance is of love. In any event, it is the best way to know].

Senghor points out a few important things here. Dance is about creation and it is about knowledge. But maybe most importantly, dance seems to be about connecting with the other, about communion, a group action. Dance, in all its aforementioned functions, manifests itself most effectively when one “dances the other.” Dance is a social phenomenon. From Agwara dance, Bikutsi, Coupé Décalé, and Zouglou, or circle, contra, or square dances, to street dances like breakdancing in which the crew becomes a surrogate family, dance reflects sociopolitical realities, current and historical affairs, and needs a community to be lived and experienced. One can find solace in the dance crew, share happiness amongst birds of the same feather. The crew is a place for mentorship, often crucial to community building. Hip hop, dancehall moves, krump, and many other urban forms of dance offer a degree of social dignity to the dancers—not only because they dance well, but because of their affiliation with the crew.

In *Dance and Politics*, Dana Mills writes about dance as a means of communication and as writing.⁷ Her argument can

6. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté 1: Négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 259. Translation by author.

7. See Dana Mills, *Dance and Politics: Moving Beyond Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

be radically summarized as follows: there are more languages than just verbal; human beings have found manifold ways to communicate with each other; and dance is an embodied language, a form of communication between bodies in motion. As such, the language of dance adheres to different rules and structures than those of verbal language. Dance is the way those subjects perform their equality before those expressing themselves verbally. There are clashes between verbal and nonverbal languages. At the meeting point between dance and verbal languages, different symbolic and political frameworks collide, underscoring the presence of two forms of language. Political dance, or the constitution of dance as a realm that does not require language, creates a shared embodied space between dancer and spectator, between equality and plurality; the equality of bodies allows them to speak with each other unmediated by words; the plurality of beings pushes them to express themselves *through* their bodies. Through these two aspects, dance is inscribed upon the body. The body is altered by inscription, informing it of communities and possibilities—a dancing body is never alone, but rather always conversing with an Other. But dancing subjects can transcend the boundaries of their communities and live in more than one world—both that constituted by dance as a method of communication and that constituted by words as a method of expression. As a practice that goes beyond boundaries, dance challenges demarcations between communities erected by verbal language, transcending spaces created by words: this happens at the moment dancers gain entry into a community larger than the one they were assigned, attesting to the equality of bodies.

Dance is a socio-political method and practice, a means of writing, narrating, and disseminating histories. It is a corporeal phenomenon that can be a catalyst for building communities and challenge and transcend the boundaries of societies and languages. The dancing body becomes the witness, a *somato-testimonium*—the body in a dance performance and the movements employed as a formal statement are equivalent to a written, spoken, eyewitness, or earwitness account, proof of a spatiotemporal reality.

The above leads me to developing the concepts of *corpo-literacy* and *corpo-epistemology*, involving the study of the nature and extent of bodily knowledge in dance performance, as well as how the body and dance performances produce, enact, inscribe, and propagate knowledge(s). Like epistemological studies in general, it is important to analyze bodies employed in dance in relation to notions of truth or belief. Thus, corpo-epistemology also focuses on manifestations of politicized, sexualized, genderized, and racialized bodies in performativity. Corpo-epistemology is preoccupied with questions like: What is bodily knowledge? How is bodily knowledge acquired? How is bodily knowledge expressed in dance performances? How can the observer of a performance decipher and relate to these bodily knowledges? If rhythm and dance provide the structure for a form of such bodily knowledge, what are the limits?

Maybe this research is an effort to grasp and practice phenomenology through dance and involving the body in shared participatory experiences. Challenging some of the most prominent philosophical positions in the West certainly takes a lot of guts—especially if these positions embody the authorities of Husserl and Hegel. But as Esiaba Irobi points out:

Husserl, like Hegel, spent the greater part of his career trying to explain what *transcendental phenomenology* means and, in my view, never really came to grasps with what the concept really means to non-European peoples of the world. His problem or mental block was that he based his analysis on the positivist premise that *phenomenology* could be understood and explained through rational thought, verbal discourse or typographical literacy. It cannot. Reading Husserl over and over again can never compare with an initiation into *Candomble* in Bahia or *Santeria* in Cuba or *Voudoun* in Haiti. Phenomenology, as a *philosophical* and *performative* concept, I contend, can only be fully grasped through action, through a bodily participatory experience as we feel when we take part physically in a ritual, festival, carnival, dance, capoeira.⁸

8. Irobi, "The Philosophy of the Sea," 7.

This text was written as a proposal for a series of performative interventions, lectures, artistic contributions and music sessions at SAVVY Contemporary, organized upon invitation by the Auswärtiges Amt to participate in the “Long Night of Ideas.” Co-curated with Elena Agudio.

The program tackled the challenge of “unlearning the given” and of deconstructing the ideologies and connotations eminent in the constructs that frame our contemporary societies. The program engaged with Gayatri Spivak’s resounding call to “unlearn one’s privileges as one’s loss,” as well with Paget Henry call for the poetic power of artistic practice to un-name and rename, de-institute and re-institute selves, lower the volume of imposed voices and un-silence suppressed voices in an effort to resolve crises of entrapment.¹ By articulating exercises of disobedience and indiscipline as means of decolonizing the singularity of “knowledge,” the program sought to give space to the possibility of a plurality of epistemologies.

1. Paget Henry, “Ramabai Espinet and Indo-Caribbean Poeticism,” in *Shifting the Geography of Reason: Gender, Science and Religion*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 13.

Unlearning the Given. Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality of Ideas and Knowledge

The Idea of Inventing this World

It is self-evident that the dominant Western and Eurocentric educational structures intimately support racist power structures and knowledge systems, which continue to measure the progress of other cultures in terms of their “distance” from Western modernity. It is under this ideology of progress that colonialism was immediately justified, deeming certain societies not yet ready for self-rule and consigning them to the “waiting room of history,”² and this continues to be facilitated in the labelling of parts of the world as “developing,” according to their ability to impersonate Western “progress.”

2. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 810.

Spat out in the world, we are immediately subjected to processes of learning, and slowly—unavoidably and irrevocably—moulded by social conventions, paradigms, ideologies, schemas, and by an innumerable list of acquired preconceptions that soon enough represent the skeleton of our moral system and superego. Continuing on our path of maturation along an universal *qua* Western educational system that has found or forced its way into almost all four corners, and nooks and crannies of the globe, we become learned subjects inserted in a perverse roleplaying game as political bodies subject to capitalist endeavors and capitalism's straightjacket.

Along the line—in the quest for power and progress in the sciences and humanities, economics and military, and in an effort to colonize space and time—those references and resources of civilizations, discoveries and innovations from the non-West, that paved the way to what one now calls a Western civilization, were sacrificed, left out, disputed or deleted, and covered by other knowledge constructs and philosophies that claimed or propagated the racial, humanitarian, economic, historical superiority of some kinds of human beings over others. These ideologies have been the pillars on which slavery, colonialism, neoliberal economies, antisemitism, anti-islamism, racism have been built. These need to be unlearned.

The Idea of *Das Volk*

In the wake of increased racism in Germany, of rising rates of violent attacks against foreigners, and especially refugees, in Europe as a whole. At a time when we experience the rebirth and reconceptualization of nationalistic tendencies in Hungary, Poland, Denmark, France, Italy and Germany.

In the dawn of an era in which refugee homes are burnt down (according to statistics of *Kein Mensch ist Illegal* in 2015 alone 1005 arsons on refugee homes were registered, as compared to 199 in 2014, and 69 in 2013), while citizens of a “civilized” nation stand around hindering the work of the firefighters, cheering and clapping and chanting “refugees go home,” and “Wir Sind das Volk” (we are the people).

In an age of refugeeness in which refugees, like in Clausnitz, Germany, are brought to a new asylum home by bus and met by a group of approximately 100 neo-Nazis chanting “Wir sind das Volk.” And, instead of protecting the helpless refugees, the police pulled them out using massive force and left them there at the mercy of a bunch of neo-Nazis?³

Besides and beyond unlearning the construction of race, the construction of the “other”—who, according to popular discourse, leaves his/her home and family, walks across the desert or swims across the Mediterranean Sea, succeeds in overcoming all the violent hurdles from Greece through Hungary to Germany, just to meet the scorn and other forms of hate, one too has to unlearn that perverse concept of a unilateral *Volk*.

Despite the historical baggage the word *Volk* brings along, especially in relation to Nazi Germany, it is time to appropriate the concept of *Volk* and give it new meaning, instead of discarding it.

3. Phillip Oltermann, “Mob chanting at bus of refugees in Germany shames politicians,” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/mob-chanting-bus-refugees-germany-politicians> (Accessed February 26, 2019).

That is unlearning. The discourse around Hans Haacke's work *Der Bevölkerung*,⁴ which is still vivid in our memories, though it was one of the most important art pieces of the twentieth century has to be reconsidered 16 years after. Haacke's position within his history and with the piece in the Reichstag is very legitimate, but with 1,1 million refugees seeking for greener and safer pastures in Germany, and with 1 of 5 Germans having a *Migrationsvordergrund*, we have to change the debate, change the narrative and change perspectives. The *Volk* should not and NEVER could afford to exclude all these people. We all know that the construct of *Das Volk* as the Nazis wanted to see it was a sheer fiction. There has NEVER been a singular, uniform, coherent, or homogenous *Deutsche Volk*. Never. This construct called *Deutsch* is made up of the Bavarians, Prussians, Saxons, Bohemians, Danes, etc.,⁵ and today, as well as tomorrow, it will mean Syrians, Iranians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Moroccans, and more, including gays and lesbians, men and women, the sane and insane.

The idea of a homogenous, blond and blue-eyed Aryan German too has to be unlearned. Thus, unlearning is not shying away or chickening out of reality, but pointing at, deconstructing and complexifying those myths and longings of the nation-state, the supreme race and other fabulations.

4. See Hans Haacke, Rosalyn Deutsche & Miwon Kwon, "DER BEVOLKERUNG: A Conversation," *Grey Room*, vol. 16 (2004): 60–81. See also John Hooper, "Artist sparks row on what it means to be German," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/apr/06/johnhooper> (Accessed February 26, 2019)

5. Johannes Fried & Christian Staas, "Kommen die Bayern aus dem Orient?," *Die Zeit*, November 12, 2015, <https://www.zeit.de/2015/44/deutsche-abstammung-migration-geschichte-mittelalter-johannes-fried>, (Accessed November 12, 2015).

The Idea of Unlearning

Unlearning is not forgetting, it is not deletion, cancellation nor burning off. It is writing bolder and writing anew. It is commenting and questioning. It is giving new footnotes to old and other narratives. It is the wiping off of the dust, clearing of the grass, and cracking off the plaster that lays above the erased. Unlearning is flipping the coin and awakening the ghosts. Unlearning is looking in the mirror and seeing the world, rather than a concept of universalism that indeed purports a hegemony of knowledge.

This text was written as a proposal for an exhibition entitled *The Conundrum of the Imagination: On the Paradigm of Exploration and Discovery*, 2017 (co-curated with Pauline Doutreluingne and commissioned by the Wiener Festwochen in collaboration with the Leopold Museum, Vienna) which aimed at exploring the paradigm of exploration and discovery as an empirical system. Heeding James Baldwin's suggestion that perhaps explorers did not discover, but rather were discovered by what they found, the project investigated and questioned humanity's endless quest for knowledge through the concept of exploration as well as through the tendency to foster certain epistemological systems while suppressing others.

The Conundrum of the Imagination focused particularly on the way the "age of exploration" presents parallels not only with the more contemporary discourse of space exploration, but also with representations of the internet as a contemporary terrain for exploration where the laws of Gold, God and Glory apply.

The Conundrum of Imagination. On the Paradigm of Exploration and Discovery

We do not know enough about the mind,
or how the conundrum of the imagination
dictates, discovers,
or can dismember what we feel,
or what we find.

—James Baldwin, “Conundrum.”¹

Imagination
creates the situation,
and, then, the situation
creates imagination.

It may, of course,
be the other way around:
Columbus was discovered
by what he found.

—James Baldwin, “*Imagination*.”²

1. James Baldwin, “Conundrum,” in *Jimmy’s Blues and Other Poems* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 45.

2. *Ibid.*, “Imagination,” 32.

When the legendary Jamaican reggae musician Burning Spear dropped the album *Hail H.I.M.* in 1982, it landed like a bomb. This was, amongst other things because of the piece *Columbus*, in which he chanted almost insolently “Christopher Columbus is a damn blasted liar.” An accusation which calls for second thought. Of course Burning Spear was referring to the conundrum regarding Christopher Columbus’ discovery of America. This dispute has been there since time immemorial, or at least since Columbus set his foot on what he mistakenly thought was India.

In the popular lore of *Columbus and the egg*, it is said that upon an honorable dinner Columbus had been challenged by some people about the simplicity of his discovery of America. As a response Columbus passed around an egg and asked those challenging and mocking him if any of them could make the egg stand on end?

When all of them failed to do so, Columbus took the egg and struck an end gently on the table breaking and flattening the shell a little and thereby making the egg to stand upright, and then he said “Gentlemen, what is easier than to do this which you said was impossible? It is the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it,—after he has been shown how!”

Whether this anecdote, as narrated by historian Girolamo Benzoni in his 1565 book *History of the New World*,³ is truth or fiction is rather irrelevant, the phenomenal and revelatory brilliance Columbus showed in silencing his opponents shines also in how it exposes the problematics behind the concept of discovery. But one thing after the other..

Of all the waves of explorations known in history—from the Carthaginian in West Africa in 500 BC, through the Greek’s ventures in Northern Europe around 380–310 BC, the Han dynasty’s exploration of most of Central Asia in the 2nd century BC, the Vikings exploring most of Europe and setting foot in America around 800 to 1040 AD, the Polynesian exploration

3. See Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

of central and south pacific until 1280, the Chinese exploration of Southeast and South Asia as well as the East African coast in the fourteenth century—the most striking of all, most productive and enriching for some and at the same time most devastating of all “exploration ages” was what has been coined the “European Age of Discovery.” The stories of the European explorers that charted the world from early fourteenth to nineteenth centuries in their discovery spree—from Columbus to Humboldt, Cão to Cook, from Dias, da Gama or Magellan to Vespucci, Tasman or Bering—have been told and retold.

The praises of how they “discovered” lands and waters, vertebrates and invertebrates, how they were the first to crest mountains and their contributions in the natural sciences and geography have been sung. Accolades have been given to the explorers for setting trade routes between continents, which they ploughed with the three G’s at the forefront of their minds: Gold, God and Glory.

So while the “European Age of Exploration” is still highly celebrated in most of the world, with countries, cities, rivers, animals, and plants still carrying the names of its main protagonists, and with countries setting up cultural and political agendas, and institutions in reverence and commemoration of these explorers, it is important to reflect on the other consequences of this Age of Exploration, beyond the advantages evident from the European perspective or viewpoint of the axis of power.

Gold... In the midst of an economic stalemate in Europe due to the then disputed Mediterranean and the perilous Arabian Peninsula that hindered trade with Asia, European kings had ushered explorers into the high seas to find alternative ways to get to the sources of gold, spices, and other resources. This thus opened the way for an age of global capitalism and imperialism. It goes without saying that every piece of gold—or of other resources—taken from the countries just “discovered” back to Europe was a piece less for the owners. Apart from an uneven economic structure built on exploitation, these explorations led to the initiation of the transatlantic slave trade, providing a source of unpaid laborers for European plantations. The economic models set up then are still preminent in our contemporary era.

God... An important part of the *companhia* of conquistadors were the clergy men—who were at the same time companions of warriors—who came with a firearm in one hand and the bible in the other. While missioning and securing religious territory for the pope and kings back in Europe were more of an excuse to get more support for their trips, these explorations led to the eradication of *autoctone* religions and cultures in their bid to impose a monotheistic christian religion to the world. They went as far as not only forcefully converting natives to Christianity, but as stipulated, for example under Castilian law, prohibited non-Catholics from dwelling in captured territory and thereby prompting a Hispanicization and Catholicization of the whole territory.

Glory... An accumulation of wealth and territory, a superimposition of your civilization, cultures, and religions, a propagation of your epistemologies and thereby destruction of other knowledge systems is nothing if it is not recognized and glorified. It is said that one of the most important power installation mechanisms is the act of naming. Thus, by naming countries, cities, insects, plants, animals, and mountains after the likes of Humboldt, Magellan, Tasman, Bering or Cook, their glories live on. At the time of the “European Age of Discovery,” the newly invented and popularized medium of writing came in handy in the dissemination of the explorers’ claims of discovery, their righteous deeds and the knowledge they had acquired. Needless to say, that a good part of the knowledge propagated might not have been completely true, and that this was a foundation of the savage slot and epistemic violence that later became official in the curriculum under the name of “Anthropology.” Writing and the distribution of the book helped Amerigo Vespucci give the impression to the world that he actually discovered America, though he got there after Columbus, the Vikings, and especially the natives, whom one would want to believe had already discovered their lands long before. Such was the case too when Humboldt disseminated the information that he was the first to climb mount Chimborazo, which was strange as knowledge of that mountain had since time immemorial been part and parcel of myths and knowledge systems of the Ecuadorian people. Glory also came on both sides of the Atlantic as explorers were feared as gods in the conquered land and honored as great knights, scientists, and visionaries in their fatherlands.

All these came along with the spread of diseases that were imported into the conquered territories, an erasure of native civilizations, cultures, languages, and peoples, thus paving the way for colonialism.

Interestingly, the notion of exploration and discovery, not only in strategy but also in vocabulary and actions was imported from the “European Age of Exploration” into space explorations of the twentieth century as exemplified by Neil Armstrong’s and Buzz Aldrin’s erection of the American flag on the Moon in July 1969. Once more, in space exploration there is the hope to acquire new knowledge about newly discovered territories, find some precious minerals, or living creatures, or some other salient discoveries and satisfy the human desire for adventure. On the other hand, apart from the fact that this intervention into this “new territory” might cause an imbalance in the natural conditions reigning there, the enormous costs invested in space research and exploration led to Gil Scott Heron’s verses in *Whitey On The Moon*:

I can’t pay no doctor bills
But Whitey’s on the moon
Ten years from now I’ll be paying still
While Whitey’s on the moon

You know, the man just upped my rent last night
Cause Whitey’s on the moon
No hot water, no toilets, no lights
But Whitey’s on the moon

[...]

Taxes takin’ my whole damn check
The junkies make me a nervous wreck
The price of food is goin up
And if all that crap wasn’t enough
A rat done bit my sister nell
With Whitey on the moon
Her face and arms began to swell
And Whitey’s on the moon⁴

4. Gil Scott-Heron, “Whitey on the Moon,” on *A New Black Poet. Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*, Flying Dutchman Records, 1970.

It is central to investigate humanity's endless quest for knowledge as revealed in the concept of exploration and discovery, but also the tendency to foster certain epistemological systems and suppress others through selection mechanisms. To situate the concept of exploration and discovery within a genealogy of academic disciplines, for example Anthropology. And equally important, to investigate continuities of the notion of exploration from its earliest days into our contemporary times. To set the spotlight on the way exploration of back then is reflected today in the exploration of the moon and other planets beyond the earth. But even more crucial, to look at the internet as a contemporary terrain for exploration, where the same laws of three Gs are applicable, as terrain is secured on the internet in form of domains, and how the scramble for gold in the Eldorados of then are equivalent to the financial booms in the internet, social media and APPs age, and most especially how everyone using the browser internet explorer or other browsers becomes an explorer of the internet worthy of earning fame and glory. The Conundrum of the Imagination looks at how exploration and discovery longlastingly framed the understanding of the science of cartography and how these still play a role in today's understanding of the world.

This text was written as a proposal for a SAVVY Contemporary exhibition (co-curated with Antonia Alampi) in the framework of the Harun Farocki Retrospective which took place in 2017. The resulting project, *El Usman Faroqhi Here and a Yonder: On Finding Poise in Disorientation* combined research with an exhibition, performances and discourse. It zoomed into a detail of Farocki's life and practice that plays a crucial philosophical, social, and political role—the issue of name and naming.

The project gathered artists, filmmakers, and intellectuals from here a yonder at SAVVY Contemporary to work around issues of naming. This led to reflections on naming as a philosophy, a mnemonic tool and a form of disorientation, but also led to addressing the performativity of language, naming and its role in warfare and in pornography. The artists revisited, questioned, and even challenged Farocki's positions and offered new ways of seeing, and experiencing, his oeuvre.

El Usman Faroqhi Here and a Yonder. On Finding Poise in Disorientation

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long possessed that he is set free he has set himself free for higher dreams, for greater privileges.

—James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*.¹

Oh baby, baby, baby
It's getting kind of crazy
'Cause you are taking over my mind

And it feels like ooh
You don't know my name
I swear, it feels like ooh
You don't know my name
(Round and round and round we go, will you ever know)

—Alicia Keys, *You Don't Know My Name*.²

1. James Baldwin, "Faulkner and Desegregation," in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dial, 1961), 117–26.

2. Alicia Keys, "You Don't Know My Name," on *The Diary of Alicia Keys*, J-Arista Records, 2003.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

In common parlance in predominantly Judeo-Christian spaces, for example, it is believed that a Thomas tends to be a doubtful and cautious person, and a Peter turns out to become the rock, which grounds his name etymologically, but a Lot, a Jezebel, or Delilah might end up with burdens alluding to their religious connotations. The point insinuated is that people embody their names and their meanings. The myths of certain societies even go as far as saying that kids, before they are born, already embody those names, and choose their own names.

But maybe this could be considered gibberish, common parlance...

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

If we were to leave the historical and religious etymologies and connotations aside, names still tend to carry their weight in gold, as they open and close doors within certain societies. In recent years, there has been much outcry about selectivity—for example for job interviews and otherwise—based rather on the names applicants bear, than their competences. In her 2015 NY Times article “Appreciate the History of Names to Root out Stigma,” Morgan Jerkins elaborates on the discrimination tendencies in hiring in the U.S., whereby resumes with names that sounded African-American were 50 percent less likely to be invited for job interviews than identical resumes carrying names that sound like “white names.”³ Essentially, it is a narrative about racialization through naming, whereby “unusually” sounding names lead to bias. Interestingly, it seems as if names do not only reveal race, but also betray class, and of course gender. This phenomenon is everything but new, as people have always been profiled as “the other” whenever they bore the names Mohammed, Shaniq, Shimon, or otherwise.

3. Morgan Jerkins, “Appreciate the History of Names to Root out Stigma,” *The New York Times*, December 25, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/10/19/job-discrimination-based-on-a-name/appreciate-the-history-of-names-to-root-out-stigma> (Accessed February 10, 2019).

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

Naming is also a philosophy. Maybe the person who has found the most accurate words in expressing philosophical concepts of names and naming is Esiaba Irobi in “The Philosophy of the Sea.”⁴ Irobi takes the example of Igbo culture to elaborate on his thesis of names and naming as philosophy. He points out that Igbo children are not given names inspired by television series, stars, flowers, cities nor adopted from dictionaries, or the bible. Rather, a child’s name is a philosophical contraction of parental or community/societal experiences at the time of his or her birth. According to Irobi, names and naming involve deep thinking and poetry that result in such complex names like Ehilegbuonefumaanodilalaulo, which means “On the day you will kill an innocent man may I not be at home!” or Osonduagabaghilodo, which means “In a time of war, we do not run the race for life on a straight path,” indeed a reference to the fact that the family survived the Nigera/Biafran civil war around the time of that child’s birth. Thus names serve as a kind of “*Eselbrücke*,” a mnemonic tool for the community, a reference and memorial to difficult confrontations and situations in their lives and through the physical appearance of the child, they celebrate the survival and overcoming hardship. Irobi was making these points in an effort to put a spotlight on alternative spaces in which, or through which, philosophical thoughts are expressed in pithy complex structures of metalanguages in the Caribbeans, the U.S., or the Asian and African continent.

Looking further at names and naming as a mnemonic tool, in some place like in pre-independence Cameroon, where, especially in rural areas, children have no birth certificates, the age of a person is marked by the person’s name, again based on an event of great impact that happened around the time of birth.

4. Esiaba Irobi, “The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics and Reason in the Caribbean Basin,” *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006): 10.

Take for example a person who is a hundred years today would be identified as Mofor, which is the name given to all male children born after the First World War's battles between the Germans and the British in Cameroon in 1915–16.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

Maybe the genealogical bridge between James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* and Alicia Keys' *You Don't Know My Name* was made unconsciously by Olivier Marboeuf in a lecture he once gave at SAVVY Contemporary Berlin in 2014. Marboeuf used the Middle Passage and the practice of giving slaves new names, mostly names of their "masters," as his reference point to build a thesis around naming. Hailing from the French Antilles, Marboeuf posited that like many other descendants of that African forced diaspora, although he was referred to as Olivier Marboeuf, he did indeed have his other name. His African name. The name his forefathers brought with them from Africa. And while the world wasn't aware of that name, he knew his name, and wasn't prepared to reveal that name to anyone, let alone people he didn't trust. It was his secret and sacred power. *Nobody Knows My Name*. While Marboeuf knows the names of whoever is standing in front of him, he has an advantage over his opponent, as he/she doesn't know Marboeuf's true name, and thus, doesn't know who he really is. This resounds and reverberates in Bra Louis Moholo's anthem "You Ain't Gonna Know Me 'Cos You Think You Know Me." The chant by Mrs. Keys "It's getting kind of crazy," "it feels like ooh," "You don't know my name," "round and round we go, will you ever know" could thus be flipped and seen in the light of the Marboeufian *Nobody Knows My Name and You Don't Know My Name* as leverage and vantage rather than a lamentation.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

Harun Farocki (1944–2014) is indisputably until this date one of Germany's most important filmmakers and artists.

That is because, while he passed on, and his body is no longer with us, his spirit and his works are still very much alive and preoccupy us in thought and deed. Thank heavens one can't reduce "seing/being to the presence or absence of bodies.

Anyways, at some point in his remarkable being and career as an artist, writer, scholar, and intellectual, Harun Farocki—who was born in Neutitschein (German-annexed Czechoslovakia) and grew up in India, Indonesia, and Germany—performed a slight surgical operation in an effort to simplify his name. Born Harun El Usman Faroqi,⁵ he dropped the middle names and modified his last name in what might be considered a Germanization of the name using "ck" instead of "qh"—uncommon in the German language.

The reasons for this change might have been manifold, including just making appellation easier or an effort to adapt, integrate, and conform. Maybe he changed the name to avoid being classified the "other" within a society in which "othering" is cultivated. Maybe he changed his name to avoid being exoticized or to avoid that his person and work are seen only through a certain prism. Maybe to enjoy certain political and social amenities, while avoiding other restraints. Maybe just for aesthetic reasons. Whatever the particular reason was seems irrelevant at the moment... of importance is to deliberate on names, naming and renaming as philosophical, as well as socio-political tools and acts. At any rate, Baldwin comes in handy here again.

If Baldwin's statement about "real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, and the end of safety"⁶ holds true, then one could consider the act of name-changing as an act of breaking up from a world, an identity, and a certain safety.

5. Margalit Fox, "Harun Farocki, Filmmaker of Modern Life, Dies at 70," in *The New York Times*, August 3, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/04/arts/harun-farocki-filmmaker-of-modern-life-dies-at-70.html> (Accessed February 10, 2019)

6. Baldwin, "Faulkner and Desegregation," 117.

If Baldwin's statement that "it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges"⁷ holds true, then one could consider the act of name-changing an act of surrendering a dream.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

It is known that Harun Farocki published, did self-interviews, signed scripts with pseudonyms. One of which was Rosa Mercedes. Here too, the reason why people use pseudonyms is multifaceted, ranging from a trial to avoid bias in the eyes of the beholder, to diversify conflicting genres like filmmaking and film critique, to avoid competition within certain fields, an effort to avoid being exotic, an effort to reveal an inner self or inner-meaning that is otherwise under hiding, to hide authorship, to play with or hide identity issues.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

One could also see name-changing, renaming, name-surgery in the context of the concept of disorientation, as proposed by Seloua Luste Boulbina in "Losing One's Bearings: In Praise of Disorientation. On the Necessity to Decolonize Knowledge."⁸ As the title betrays, Boulbina sees disorientation as a pivotal aspect in the decolonization of knowledge. She advocates for disorientation as a step towards becoming decentered within and outside of the self.

7. Baldwin, "Faulkner and Desegregation," *Ibid.*, 117.

8. Seloua Luste Boulbina, "Losing One's Bearings: In Praise of Disorientation. On the Necessity to Decolonize Knowledge," in *Incantation of the Disquieting Muse: On Divinity, Supra-Realities or the Exorcisement of Witchery*, eds. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung & Federica Buetti (Berlin: The Greenbox, 2016).

Disorientation should therefore not be understood as a failure or absence but as an action and a gesture. It should not occur by chance but should be sought as a desirable type of perennial indeterminacy that cannot be interrupted [...]

Disorientation also involves forgetting. If memory is linked to orientation, oblivion may be preferable.⁹

So maybe the act of name-changing, renaming, name-surgery is an effort to find poise through disorientation.

It is said that there is much in a name.
That there is much in naming.

9. *Ibid.*

This text was written as a proposal for a 2016 SAVVY Contemporary exhibition (co-curated with Elena Agudio) in collaboration with the Goethe Institute Johannesburg. A part of the project's title is borrowed from Sylvia Plath's poem "The Disquieting Muses," titled after Giorgio de Chirico's eponymous painting, which portrays three enigmatic faceless beings.

The Project "The Incantation of the Disquieting Muses" proposes "witchery" as a point of departure to reflect on cultural, economic, political, historical, medical, technological, and scientific infrastructures, infrastructures which all present parallel realities, on which futures can be built. The project also looked at "witchery" as an epistemological category and a possible medium of historical, spiritual, and cultural continuity between the African continent and its diaspora. "The Incantation of the Disquieting Muses" sought to use the prism of art and discourse to liberate witchcraft from the "savage slot" to which it has been ascribed by Western scholarship and religion in order to reposition it as a realm of flourishing cultural, political, religious, and scientific production in African and African diasporic societies.

The Incantation of the Disquieting Muse – On Divinity, Parallel, and SupraRealities or the Exorcisement of “Witchery”¹

Inadequately stressed are the aspects of witchcraft that emphasize interdependence and conviviality without obfuscating the individual or collective aspirations to dream, fantasize and explore new dimensions of being. A closer look at the everyday discourses and practices of Cameroonians suggests that witchcraft is about much more than just the dark side of humanity. As a multidimensional phenomenon, witchcraft is best studied as a process in which violent destruction and death are rare and extreme exceptions, employed mostly when all attempts at negotiating conviviality between the familiar and the undomesticated have been exhausted.

—Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri*.²

1. The term “witchcraft” is a denigrating generalization of diverse practices that inhabit the realms of the epistemological, metaphysical, technological, and cultural. In the project “The Incantation of the Disquieting Muses,” the term “witchcraft” is appropriated to complexify what it should stand for, i.e. divinatory, medical, magical, scientific, cultural, and all sorts of practices that manifest within the supernatural, occult, shamanism, spiritualism and other umbrella nomenclatures determined by men of religion and anthropology, who couldn’t grasp the reason and rationale of such phenomena. The term is used despite, and even *because*, of its connotations, so as to liberate these practices from the term and from the savage slot they have been forced into.

2. Francis B. Nyamnjoh, “Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri,” *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2005): 241–242.

The moth that enters
your house at night is a grudge
that somebody is holding
against you. It halfsits, bothered
by your light and the roof
over your head. It spreads
its small evening wherever
it lands, over the things
you love most. A dark tent
of dark intentions.

—Vladimir Lucien, *The Belief in Obeah*.³

When I say “this world” I include, of course, such feelings as fear and despair and barrenness, as well as domestic love and delight in nature. These darker emotions may well put on the mask of quite unworldly things, such as ghosts or trolls or antique gods.

—Sylvia Plath, *Introduction to the Disquieting Muses*.⁴

It goes without saying that any deliberation on the “future” necessitates an in-depth reflection on the past—and the present, for that matter. Otherwise, discourses around future(s) and futurisms are bound to be escapist, intriguing from a far, but indeed far from intriguing at closer look.

Especially in the context of Africa, but also elsewhere, any speculation about the future must thus be situated within the auspices of complicated understandings of the concept of the past (in some African languages like the Bamileke, there are up to 8 different concepts of the past tense), as much as in a multifaceted and nuanced notion of the present and its realities.

3. Vladimir Lucien, “The Belief in Obeah and Other Poems,” *PN Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, (2013), https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=8871 (Accessed February 10, 2019).

4. Sylvia Plath, “Introduction to the Disquieting Muses,” in *Sylvia Plath: The Spoken Word* (The British Library Sound Archive, 2010).

Of the many present realities that might be in existence, some that in many ways, from time immemorial, have influenced, preoccupied, and basically consciously or unconsciously domineered in the daily lives of most people on the African continent and in the various African diasporas are concepts often pejoratively termed sorcery, folk magic, witchcraft, animism, occultism or otherwise, and that take the shape of Nganga, Juju, Ngambe, Obeah, Vodun, Palo, Santeria or otherwise. These practices that are manifested as social, economical, political, historical, medical, technological, or scientific infrastructures give human existence a sense of meaning, as well as an incessant drive for survival.

Though these concepts vary widely from one social group to another, and though these practices have been brand-marked and connotated by anthropologists and representatives of monotheist religions, the belief and the practicing of “witchcraft” and other supernatural knowledges still form a crux and frame for many African and African diaspora societies.

Among the Ashanti, your ancestors are spirits who can help or hinder you, and you supply them with food and drink out of prudence as well as out of the fullness of your heart. Doing so is a part of daily life, because daily life is where you interact with spiritual beings. Nobody is warned against faltering in their faith; because nobody is very much tempted by infidelity. And these practices are taken by most people (Ashanti Catholic bishops and imams included!) to be perfectly consistent with having other confessional allegiances, with being Muslim or Christian. That was certainly true of my own father. He was an elder of the Wesley Methodist Cathedral in Kumasi. But his Methodism had to live with the fact that he was also an Ashanti. And so whenever my father opened a bottle of spirits, which was splendidly often, he poured out the first drops in a libation to his ancestors, and asked them to watch over the family; as an Italian Catholic might call on Mary, mother of God, or an Indian Muslim might call on a Sufi saint at a shrine. The missionaries who converted my grandfather might have complained that this was a reversion to idolatry, but this complaint would have been regarded by my father and my grandfather as absurd.

Philo of Alexandria, expounding Exodus, had some well-judged counsel for them: to be loyal to your god, he said, you need not revile the gods of others.⁵

One could start with that fantasmatic anecdote of the Afo-a-kom, a deity of the peoples of Kom in the Cameroons, which—as facts suggest—was stolen or extorted by Americans around 1966 and subsequently channelled to the Hood museum. Legend has it, the sheer presence of the Afo-a-kom in the museum led to constant commotion, as it emanated powers that destroyed other museum-objects. The legend states that after about a decade abroad, Afo-a-kom took upon itself to escape the prison of the museum and return to Cameroon on foot. One would imagine it would have walked on or swam across the Atlantic Ocean to get back home. Variations of the same story say it came by plane. At any rate, eye witnesses at the welcoming ceremony of Afo-a-kom in Yaounde in the mid-1970s claim that they saw tears rolling out of the deity's eyes.

Another possible anecdotal point of departure could be one from Ousmane Sembène's seminal film *Xala*, 1975 in which the wealthy business-man protagonist of the film chooses to marry a third wife. On the night of the marriage—in which he has to provide a double proof of the fact that his new wife is still a virgin, and also thereby proving his manhood/manliness, on that faithful night of nights—he loses his virility. Suspicions and accusations run wild, and soon enough he is sure that one of his other wives must have put a spell on him. After a few unsuccessful attempts to safe his manhood he finds the right marabout, who convokes the right spirits capable of reinstalling his lost virility. Incapable of paying for that generous and miraculous service, he loses his virility anew. In the end, poverty stricken and still deprived of his manhood, he is forced to face a conglomeration of handicapped beggars, who by spitting on him in denigration as a revenge for previous ill-treatments, promise to thereby reinstate his virility.

5. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Mistaken Identities," *BBC Radio 4: The Reith Lectures*, November 5, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b080t63w> (Accessed February 10, 2019).

Whether these anecdotes are true or not, whether the supernatural exists or not, whether there is something like witchcraft or not, is rather of just so much importance as believing in a young Jewish man who is said to have, some 2000 years ago, walked on water like Afo-a-kom did in the mid-1970s or healed the sick like the marabout did. Of relevance is the capacity of people to believe in individuals' and groups' capability to convoke and use forces to affect subjectivities, events, and eventually the course of human and world affairs.

Unfortunately, issues regarding knowledges, cultures, religions are more complicated than that especially in former colonized societies. It was Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*,⁶ who said that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country, just as it is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content, but by a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it. The exportation of the Abrahamic religions in Africa, accompanied by the colonial enterprise did exactly this to most African societies. While some people were forced to the new world to toil the soil of the Caribbean in what should be seen as the onset of the capitalist economic system, others were forced to destroy their deities, abstain from practicing their religions and forced to acknowledge that besides the White God there was no other God. This and other colonial manipulations upon domination sure led to whitewashing of brains, erasure of histories and knowledge systems, as well as it distorted pasts, presents, and futures. It is thanks to the indoctrination and structuring of former colonized societies around the premises of rational or irrational that one contemplates today if it is rational or irrational to believe in witchery or not? It is also thanks to the evaluative nature and discourse around "development," "progress," and "modernity" framed around grading societies along an evolutionary continuum, which then serves as an indication of society's progress that the destiny of the postcolony is schizophrenic between what to believe or not, which knowledge to follow or not, which culture to inhabit or not.

6. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1967).

But as Kwame Anthony Appiah pointed out, it was normal for his father to pour libations to his ancestors while being an elder in the Methodist church in line with Philo of Alexandria's counsel that one could be loyal his/could without reviling the gods of others.

Also in line with Appiah's argumentation, it is worth reminiscing strategies of surviving through syncretism. Within the den of the colonial enterprise, wherein the colonized was neither able to live his/her indigenous religious and scientific practices, some found ways of sneaking supranatural rituals, songs, performances, regalia, and decor within the religious and scientific "norms." By doing so, the complete destruction of epistemologies, cultures, religions, medical, and other sciences was partly avoided. The performing of some of these syncretic practices, religious, or not, is the epitome of the double bind between coloniality and decoloniality. This is so because the languages, forms, and acting of the indigenous practices is always a reminder of resistance towards a continuous violence, no matter how appropriated and subtle it becomes.

From a socio-cultural point of view, in contemporary times, issues of "witchcraft" seem to be the foremost topic in pop culture, for example in Nollywood films, but also in music and other mediums of cultural expression. Not too long ago, after the 2008 riots and destructions in Cameroon, President Paul Biya, in a speech delivered to the nation on the 27th of February 2008, put the blame of the escalating situation on some "*apprentis sorciers qui dans l'ombre manipulent les jeunes*" [apprentice sorcerers in the shadows who manipulate young people].⁷ In another example, in an article for *Der Spiegel*, Thilo Thielke wrote that "Just as every German team has a physiotherapist, every African team has a resident witch doctor.

7. Paul Biya "Adresse à la Nation," February 27, 2008. A transcript of the speech can be found here: <http://edouardtamba.centerblog.net/4195368-Le-discours-de-Paul-BIYA-le-27-02-08>, (Accessed 10 February 2019). Perhaps Paul Biya had just read Tahir Shah's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), which describes Shah's travels across southern India to find and learn the art of magic from one of India's greatest practitioners.

And the spells work, say some. The governing body of African football has gone out of its way to ban the practice.”⁸

He went on to write:

At the 2002 Africa Cup, Cameroon trainer Winnie Schäfer had to do without his co-trainer Thomas Nkono because, just prior to the semi-final, he had been seen burying bones under the turf and spraying a strange elixir, in order to cast a spell on the playing field. Nkono, a legendary African goalkeeper, was arrested and led away in handcuffs and had to spend the night in police custody.⁹

But what is it about this practice of sorcery that Biya mentions, or the “elixir” that Nkono used that has the potential to influence a nation and a team respectively? What if one were to extrapolate on those forces and implement them as a future science? In any case, these are parallel realities believed and practiced by millions of people.

Not only at the level of the president, but also on a daily basis in even very banal situations are discourses of “witchcraft” invoked. In some parts of the continent, it is normal that if someone dies a “medium” is contacted to facilitate the communication between the dead and the living. In this process, not only is the dead venerated, but one also has the chance to do final clarifications about heritage and more.

In some parts of the continent, it is believed that some people have the power to transform themselves into animals like lions or otherwise and go out in the night for a hunt. In an interview with Pius Bejeng Soh¹⁰ on such transformation practices in the grasslands, he narrated a scene he had experienced as a kid,

8. Thilo Thielke, “They’ll Put a Spell on You: The Witchdoctors of African Football,” *Der Spiegel*, June 11, 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/they-ll-put-a-spell-on-you-the-witchdoctors-of-african-football-a-699704.html> (Accessed February 10, 2019).

9. *Ibid.*

10. Interview conducted in 2015 with Pius Bejeng Soh on the topic of “Witchcraft in the grasslands.”

wherein his father, who was a practitioner of Therianthropy had been out all night in an animal form, and panic broke out, when he wasn't back shortly before sunrise. The break of dawn was never supposed to meet the transformed in the skin of an animal.

It is normal that, for example, a Nganga in Zimbabwe is consulted for divination when one is traveling or if someone is facing charges in a law court. The Nganga and other practitioners are also consulted to resolve love or marital problems, or are asked to intervene in situations of infertility.

In *The Faith of Our Ancestors*, Tatah H. Mbuy takes up a position in a long line of priest-anthropologists/philosophers that reflect on such practices as religion, in what he terms African Traditional Religions (ATR).¹¹ In his opinion ATR withholds beliefs of a supreme Being or God, in the anthropomorphisms of ATR the concept of incarnation is lived, through the veneration of the ancestors a communion of the saints is experienced, the “rites of passage” could be considered sacramental, *inter alia*.

Mbuy, like his colleagues E. Bọlájí Ídówú¹² and John S. Mbiti¹³ share a rather Christianized and Western view of ATR, which is related to a High God e.g. Chukwu, Olodumare, Nyame, Nwi, Roog. On the contrary, Okot p'Bitek believed that the aforementioned scholars' search for a High God was a continuation of a colonial strategy through conversion to monotheism.¹⁴

11. Tatah H. Mbuy, *The Faith of Our Ancestors: Emergent Key Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Maryland Printers, 2007).

12. See E. Bọlájí Ídówú, *Olódumarè: God in Yorùbá Belief* (London: Longman, 1977).

13. See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1985).

14. Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: Uganda Literature Bureau, 1980).

In general, such supranatural practices, for example Vodun, though believing in a Bondye as Supreme God, in its synchronism with Christian religion, the focus is on the tying of the body and soul together.

From an economic point of view, there are numerous manifestations of “witchcraft.” Of the many, it is worth mentioning the case of zombification called Ekong (Douala), Nyongo (Bakweri), Shipoko (Mozambique), Obasinjom (Banyangi).

According to Francis B. Nyamnjoh:

Nyongo is a dynamic, flexible, fluid and common form of witchcraft among the coastal and Grassfields peoples of Cameroon. Amongst these peoples, one is accused of Nyongo when he or she is perceived to have appropriated or attempted to appropriate the life essence of another person, occasioning a sudden and often mysterious “temporary” death. It is claimed that those capable of Nyongo benefit from the afflicted by harnessing the abilities of the latter to slave for them as zombies after their presumed death. Nyongo also refers to the mysterious place(s) where victims of fierce greed—Nyongo—are said to be slaving away, visible mostly to slavedrivers or to those who have consigned them to slavery.¹⁵

In his paper “Dead Men Working: A historical-anthropological look at the modern zombie phenomenon in Africa,” Patrick Harries writes: “But for many Africans, the zombie is very real. He is a neighbour, a relative, being wrenched from his life because a witch forces him to work for him. He becomes a shadowy figure, a laborer without a soul, making his owner rich while he himself is robbed of his identity.”¹⁶

15. Nyamnjoh, “Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri,” 242.

16. Patrick Harries, “Dead Men Working: A historical-anthropological look at the modern zombie phenomenon in Africa,” Seminar: On the African Occult, July 2005, Universität Basel.

The Nyongo practice (as we will generalize it here) is the act of sacrificing a human being for economic gain. While the sacrificed goes to a place a yonder to work, the sacrificer becomes richer. Historically, according to Comaroff and Comaroff:

“Zombies themselves seem to be born, at least in the first instance, of colonial encounters; of the precipitous engagement of local worlds with imperial economies that seek to exert control over the essential means of producing value, means like land and labor, space and time.”¹⁷

But according to local connoisseurs and historians, this practice dates as far back as the age of slavery, when European slave ships combed the shores of the African continent for slaves. Since some Africans were also involved in the capturing or selling of their fellow brothers and sisters to go and work in the plantations in the new world, the practice and its discourses were then integrated in occult practices. This view is also shared by Eric de Rosny in his writings about the Ekong and Mt. Kupe.¹⁸

It is thus not surprising that this concept of Nyongo is used as a metaphor for many other capitalist and neoliberal systems reigning today. In many cases, the proverbial 1% rich and 99% poor common in most societies is easily comparable to the sacrificer and the sacrificed. Likewise, cheap labor or the concept of voluntary work! It is common for someone doing an unpaid internship or someone working in a non-profit institution or on voluntary basis to be asked the question “na which kind Nyongo you di work so,” or “na who gi you for Nyongo.”

17. Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff, “Alien Nations: Zombies, Immigrants, & Millennial Capitalism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 4 (2002): 795.

18. See Eric de Rosny, *Die augen meiner Ziege: Auf den Spuren Hexer und Heiler*. (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1999).

With the increased migration flow of Africans to the West in the 1990s and 2000s, the discourse on Nyongo gained another comparable territory. As many families in f.e. Cameroon sacrificed a lot to send out a kid to Europe or America (in what is called “bushfalling”), and in many cases as young people sacrificed their own lives crossing the Sahara Desert and boarding dilapidated boats just to get to Europe to work under sometimes terrible conditions so as to send money back home, this too was considered a contemporary form of Nyongo. In his seminal paper, Nyamnjoh explores the contemporaneity of this concept of Nyongo, as his research on diasporic Cameroonians showed that “the expectations of modernity through consuming foreign goods have engendered highly mercantilist attitudes by kin and acquaintances determined to treat those in the diaspora essentially as disposable wallets on legs.”¹⁹

Not only are these mostly young people in their best productive age seen as sacrifices, when they go abroad to look for greener pastures for their loved ones back home, they too perceive themselves as being in or victims of Nyongo, due to the enormous demands they get from back home, the load of the society which they have to carry on their shoulders and due to the sometime inhumane dwelling and working conditions they find themselves in:

Bamenda Grassfielders abroad compare Whiteman Kontri to Nyongo and liken themselves to victims of Nyongo. It is common to call and ask to speak to someone and be told he or she “has gone to work Nyongo,” meaning that they have to offer devalued and highly exploited labour at factories, as cleaners, maids, security guards or prostitutes, sweating and toiling round the clock, just to make ends meet. I was first intrigued by this comparison among undocumented Grassfielders in Italy, and as I discussed further with others, I realized the comparison was indeed widespread.²⁰

19. Nyamnjoh, “Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda Grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri”, 244.

20. *Ibid.*, 248.

“Witchcraft” doesn’t need to be science or a technology. Believers and practitioners do not need the legitimization of “science, scientists or some specialist board” to be able to divinate, practice Therianthropy, heal or do whatever they do through invocations of spirits, using spells, chants, herbs, performativity (dance, movement, gymnastics) or otherwise. Indeed science is up-valued and upgraded if it is associated with “witchcraft.” Science as a discipline is intended to facilitate or provide techniques to resolve complicated or adverse conditions such as sickness, transportation and in general other hindrances in the quotidian. It goes without saying that one of humanity’s primary aim is to overcome such hindrances for the continuity of his/her kind. For this to happen, the world and its hindrances have to be studied through observations, experimentations and the development of methodologies, objective in nature and solidified by hypotheses and theories.

Discourses on “witchcraft” and/as science have often been polemicized, but could be summarized by Stein & Stein as follows:

Science deals only with empirical observations, that is, observations that are made through our senses, such as using vision to examine animal tissue under a microscope. Scientific conclusions also must be testable. [...] However, all peoples make detailed observations about their world and sometimes manipulate objects in their environment in order to come to some understanding of their world. All peoples have systems of technology that use rational and practical methods to achieve certain objectives.²¹

21. Rebecca L. Stein & Philip Stein, *Anthropology of Religion, Magic and Witchcraft* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2005), 138.

Most “witchcraft” practices and observations are done on empirical basis, they are testable and their theorization and experimentation in the forms of rituals, chants and performances have existed forever. Manifested/implemented in everyday knowledge, passed on from one generation to the other as a craft, and ameliorated to meet up with the demands and discourses of contemporary society, “witchcraft” knowledge can be considered important for a society and its future.

This text was first published in the exhibition catalogue for “Being There: South Africa, A Contemporary Art Scene” at the Fondation Louis Vuitton.¹ “Being There” was part of a pluridisciplinary program dedicated to African contemporary art at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in the spring of 2017. The exhibition interrogated contemporary South African politics by reflecting on the country’s democratic institutions and its economic and social disparities, twenty years after the end of Apartheid.

1. See *Being There: South Africa, A Contemporary Art Scene* (Paris: Dilecta, 2017).

Caught, Can We Get a Witness?

Understand where we're goin
Then listen to this, plus my Roland
Comin' from way down below
Rebound, c'mon boost up the stereo
Snakes in the morning
Wake up, scared afraid of my warning
They claim that I'm violent
Now I choose to be silent, can I get a witness?

—Public Enemy, *Caught, Can We Get a Witness*.²

The sheer apocryphalness of History with a capital *H* is without doubt what we are all observing these days, as political, social, economic absurdities unravel themselves on a daily basis. Whether it is about building walls to separate nations, putting in state religious-bans, finding new ways to create racial, gender and class divides, we are now all observers of the uncertainties of a History in a helter-skelter dash. At the core of our observations these days from South Africa to the U.S., from Brazil to Hungary is the heightening of philosophies and practices of both globalization and neoliberalism. As Arjun Appadurai so aptly describes in *Fear of Small Numbers*,³

2. Public Enemy, "Caught, Can We Get a Witness," on *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, Def Jam, 1988.

3. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

one can hardly reduce globalization to just other concepts in History, like capitalism, imperialism, neocolonialism, modernization or developmentalism. To Appadurai globalization is all these and even more sophisticated and accessorized with some new elements, namely the role of speculative financial capital, the power of electronic information technology as part of new financial instruments and new forms of wealth generated by electronic finance markets. It is obvious that these tendencies and their ameliorated states lie in a genealogy that is anchored in the foundational ideologies of the neoliberal system formulated in 1938 in Paris by the likes of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises as a counter ideology to Social Democracy *à la* British welfare state and the U.S. New Deal.⁴ This core ideology has stayed true to itself though fortified in nature, but it has assumed new forms and grown new tentacles in its efforts to transform citizens into consumers, politicians into entrepreneurs, public institutions and society into markets ruled only by the laws of demand and supply, buying and selling, civil servants into traders, and the nation-state into a big economic enterprise.

While we are observants of History in the making, it is worth deliberating on our role in this process and how we construct and participate in this process of History making. According to Aristotle, “above all we value sight ... because sight is the principle source of knowledge and reveals many differences between one object and another”⁵ or according to Heraclitus, the “eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.”⁶ As Theodor Thass-Thienemann points out, “Greek thinking was conceived in the world of light, in the Apollonian visual world ...

4. See George Monbiot, “Neoliberalism — the ideology at the root of all our problems,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot> (Accessed February 12, 2019).

5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. Warrington (London: J.M. Dent & Sons), 51.

6. See, Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics*, (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966), 70.

The Greek language expresses this identification of “seeing” and “knowing” by a verb which means in the present *eidomai*, “appear,” “shine,” and in the past *oida*, “I know,” properly, “I saw.” Thus the Greek “knows” what he has “seen.”⁷ This is arguably a reductionist take on experience and knowledge making limited to the sense of sight, and a domination of what one might call *visualism*.

In this essay, I will make a case of experiencing histories with a miniscule *h* and in its plurality by and through the act and fact of “being there” (*être-là*). The arguments here are based on the phenomenological, the act of “being there,” experiencing and witnessing, rather than just observing. Though often taken for granted and mistaken, the observer is not the witness. As *The Book of Wisdom* tells us, “The observer means the subjective, and the observed means the objective. The observer means that which is outside the observed, and the observer also means that which is inside. The inside and the outside can’t be separate; they are together, they can only be together. When this togetherness, or rather oneness, is experienced, the witness arises. You cannot practice the witness. If you practice the witness you will be practising only the observer, and the observer is not the witness.”⁸

It is this oneness of the observer and the observed, of the inside and outside that makes the witness arise that I am interested in when looking at artistic practice today in South Africa. In Osho it is said that while the scientist is an observer, the mystic is a witness. And here I dare to add that the artist too is a witness, in some cases, like in South Africa today. With that I mean the mere fact of actively participating in the process histories making, the willingness and ability to perform that processuality of making histories, and the fact that many artists in South Africa today are willing and able to bear testimony in their societies today from this collapsed vantage point of inside-outside.

7. Theodor Thass-Thienemann, *Symbolic Behavior* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 147.

8. Osho, “23. Consciousness is Total, Pure Energy” in *The Book of Wisdom: The Heart of Tibetan Buddhism*, (New York: Osho International., 2009)

So, when students ignited the protest movement that was to become #RhodesMustFall, artists didn't stand and observe, but those who saw this as a time defining political movement, joined in shaping this experience. It all started in April 2015 in the University of Cape Town, when calls to tear down the 1934 erected bronze statue of imperialist, colonial business man and political figure Cecil Rhodes became much louder. In this process of symbolically dismantling white supremacy and decolonizing the university as well as the country at large, artists participated actively, but also produced works that deliberated on the status quo and at the same time contributed to the spiritual and cognitive foundations of the movement. Histories, in the future, will be narrated with reference to some of these works, that will stand as witnesses of what happened. Just like the paintings of Emory Douglass or Diego Riviera, which are vivid in our memories, not because they were observers, but rather witnesses of, and did embody the Black Panthers and Trotskyists, respectively.

When the “transition” from #RhodesMustFall to #FeesMustFall happened from October 2015 onwards as a response to increases in university fees in South Africa—spreading contagiously from the University of Witwatersrand to University of Cape Town and Rhodes University then to other universities all over the country—artists too “were there,” physically and spiritually bearing witness. Caught, Can We Get a Witness of the decolonization of education, universities, art, politics, economy, and society at large? The claim is not that artists were and are architects of such movements, but rather that as eye-witnesses, ear-witnesses and somato-witnesses, they will play a crucial role in the scribing and reading of histories.

Être-là in its philosophical understanding can and should never be understood through the simplicity of being a resident somewhere. There are enough people based in particular places, but completely detached from where they are based and completely delocalized. *Être-là* must be read through the prism of rooting, it is about inhabiting a space physically, metaphysically and spiritually,

it is about being concrete in space and time, but it is also about inhabiting and embodying certain languages and temperaments. *Être-là* must be a performance of the quotidian, the accommodation of music and other sonic elements particular to certain psychic than physical spaces. Asked about the use of local references and language in his work and how he succeeds in making the local universal the Caribbean poet Vladimir Lucien responds that he doesn't 'see the local and the universal in conflict with each other. Some of the greatest works of literature were very provincial. They have lasted through time and transcended the context from which they originated. There's a claim you can make for internationalism, but how well do we know the world as something other than an abstraction? For me, the world is too capacious a place to inhabit, and I think a poet ought to inhabit a place. The chief mechanism of a poem has to be vision and vision has to be connected with people and sharing in their fate.'⁹ Therefore, *être-là* is and bearing witness of and to what is there and happening must be about having that vision and the ability to connect not only to space but also people and their fates.

But if the artist is to be the witness, who bears witness to the witness? This is the question that tortured Paul Celan and led to his poem *Aschenglorie* [Ashglory] in which he concludes that:

No one
bears witness for the
Witness.¹⁰

9. Nandini Majumdar & Vladimir Lucien, "Digging with My Pen: A Conversation with Saint Lucian Poet Vladimir Lucien," *The Wire*, February 4, 2017, <https://thewire.in/uncategorised/digging-with-my-pen-conversation-with-saint-lucian-poet-vladimir-lucien> (Accessed February 12, 2019)

10. Paul Celan, "Ashglory," in *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry. A Bilingual Edition* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), 65.

It is of course helpful to know that Celan was a survivor of the Holocaust and lost his parents to the atrocities of this darkest times of the twentieth century. The task of bearing witness weighed on Celan's shoulders all his life and in *Ashglory*, he seemed to have come to terms with the fact that there is not an infinity in that task of bearing witness. In his essay *Poetics and Politics of Witnessing*,¹¹ Derrida suggests that the act of bearing witness cannot be limited to proving or confirming knowledge, nor in guaranteeing a theoretical certitude. On the contrary Derrida argues that if there is such a thing like bearing witness, it should be eventlike, a pledge, a promise that something happened to the witness and before the witness. And this is, in my opinion, what characterizes this generation of artists in South Africa—the pledge, the promise of living and recounting what happened. The pledge of being there. It is banal. Indeed, in Zulu and Xhosa languages, the public-parlance greeting *Sawu bona* could be translated as "I see you," and the colloquial response would be *Sikhona*, which translates as "I am here." These pledges and acknowledgments of seeing and being seen, being there, being present encompasses bearing witness.

Coming back to Celan, I do agree—or will want to understand Celan in such a way—that while the witness bears witness, no one can bear witness to the witness. Rather one can observe the witness bear witness. Good exhibitions can be spaces in which the witness is observed bearing witness. Spaces in which hidden and more evident histories are revealed. Spaces in which the witness gets into a non hierarchical conversation with the viewer.

11. Jacques Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," in *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 65–96.

That said, we should also be cognizant of the constant efforts of the judicial, economic, cultural, and political machineries to appropriate, to cannibalize, to exploit the witness. That too is an interpretation of Celan's "No one/ bears witness for the/ witness," as a negation to the efforts and machinations of all those posing as witnesses of the witness.

But,
Caught, Can We Get a Witness?

This text was written for a series of performances which took place in the Museet for Samtidskunst in Roskilde. This program was a part of the yearlong series of exhibitions for *IMAGES 16 / ACTS 16, An Age of Our Own Making* co-curated with Solvej Helweg Ovesen. The performance programming originated in the observation that there lies in contemporary life a central contradiction: that between the notion of community and the processes of immunity. This chapter of the exhibition included performances and installations by artists Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Ali Al-Fatlawi and Wathiq Al-Ameri, Nathalie Mba Bikoro, Michèle Magma, Aman Mojadidi, Mwangi Hutter, Harold Offeh, Athi-Patra Ruga and Amy Lee Sanford and Moe Satt.

The Route that Tempts the Traveler to Test Gravity. Notes on the Paradigm of Immunization

One of the greatest paradoxes of the concept of globalization is undoubtedly the fact that it expects of itself to be semi-permeable to reality. This semi-permeability in essence refers to the ability of certain things, especially goods, to flow freely, while people's movements and the flow of religious or philosophical concepts more often than not are expected to flow unidirectionally or to encounter with massive hindrances in the other direction.

In an age of globalization with claims of a liberalized market, the extent of liberalization comes with an exponential increase in control. It is fair enough to say that although the concept of globalization can be traced as far back as the middle ages—for good or for bad—it can be considered as one of the most striking features of our age. It is interesting to observe that while Coltan, bananas, fish, textiles or car parts can easily be

shipped from a to b, it is rather unlikely for the miner, farmer, fisher, or factory worker to move from a to b, even in cases of emergency such as persecution for religious, political, race, gender, or economic reasons. To depict it in a simplistic but not untruthful manner, while it is normal practice to empty the waters of the Atlantic coast of Senegal through aggressive fishing, dump chemical wastes on the shores of Ivory Coast, or pollute the Ogoni lands with the remnants of petrol tapped by multinational oil companies, it is rather impossible for the people who suffer these damages to seek for greener pastures in Europe for example, whose metaphorical fortress is becoming more real with every day.

In his seminal publication *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*,¹ Roberto Esposito reflects on some of his key concepts, which answer Foucault's underlying question: What is the nature and the meaning of biopolitics? With his concept of immunization,² Esposito clearly distinguishes himself from other philosophers of biopolitics like Giorgio Agamben who "accentuates the negative even tragic tonality of the biopolitical phenomenon in a strongly dehistoricizing modality"³ and Toni Negri who "on the contrary, insists on the productive, expansive, or more precisely vital element of the biopolitical dynamic [...] imagin[ing] that biopolitics can contribute to the reconstruction of a revolutionary horizon at the heart of empire, and so doing absolutely accentuates the moment of resistance to power."⁴ Esposito's position is one that doesn't take to the extremes of productive and affirmative or of destruction and disapproval. With his model of immunization, Esposito proposes a concept that encompasses the positives and the negatives of biopolitics and puts them into a causal relation.

1. Roberto Esposito, *Bios: biopolitics and philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008).

2. See in particular "The Paradigm of Immunization," in *ibid.*, 45–77.

3. Timothy Campbell & Roberto Esposito, "Interview: Roberto Esposito," *Diacritics*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2006): 50.

4. *Ibid.*, 51.

To follow Esposito, one must understand that while “the term ‘immunity’ for the biomedical sphere refers to a condition of natural or induced refractoriness on the part of a living organism when faced with a given disease, immunity in political juridical language alludes to a temporary or definitive exemption on the part of subject with regard to concrete obligations or responsibilities that under normal circumstances would bind one to others.”⁵

The issue at stake here is the fact that in the biomedical and political-juridical understandings, immunity/immunization exempts an entity from an entire community, which puts immunity and community at loggerheads, as etymologically observed in *communitas*, which is positively connotated while *immunitas* is negatively connotated. All these boil down to two important underlying theses Esposito so brilliantly makes: First and foremost that the tendency to exempt, safeguard and to self-protect that was typical to the juridical and medical fields has now spread its tentacles into other domains of existence like sports, economics, culture and especially politics such that our contemporary existence is dominated by this experience. And on the other hand, when protection of life through immunization surpasses a certain threshold, it topples and negates itself in what Esposito would term “‘protection is the negation of life,’ in the sense that such a protection, when pushed beyond a certain limit, forces life into a sort of cage or armouring in which what we lose is not only liberty, but also the real sense of individual and collective existence. In other words, we lose that social circulation, which is to say that appearing of existence outside of itself that I choose to describe with the word *communitas*: the constitutively exposed character of existence.”⁶

This contradiction exist on an individual entity level, as well as on the collective level of a political body, such that the very thing that protects that entity is the same thing that obstructs it and—upon transcending a certain threshold—could even annihilate the entity.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 52.

Bringing this back into context, and considering an age of our own making that is characterized by overregulation and over-protection, over surveillance and over-instigation of fear as a protective mechanism, it is worth reflecting on that threshold which, if surpassed, could lead to an inevitable tipping of the assumed equilibrium.

It is also important to situate this within a Europe, which as forerunner, proponent and advocate of globalization and free economy has chosen to build even higher and more fortified walls to protect its economy, geography, culture and racial conceptions.

Thanks to the air, land and naval surveillance patrols by Frontex and the billions of Euros invested in man power, information technologies and satellite tracking, for example the Sea Horse, along the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, Europe has been able to keep millions of refugees away from its shores, thousands of whom disappeared in the abyss of the aforementioned waters. It might not sound optimistic but ours might well be an age of limitations and immunization.

In 2011, the Danish government worked closely with the rightwing Danish People's Party (DPP) and reinstated border control. Border controls had until then been a symbol of a barrier-free European Union. While other EU countries cried foul regarding Denmark's move, which primarily intended to curb the influx of refugees, but inevitably challenged free movement of goods and services—countries like Italy and France at the outer posts of Europe took this as an opportunity to make demands on closing their borders against the flow of African and Middle Eastern refugees.

From a more contemporary example on the State of Refugee-ness, one cannot oversee the quandary that arose in 2015, as thousands of refugees from Syria fluxed into Europe. In Denmark in particular, curiosity arose when the refugees occupied the highway from Roedby, Denmark, passing on to Sweden chanting "Malmo, Malmo" or as one father put it

“we do not want to stay here, we know we are not welcome!”⁷ After this incident the borders between Sweden and Denmark as well as between Germany and Denmark that had until then been freeway, became a controlled territory. A fortress. This all occurred as the state launched a covert campaign to pronounce Denmark unattractive for foreigners. A strategy of over-immunization?

The tendency to exempt, safeguard and self-protect is not only part of state apparatuses, but also practiced as part of private *habitus* with regards to alternate sexual orientations, food cultures, clothing styles, family structures and languages.

These tendencies of immunization which are observable in many European countries stand in contradiction with the basic concept of globality, but also further reveal the liminality of the *bios*, which is to say constraints of life and existence in the framework of the global *polis*, that is, a “global” though contested community and body of “global” citizenship. These also go a long way to betray how much the body has continuously been, and is still, politicized within the context of sovereignty.

Bernard Akoi-Jackson’s participatory performance ... *it’s imperative, staying put, put into globalized imperative contexts, is imperative...* in the old city hall Byens Hus in Roskilde highlighted the pitfalls of the practical administration of immigration laws and the language used in such bureaucratic contexts. The performance pointed at the absurdities of state administration procedures as forms of national self-protection against migration.

7. Carolina Kamil, “Vi vil slet ikke vaere her — vi ved godt at vi ikke er velkomne,” *Berlingske*, September 7, 2015, <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/vi-vil-slet-ikke-vaere-her-vi-ved-godt-at-vi-ikke-er-velkomne> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

The artist duo Ali Al-Fatlawi and Wathiq Al-Ameri reflected and challenged prejudices against Arab cultures, the fear and expectations of terrorism, border-crossing situations and the psychological pressure expressed in physical gestures. The mortal as part of everyday life is also an important subject expressed in these performances and gestures, which deal with masculinity and war acts and the role of memory and the musealization of lost lives in war zones. In the *The Pavilion of Iraq* they set up at the Roskilde Festival, Al-Fatlawi and AlAmeri created a lived circumstance in a tent with a TV broadcasting Iraqi news and music, and open for conversations and questions from the general public.

In their performance *X marks the Spot*, the artist duo Mwangi Hutter explore the idea of “self” and of mutation of the self through others. Their interest lay in creating a common voice, while questioning the stable definition of the self and the collective—in terms of bodies and histories. The participatory performance brought together some 150 volunteers, who wrapped themselves in black and red colored gauze, to symbolize a humane Danish flag. The performance opened the devious associations connected to this national symbol and the status of nationalism in Denmark.

Moe Satt’s performances dealt mostly deal with issues of communication, work and routine gestures. The hand as a medium of inter-human gestures can communicate beyond spoken language—who you are, what you are used to do with your hands etc. In the performance *Wishes of Hands*, Satt created banners with drawn contours of hands on them, on which he wrote wishes present in the context where the work is displayed. The wishes written on the banners were recognized through a parodic ritual, which questioned the earnestness and purpose of the act of wishing.

Amy Lee Sanford’s performance *Full Circle* was a meditative and introspective performance, exploring cycles of human trauma, healing, and the reconstruction of life in the present.

Sat amongst several utilitarian Cambodian clay pots (made in her home province of Kampong Chhnang), she broke and then repaired them by gluing together each pot. During the 1975–79 Khmer Rouge regime, which orchestrated the genocide in Cambodia during which millions of Cambodians were enslaved, tortured and killed, or died of starvation, disease and overwork. This durational performance brought attention to the cycles of human trauma, the experience of sudden loss, and the reestablishment of life both personally and societally.

In her installation/performative piece *When The Hero Disrobes Her Armour Giving Birth To Quiet Revolutions*, Nathalie Bikoro piled up refugee clothes worn on flight (and sold in markets in Berlin) to represent the larger narrative of migration and nationality as well as the resistance against oppression by the nation-state and political regimes. The clothes, which were at the centre of a concentric sound installation composed of megaphones, become kites which flew as monuments of the paradigm of migration, identity, and border-crossing. The kite is a symbol or a memory that creates new birth for oppositions and alternative ways of understanding the spirit of nomadism. The repetition of recorded voices from colonial camps, human zoos, and labor camps, all spaces where anthropological and film experiments took place during the first and second world war in Germany became an alarm call to agency and urgency not regarding the past, but contemporary life.

Choreograph Me is an ongoing project in which Harold Offeh invites audiences to use his body as material for the production of a series of performative gestures. Visitors have the opportunity to generate instructions for actions, movements and gestures that Offeh performs live for one hour. By offering his body as a material to be experimented with, Offeh explores the question of how an artist can be used as a sculptural material and his labour made useful to an audience. Offeh is interested in the relations between body, space, race and gender, but also the space between audience and performer.

Aman Mojadidi's *Immunization Clinic* at the Roskilde Festival reflects on how Denmark has responded to the migration crisis, and how this response can be seen as rooted in the notion of *immunization*. What (and, in this case, who) do we choose to immunize ourselves against? And what is it that we seek to be immunized from ideas? religions? races? nationalisms? extremisms? political ideologies? open borders? The performative/installation consisted of a clinical tent with medical staff working behind desks, liquid tinctures were dropped by medical staff under visitors' tongues in order to immunize them. The choice of "vaccine" shows whether they are with or against the racist, anti-immigrant policies of the current Danish government or the People's Party. The visitors could choose to be vaccinated against Islam, Blackness, Racism, Extreme Right or Extreme Left Politics, Arabness... or against the fear of the aforementioned.

Athi Patra-Ruga's performance *Decimation* consisted of a procession from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde city centre to the Roskilde Festival grounds. Together with invited drag-performers and dressed up in lustrous outfits, a swarm of balloons, LED lights and high heels, the march attracted followers on the way to the Festival grounds, ending with a selection process at a sacredly decorated tree, where a ritual of belonging or non-belonging to "the state of Azania" was performed. The term "decimation" refers to a mass punishment tool used by the Roman Army, where hundreds of soldiers were selected for punishment by decimation (literally, "a tenth of" in Latin). They were divided into groups of ten; each group drew lots, and the soldier on whom the lot fell was executed by his nine comrades, often by stoning or clubbing. *Decimation* was the final chapter of *The Future White Women of Azania*—a myth in which Patra-Ruga invents and treats alternate identities and marginalized life experiences.

Michèle Magema's performance *What the Sea didn't Take Off Me* took its cue from the disappearance of 400 migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea in April 2016.

The piece questioned processes of migration, the risks taken by people to transgress frontiers. Magema's work calls on the memory of the body, as it carries in itself the memory of other individuals in the family and the society. Magema's work, wherein her body in action uses symbols and repeatedly implements gestures which gradually become rites, situates itself between History with a capital *H* and individual histories. Thus, it is a form of resilience and resistance to the world through artistic action.

The essays which form *Reflection II* interact with these artistic voices, expressing the many nuances of the concept of immunization. In his text "No More Gifts Please: Reflections on a Community of Our Own Making," Timothy Campbell reflects on our age of Refugeeness beyond the binary perspectives of the compassionate, perplexed, xenophobic, or welcoming subjects, and draws upon the work of Roberto Esposito to tackle "the immunitary paradigm" and how Esposito's reading of both immunity and community in the current moment of the so-called "refugee crisis" could actually imply a crisis in European immunitary protocols. Campbell asks: "If to this point, Europe has failed to develop adequate humanitarian responses to the crisis, the reason may well be found in a collective failure on all our parts to register the breadth of what looks increasingly like a crisis in immunity. [...] Is it possible to imagine a community in which the *munus* as gift is held less as an object that demands that something be returned as part of an exchange of one's identity for immunitary protection? What would such a community that requires less gift-giving look like? The performances for *An Age of Our Own Making* are located here in the interstices of community, immunity and that hoped-for repositioning of community that comes to depend less on the giving of gifts."⁸

8. Timothy Campbell, "No More Gifts Please: Reflections on a Community of Our Own Making," in *An Age of Our Own Making*, Solvej Helweg Ovesen and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung eds. (Berlin: The Green Box, 2016), 111–115.

In an interview about immunization in Denmark and the future of current anti-migration tendencies, Henrik Erdman Vight wishes for Denmark to play a pioneering role in issues of progressive immigration politics.⁹ He states that climate, and economic refugees, people fleeing their countries because of the repressive systems etc. will be on the rise and it is a responsibility to support them, instead of paranoia and fears of dangers and threats everywhere. Vight also introduces his concept of “displacement without moving” as a common denominator on the part of the Danish population who share this fear of “infection of the social body” by otherness. A fear that entails that the well-known surroundings become non-recognizable, difficult to read and navigate. He, however, clearly cautions against concepts of fortressing or building of walls around nation states as a solution, as propagated by the likes of the Danish People’s Party, and now politicians like Trump.

If I Were Another

If I were another on the road, I would not have looked
back, I would have said what one traveler said
to another: Stranger! awaken
the guitar more! Delay our tomorrow so our road
may extend and space may widen for us, and we may
get rescued
from our story together: you are so much yourself ...
and I am
so much other than myself right here before you!

If I were another I would have belonged to the road,
neither you nor I would return. Awaken the guitar
and we might sense the unknown and the route that tempts
the traveller to test gravity. I am only
my steps, and you are both my compass and my chasm.
If I were another on the road, I would have

9. See “Displacement Without Moving,” interview with interview with Henrik Erdman Vigh by Solvej Helweg Ovesen, in *Ibid.*, 123–130.

hidden my emotions in the suitcase, so my poem
would be of water, diaphanous, white,
abstract, and lightweight ... stronger than memory,
and weaker than dewdrops, and I would have said:
My identity is this expanse!

If I were another on the road, I would have said
to the guitar: Teach me an extra string!
Because the house is farther, and the road to it prettier—
that's what my new song would say. Whenever
the road lengthens the meaning renews, and I become two
on this road: I ... and another!

—Mahmoud Darwish, “If I Were Another.”¹⁰

10. Mahmoud Darwish, “If I Were Another,” *The Butterfly's Burden: Poems* (Port Townsend, WA: Cooper Canyon Press, 2007), 271–272.

This text is a transcript of a lecture delivered on September 15, 2015 at Gallery Sinne in Helsinki, Finland. The lecture was given in the context of the Chambers of Commons residency, organised by Hansaari – The Swedish-Finnish Culture Centre and Frame Visual Art Finland curated by Giovanna Esposito Yussif, which brought together ten curators to collectively investigate developing alliances between sites of production, situated knowledges and practices of commoning.

The Sheer Impossibility of Thinking Space or Independence in a World of Dependency

The mere consideration that the coloniality of power,¹ i.e. the structures of power and hegemony that have been in reign since the modernist era—the Age of Exploration, the era of colonialism—and that still stretch to the present might in some way be linked to the killings of approximately 140 people in Paris, 40 in Beirut, and countless other deaths all over the world, which is also linked to the destiny of the 71 people trapped in the trunk of a truck on a highway in Austria. This makes any abstract deliberations on concepts of independence, of space or independent spaces superfluous, redundant or even cynical.

But without wanting to delve into the perversity of voyeurism by analyzing those bodies in that space—be it the truck, any of the many boats or even that space called the Mediterranean Sea—it is worth reflecting on the biopolitics and the underlying violence coloniality has on space, and what might independence mean within such a context. This paper will offer a space for cogitation on a world of dependency.

1. See Anibal Quijano, & Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1 no. 3 (2000): 533–580.

Intro

All the uncertainties we face, we feel, those we embody and even emanate as we see our world slip gently through our fingers, as we struggle to grasp or get a grip on what is happening in the world today. All these quandaries leave me thinking of how each and every one of us is dependent on each other, dependent on good health, on wealth, land, climate, the good will of people with economic, political and social power, even on fate and the mercy of someone who might have a weapon in his or her hand. How do we reconcile these dependencies with our urge for freedom in an age where each one of us considers him or herself an independent individual, in which nation states call themselves independent, and even art and art spaces, artists and curators are referred to as independent?

When I think of independence, my psyche links this concept to sound. I think of the art and the music that accompanied the processes of independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Africa like Joseph Kabasalele's aka Le Grand Kalle's rumba Independence cha cha, E. T. Mensah's highlife Calypso Ghana-Guinea-Mali or Rail Band de Bamako or Les Amazones de Guinée. I think of an age of new beginnings, of optimism, of longing for land, freedom, self-empowerment and self-determination. Though I wasn't there, these feelings have been passed on to me, as I will pass them on to the next generation. But as soon as I come to my right mind, look around me and come to terms with reality, I feel how every cell in my body revolts against thinking about the elations of independence. The images of and discourses on millions of people, probably the largest displacement of people since WWII, trying to move from one place to the other in search for a space of peace and greener pastures, basically deters me from imagining independence and stirs in me the question what independence is in a context where presumably independent human beings are forced to leave a presumably independent space/nation like Syria to seek refuge in a presumably independent space like the European Union, but then find themselves in a sinking boat, in front of barbed wire, in the trunk of trucks, on foot on a highway, in a refugee-home affected by arson, in the cold of the streets or on the roof of a squatted school?

To this end, I have chosen to reflect on the biopolitics and the underlying violence that coloniality has on space, and what independent/independence might mean within such a context? So, what is independence in a reign of dependence? Are independence and autonomy necessarily antithetical to dependency? And where does interdependence fit in within all this? These random thoughts might or might not answer these questions, but might create a space for deliberation on them.

Part 1

The Tale of Modernist Independence

The premise of this paper is to be understood within the framework of the coloniality/decoloniality discourses propagated by the likes of Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and Ramon Grosfoguel. Mignolo in his seminal text *Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity*² portrays the concept of modernity in the following 3 structures:

1. The idea of modernity also entails the double colonisation of time as seen in the invention of the concept of the Middle Ages and the conceptualisation of the Renaissance as well as the colonisation of space, which as we all know involved the conquest of the New World and the colonisation of a great part of the world including Africa, Americas and Asia.

2. The idea of modernity is also synonymous with salvation as propagated by Christian Theology and by secular Renaissance Humanism. Conversion to Christianity meant, being civilised which in turn meant being progressive. According to the coloniality thinkers, Salvation, newness and progress then became the economic global project called “development and modernisation” which basically has been in practice since post WWII and post-independence of many African states.

2. See Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity,” in *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernist*, MACBA, Barcelona, 2009, 39–49.

3. The rhetoric of modernity (salvation, newness, progress, development) went hand in hand with the logic of coloniality.

So, if we agree that these concepts of modernity are the backbone of the nation-state, and that these concepts were inherited in the germination of the so-called independent states, then one has to think independence within the context of the coloniality of space and time, and within the context of the coloniality of power. According to Steve Martinot in his paper “The Coloniality of Power: Notes Toward De-Colonization,” “coloniality of power” is a complex matrix that operates “through control or hegemony over authority, labor, sexuality, and subjectivity that is, the practical domains of political administration, production and exploitation, personal life and reproduction, and world view and interpretive perspective. The forms these have taken are the nation-state (as mentioned earlier), capitalism, the nuclear family, and eurocentrism.”³

Martinot also contextualizes his understanding of “coloniality of power” within the contemporary when he writes:

A vast movement of the world’s people, in the aftermath of colonialism’s demise, and fleeing the impoverishment, derailed development, and debt-servitude it left as its heritage, has accelerated toward the heartland of that colonialism: Europe and the US. This diaspora a logical response to the Euro-American despoliation of the third world’s resources and public assets. The people of post-colonial regions, divested of their economies, and thus of their ability to live, follow their pillaged wealth into the Euro-American economies that plundered them. In the US (and also in Europe and Australia), they face a virulent anti-immigrant machine that combines a racist populism with arbitrary policing and a militarized border.⁴

3. Steve Martinot, “The Coloniality of Power: Notes Toward De-Colonization,” *The Center for Global Justice*. Available online at: <https://www.globaljusticecenter.org/papers/coloniality-power-notes-toward-de-colonization> (Accessed March 10, 2019).

4. *Ibid.*

Of course, Martinot's observations are not limited to the economic repercussions of modernity/colonialism in those societies, but necessarily extends to political infrastructures that have been maintained through what Kwame Nkrumah called neo-colonialism when he wrote that "In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism. The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."⁵

With this in mind, how can one think independence in the state of individual and social dependency, in the state of economic, legal, political and psychological dependency?

Part 2

Looking death in the eye

A State of Independence?

Have you ever died
Only so you can live?

Have you ever lived
Only so you can die again, then be born again

—Wyclef Jean, "Diallo"⁶

The tension in the air was palpable. A tension that emanated from the unease that reigned over thousands of people that had gathered around the former Gerhart Hauptmann school in Berlin's district of Kreuzberg on such an amenable Berlin summer evening. The sweat that accompanied the chants and

5. Kwame Nkrumah, "Neo-Colonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism," 1965. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/introduction.htm> (Accessed 16 March 10, 2019).

6. Wyclef Jean, "Diallo," on *The Eclectic: 2 Sides II a Book*, Columbia, 2000.

agitations, the smells of frustration, sadness and disbelief were the molecules that constituted that tight air of open space. Various shades of despair and trepidation lingered in the air. Under “normal” circumstances, that is to say if one could use one of those Photoshop paintbrushes to erase the 1750 police officers who had been deployed from all nooks and crannies of Germany to encapsulate that part of Kreuzberg, it would have looked like any other festival. The sole difference was that pendulum-like swinging of emotions, as anxiety filled the air or dwindled off in sinus rhythms.

Rewind... the context

The scuffle seemed to have started just a few days before, but it had indeed been going on for ages. Malicious tongues would say it all started with the Berlin Congo conference of 1884, when Africa was partitioned by 14 Western powers for their economic and political interests, while some radical souls even say it all started even earlier with the 15th century conquest of the New World and the subsequent middle passage. Those twentieth century history-affine fellows say the point of departure of all the *malheur* that eventually led to the massive exodus of men and women, young and old alike, a great part of who never saw the shores of Europe but ended up on the cold bottom of the Mediterranean, lies in the colonial and neo-colonial practices all over the globe, with well-known political, economic, social and psychological consequences. Guess what? All are right, but let's limit this to an even more contemporary history, with the risk of skipping all too many other important points in history. The quandary really got rolling in October 2012, when some plus 50 asylum seekers organized a 500km protest march from Bavaria to Berlin. Tired of the laws that restricted their free movement, worn out by the inhumane living conditions they were forced to cope with, fatigued by the neofascist tendencies in the provinces, as well as the psycho-tortures of everyday life, they decided to take their socio-political demands from the geographical periphery to the political centre of Germany and economic centre of Europe Berlin. This in itself was revolutionary.

Upon arrival in Berlin, the asylum seekers protested in front of embassies, occupied Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg gate and eventually set up their tents on Oranienplatz, as well as in the Gerhart Hauptmann school in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Whatever happened thereafter could be summarized as a drama of resistance, the making of a movement through political protest, counteracted by political deceit and manipulation.

Forward... the movement

In 1892 a young German dramatist, novelist, poet and naturalist called Gerhart Hauptmann—who was to go on to earn fame, winning a Nobel prize for literature and controversy due to his slalom of political affinities between pacifism, to supporting eugenics—wrote a compelling and until now indisputably innovative pieces of German drama, *The Weavers*.⁷ Hauptmann had taken the pains to go to Silesia to research the Silesian weavers' uprising of 1844 and his revolutionary depiction of one of the first major independent workers' uprisings in Germany, who had had enough of double sided exploitation by both the capitalists and the landlords strangely has some parallels to what was to happen in 2014 in a school named after him. Just like the Silesian uprising that was a great impulse on the consciousness of the working class in their fight against capitalism, the radical movement that led the asylum-seekers to Berlin was to become a revolt that would bolster the consciousness of the state of refugeeness in Germany and foster the movement not only within the refugees but within the community at large, and at last. Just like in Hauptmann's drama the question of guilt was not an easy one to answer within this whole set up. The tendency was that everyone was to blame, as the ping-pong blame game swung from world politics through the German state, district politics, the police as executor of law and order to the refugees themselves as instigators of the problem at hand. Whoever might have been responsible for what had become, the state of being that became obvious, that is, the revelations

7. See Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Weavers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

of that state of refugeeness was one of extreme cruelty, misery, desperateness and a state unbecoming to humanity similar to the state of the weavers in Hauptmann's play.

Another peculiar point for which Hauptmann was very much credited was his ability to look beyond individual heroes to depict the revolt as a movement based on collectivity. The mob as hero. This was the case too in and around the Gerhart Hauptmann school when banners flew high reading "you can't evict a movement." It was a collective action of resistance that took some people to the roof of the Gerhart Hauptmann school and it was this same collective decision of making or breaking, of living or dying together that made the roof of the school a stage for a tug of war, a space where the penultimate dance was rehearsed, the ultimate space and currency for negotiations and maybe something like independence?

What had happened and how had things fired up to this crescendo? The protest and march of refugees against the refugee camps, against the fact that they were not allowed to work and against the law on residential obligation, had led them to squatting Oranienplatz and the Gerhart Hauptmann school in 2012. It is in this space, with little or no furniture, no sleeping facilities, very limited lighting and one shower for more than 200 refugees that the showdown was supposed to happen. So, when in 2014 the refugees were offered a conciliation paper by the senate of Berlin and district of Kreuzberg (which later turned out to be a simple coax and hoax) to leave Oranienplatz and later the Gerhart Hauptmann school in exchange for a fair case-by-case review of their asylum application, some hundred left and around 40 people stayed back. The district of Kreuzberg then thought it absolutely necessary to mobilize a 1750 police force to evict the remaining 40 refugees from the school building and prevent supporters of refugees from getting into the building. For this, a part of the neighborhood was shut down and paralyzed by the police barricade. In an enormous show of support for the refugee movement, thousands of citizens mobilized themselves to the place of action, while the police prohibited journalists, clergy men and well-wishers from getting into the building to get news, bring consolation through the word of God or bringing in food for the refugees.

Fast-forward... the negotiations

So, while the tension grew with the day as the police threatened to storm the building and forcefully evict the remaining refugees, some of the refugees moved to the roof top of the building and threatened to jump off and commit collective suicide if the police stormed the building. The aforementioned pendulum-like swinging of emotions and anxiety that filled the air or dwindled off in sinus rhythms was to a great deal on the one hand caused by the fear that the police will fulfill its threats of storming the building, and on the other hand if the refugees were ready to sacrifice their lives for such a cause. At this point, the roof had become a space of negotiations and life—or rather death—became their currency, as they “looked death in the eye.” It was no longer just about them leaving or staying in the building, but the refugees were prepared to invest their lives as a bargaining means to attain all the political demands regarding changing asylum politics, changing the residency laws, stopping deportation and having the right to stay. For that, they were prepared to die. The penultimate dance on the roof is no easy one. With every passing day the pressure to live overshadows the will to sacrifice life in the face of death. Though some of the refugees on the roof were Muslims and needed to fast, the lack of food and fresh water not only rendered the breaking of the fast obsolete, but also made the body and soul weak in general. It was hardly possible to get through any medication to those who have fallen sick or who couldn’t physically stand the pressure of being on the roof, with the police all around. The psychological pressure and torture of existence in the threshold of life and death was intensified by the police waving handcuffs or bananas from neighboring rooftops.

The politics of death, necropolitics, and the varying forms death assumes under biopower has in many ways and through many prisms been analysed by different generations of philosophers and theorists. To be able to understand why the refugees would create this threshold of life and death on the roof, and why they would be able to sacrifice their lives for this, one will have to look at a few concepts of necropolitics and thanatopolitics.

In “Authority, Alienation, and Social Death,” Orlando Patterson reflects on the power relations that framed the concept and establishment of slavery and discusses the politics of death in the light of social death. Patterson’s research on slave-master dynamics in history revealed that these relationships create the slave or fortify the slave’s subordinate position by producing the slave’s social death.⁸ The parallel of the nation-state’s subordination of refugees, or the nation-state’s ability to provoke death or let die as the basis of sovereignty is therefore not farfetched.

In his seminal essay “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe describes how the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who may die.⁹ He draws on other philosophical concepts of the domain of life over which state power has taken control, biopower, and explores its relation between notions of sovereignty and the state of exception. Mbembe identifies the plantation and colonial worlds as “manifestation[s] of the state of exception”¹⁰ and it goes without saying that not only is the state of refugeeness a state of exception, but so is this reclusive state in the Gerhart Hauptmann school, being surrounded by 1750 police officers and thousands of well-wishers, and most especially the state of limbo on the roof. This conceptualization of political sovereignty as the relationship between death and subjectivity and the historical connections between the concepts of modernity and terror go also in line with Agamben’s understanding of “sovereignty as the state of exception.”¹¹ According to Mbembe the core issue of sovereignty is “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations.”¹²

8. Orlando Patterson, “Authority, Alienation, and Social Death,” in *Critical Readings on Global Slavery* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), 90–146.

9. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

10. *Ibid.*, 22.

11. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

12. Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 14.

Before getting to this point of wanting to sacrifice their lives for a cause, of putting the lives and deaths as a currency to bargain in order to attain their rights to live freely—as paradoxical as it might sound—these refugees have already died a thousand deaths. Their bodies and souls have been destroyed by various regimes of sovereignty. Their situation might be recounted as follows: It demands for one to lose the foundation of their existence, as in the case of war, famine or socio-politico-economic torture; to leave one's home to seek refuge and greener pastures a yonder. The mere idea of stepping on a boat in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea or sheer daring of crossing the Sahara Desert on foot is another act of facing death or even dying. The physical and psychological destruction of the individual's sovereignty continues with the existence as a refugee without rights to move nor work, nor live freely.

As Wyclef Jean rightly questions “Have you ever died only so you can live? Have you ever lived Only so you can die again?”¹³ Taking all these into consideration, the acts on the roof can only be possible under two conditions, namely:

a) A state where the individual has already experienced the states of dying just to live and die again. In this case the body is seemingly alive, but the psyche is already destroyed by sovereignty and society. It is at this juncture that the act of suicide is not only to be considered as the only outlet from a *cul-de-sac*, but for that matter it is seen as a moment of taking decisions into one's own hands to determine one's own destiny even if it means death. The roof of the Gerhart Hauptmann school is that stage where things are taken into one's own hands, or at least threatened. The distance and the height of the building play an important role here. The coin is flipped and there is a prevailing sense of upper-handedness here, as the refugees can look down at the police, as if the inhabitant of the “state of exception” suddenly has dominance over the sovereign. On that roof, the inhabitant of the “state of exception” not only defines the tone of the music but also determines the pace of the dance.

13. Wyclef Jean, Diallo.

The fact of being in front of the eyes of thousands of supporters and cameras gives them additional power and a rare moment of pulling the strings. So, while the sovereign is ready to destroy the psyche on a daily basis, overtly and covertly both, it is not prepared to go frontal and storm the building, thereby provoking a suicide mission. Thus, the roof becomes the ultimate space for negotiations of demands and death the decisive currency. In Stuart J. Murray's paper, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life," he argues that thanatopolitics—the politics of death—is more than just "a response *and* a resistance to biopolitical power and to the Western conception of rational sovereignty with which biopolitics is allied."¹⁴ Taking the example of the suicide bomber he expatiates "While the resistance of the suicide bomber is sparked within the circuits of power, this resistance also approaches the absolute: he or she destroys the very condition of possibility for biopolitical regulation and control. Because the suicide bomber usually dies in the blast, for instance, he or she cannot be brought within the mechanism of justice. While suicide bombing is destructive, while it is clearly a force of negation, I argue that we must also understand this act as productive—it produces something, it has independent rhetorical effects which are not easily comprehended within a biopolitical Logic."¹⁵ The crucial point at this juncture is understanding that the mere threat to jump off the roof and commit suicide as not only an outlet but also a political act of taking things into one's own hands is not only an act of resistance, but also an act of being proactive and productive, an act of seizing independence, especially in a situation where human existence has been instrumentalized and the material destruction of human bodies and populations has been the order of the day.

b) A spirit of sacrifice... Approaching the end of his "Necropolitics," Achille Mbembe too touches on the concept of suicide bombers following a long philosophical tradition when he writes

14. Stuart J. Murray, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life," *Polygraph: an International Journal of Politics and Culture*, vol. 18 (2006): 195.

15. *Ibid.*

that “There is no doubt that in the case of the suicide bomber, the sacrifice consists of the spectacular putting to death of the self, of becoming his or her own victim (self-sacrifice). The self-sacrifice proceeds to take power over his or her death and to approach it head on. This power may be derived from their belief that the destruction of one’s own body does not affect the continuity of the being. Death, here, achieves the character of a transgression. But unlike crucifixion, it has no expiatory dimension. It is not related to the Hegelian paradigms of prestige or Recognition.”¹⁶ Going beyond the concept of sacrifice that is a fundamental part of all Abrahamic religions—as Abraham pledged to sacrifice his son Isaac to God—the concept of sacrifice here should be seen in the light of selflessness towards an attaining of a worldly freedom or independence. Again, the issue of having died a million deaths just to live again plays an important role here. One can afford this selflessness or afford the “luxury” and greatness to use death as a currency for negotiations in such a state of limbo only if one has “looked death in the eyes” a couple of times. In the case of the refugees on the roof of the school, the threat to commit suicide for the cause seems to imply that if the market value of attaining freedom is to die, then so be it. It is what Mbembe means by “the destruction of one’s own body does not affect the continuity of the being,” not only in the abstract sense of existence in spirit or achieving the state of transgression, but moreover the death of one or a few bodies assures the continuity, and perhaps even the improvement, of the lives of a multitude or a population.

So, the roof of the Gerhart Hauptmann school that in itself was a space of exception also served as a space in which for at least a short period of time the tables were turned and the being in that state of existence—through a radical measure of exchanging life for freedom or taking life into one’s hands—was able to strip off sovereignty of its power armor. This was a brief moment that agitated sovereignty’s purported power over life and death, by investing one’s own death as a possible currency to buy freedom and independence.

16. Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 38.

Part 3

An Epilogue of Contradictions

In a facebook exchange with the theorist and artist Olu Oguibe, he challenged my thoughts on that moment of independence close to death, as he wrote:

that staring death in the face (which is quite different from looking death in the eye) is not, in and of itself, a state of independence [...] No matter the risks or challenges, flight is not a space of independence. Flight, like exile, is a state of incarceration. As Fanon rightly argued in “A Dying Colonialism,” the only true state of independence in the context of crises such as the ones which have created the current Exodus into Europe is fighting, not fleeing. [...] Fanon argued that by doggedly and determinedly fighting the French and setting out to retake their country from the settler, Algerians had already created their independence even before their victory in the war. By applying their agency to something far more than even resistance, they’d liberated their mind and body from colonization. Flight, too, is agency, by the way. However, as you rightly suggest, flight only takes the individual from one space of dependence into another, both physically and mentally. [...] But, as you also rightly show, dependence and independence are contradictory states: you cannot be independent and yet, dependent; certainly not mentally, and the very psychology of flight or escape, to the extent that it does not provide opportunity to retake that which is taken from you, but merely places you at the mercy of yet another set of circumstances beyond your control, underlines a state of implacable dependence and loss of sovereignty. In effect, returning to Fanon, only those who stay to fight against their dispossession, that is, to “look death in the eye” rather than merely stare it in the face, and those who only leave so as to be able to continue to fight, can claim independence.

I tried to justify my points in a post and the following response came back...

Ultimately, you have to determine whether threatening suicide from the roof in Berlin, which is an act of desperation, rather than boldly facing death to defy the monarchy in Syria (or even both the monarchy and its adversaries) is a liberating gesture. In making that determination you would have to consider the intended and possible goal of either gesture. What do the people on the roof in Berlin hope to accomplish through their suicide threat? Refugee status. What does the fellow who stays in Syria and defies the regime hope to accomplish? The fall of the regime and the repossession of his sovereignty and his homeland. Two entirely different goals. Two states of being. Repossession as opposed to dispossession. Another look at looking death in the eye. To look death in the eye is to defy death. The moment of deciding between flight and fight is not looking death in the eye: it is staring death in the face. The moment of decision is a condition, a state, and not an act or gesture. It is, in fact, a passive state. That's why it is staring death in the face. It cannot be a state of independence, because the individual is not free or at liberty to decide: the individual is compelled by circumstance to decide. What it does is present an opportunity, not liberty in and of itself but an opportunity to choose liberty, the liberty of defiance (not just resistance, but defiance), rather than the perpetual captivity of compliance which flight is.

While I agree with almost everything Olu Oguibe said, his points rather pushed me to think my position even more radically. The question still at stake is how can one think independence when one lives under the roof of the "coloniality of power." And it is important to be more rigorous here... If, as Fanon claimed, the act and process of claiming independence is already independence, then one might as well relax and content oneself with the process of fighting, but at the same time physically and psychologically dependent. The concept of independence is a flawed concept in the context of coloniality of time and space, wherein the structures of power, control, and hegemony still reign.

It is unthinkable if the legacy of coloniality still has its tentacles in political and economic decision-making and prevents the existence of economical, ethical and social equity. And to me that is irrespective of whether one is inland, i.e. within the nation-state, or outland, i.e. in exile. But one cannot think independence especially within that context of the nation-state, another imperial concept, that has been adopted and that in itself negates pluriformity, but proposes uniformity under a singular flag, anthem, language etc. It is not within the context of the nation-state that one will find independence. But at this juncture, it is maybe important to bring in the concept of interdependence: the notion of mutual and, I would say, transparent reliance between humans and also non-humans within a community and between many communities. This to me is the core of *communitas*, the fact that one acknowledges the fact that one is economically, morally, socially, politically, emotionally, ecologically reliant on and responsible to each other. That said, I do very much agree with Fanon and Oguibe on the points of resistance and defiance in the context of crisis, as the maybe closest one can get to liberty. But this resistance and defiance is exactly what the decolonial thinkers mean when they say that decoloniality goes hand in hand with coloniality. From the very onset of colonialism, there were resistances and defiances. These were acts of decoloniality. The person that takes up his weapon to fight against the authoritarian forces in power is exercising an act of decoloniality, albeit towards a fiction called the nation-state. The person that flees with his family to face other oppressions and humiliations at the borders of or within another country—that claims the possession of human rights as fundamental values—is also a decolonial act.

This statement from an interview by Walter D. Mignolo and Christopher Mattison seems to be an appropriate way of ending this paper:

Decoloniality works toward delinking from economic coloniality (e.g., a capitalist economy within which there can be no peace, equality or democracy). So, how do you delink decolonially? First, you need to build knowledge and arguments that supersede the current

hegemony of Western knowledge. It is the hegemony of Western knowledge that justifies the hegemony of capitalism and the State, for example, and that establishes development as a condition of freedom [...] This is the struggle for the control of knowledge. Otherwise, hegemonic knowledge has the power to convince that people who are dying of cancer because the water and lands around them are being polluted with cyanide, who are rising up to defend their very lives, are considered “delinquents” because they dare to confront modernity and development.¹⁷

17. Christopher Mattison & Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking, Decoloniality & Dewesternization: Interview with Walter Mignolo, part II,” *Hong Kong Advanced Institute for Cross-Disciplinary Studies*. Available online at: <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/> (Accessed March 10, 2019).

This text was written as a proposal for a yet-unrealised exhibition project aiming to deliberate on the paradox of invisibility and hyper-visibility through 6 Reflections. The Reflections were to be inter-connected through non-narrative visuals and conceptual sequencing of the city symphony film-genre—an orchestral score intended to accompany a silent film—in this case, Walter Buttman’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927). As things stand, this remains a proposal.

How to Awaken the Sleepwalker. Reflections on Cultures, Philosophies and Politics of Hyper / InVisibility

“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.”

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*¹

“I remember that I’m invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers.”

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

1. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952).

The paradox of visibility accounts for the fact that while some people and things enjoy the normativity of just being visible, others exist within or are rendered into a pendulum of invisibility and hyper-visibility. It is the space between not being seen and being watched.

This proposal endeavours to deliberate on the tendencies, cultures, philosophies and politics that carve out these oscillating extremes, spaces, states and situations between invisibility and hyper-visibility, and relinquish people, objects and knowledge systems into them. Of particular interest is the conundrum of being invisible and hyper-visible at the same time.

It goes without saying that the invisible man in Ellison's eponymous novel—whose nonliteral invisibility is not a physical condition but rather the consequence of society's refusal to see him—shares the same fate as the millions not belonging to a certain heteronormative whiteness. Due to his invisibility, the narrator recedes from the world, lives underground, steals electricity, and listens to Louis Armstrong's "what did I do to be so black and blue". It is the non-transparency and opacity of this underground existence, it is the inaccessibility by non-inhabitants of such underground spaces, it is the mystification and exoticization, it is the reduction and misunderstanding, it is the silencing, darkening and mirroring that eventually propels people from the invisible to the hyper-visible.

Social cognition studies² have demonstrated that certain groups of people draw significantly more visual attention, i.e. are hyper-visible, than others. This is especially true for marginalized groups such as refugees or when racial, gender, sexual or class stereotypes are salient.

2. See M. G. Bean, D. G. Slaten, W. S. Horton, M. C. Murphy, A. R. Todd & J. A. Richeson, "Prejudice concerns and race-based attentional bias: New evidence from eyetracking," in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, Vol. 3 (2012): 722–729. And N. C. Donders, J. Correll & B. Wittenbrink, "Danger stereotypes predict racially biased attentional allocation," in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 44, (2008): 1328–1333.

Conversely, studies have observed a sort of in-attentional blindness,³ a psychological lack of attention, not associated with any vision defects or deficits, towards these same groups of people. These phenomena are—needless to say—applicable to people, objects and epistemological systems.

The concepts of *nomenclature* and *taxonomy* are not exempt from the paradox of hyper- and in-visibility. The art and science of naming in order to attain clarity and brightness; the urge to identify, distinguish and classify objects and beings according to their similarities and differences; the itch to arrange biological organisms into hierarchized groups in the science of taxonomy as propagated by Carl Linnaeus with his binomial nomenclature have all been important practices within the colonial enterprise and tools through which the coloniality of power was and is still exerted. Be it in the form of naming places, plants, rivers, mountains after the so-called “discoverer” or naming according to a universalized, often latinized, principle or recommendation that governs the making and usage of special terms to make them worthy of scientific usage, nomenclature brings with it erasure as well as overexposure. So, if a continent is named after Amerigo Vespucci, or a river after Alexander Humboldt, the original name becomes invisible (so too much knowledge and culture affiliated to that *Ur*-name), while these places become hyper-visible through a sudden eligibility to fit into certain cartographies. Interestingly, the science of cartography as a mechanism of power has often played this role. As the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett put it:

She hope dem caution worl-map
Fi stop draw Jamaica small
For de lickle speck cyaan show
We independantness at all!

3. Mack, A., & Rock, I. (1998). Inattentional blindness. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Moresomever we must tell map dat
We don't like we position —
Please kindly tek we out a sea
An draw we in de ocean.⁴

This rhetoric is also rehearsed by Kei Miller in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* when the Rastafari says of the cartographer:

Him work is to make thin and crushable
All that is big and as real as ourselves; is to make flat
All that is high and rolling; is to make invisible and wutliss
Plenty things that poor people cyaa do without
(...) And then again
the mapmaker's work is to make visible
all them things that shoulde never exist in the first place
like the conquest of pirates, like borders,
like the viral spread of governments⁵

This rendering invisible and hyper-visible can also be seen within the German and Berlin historical and geographical landscape. An example will be the rash erasure of GDR history and presence through the renaming of streets, destruction of the Palast der Republik or even the cannibalization of political parties. With programs like *Aufbau Ost*, a spotlight for hyper-visibility was directed to former GDR. The conundrum of invisibility and hyper-visibility becomes overwhelming when situated within our current “state of refugeeness.” With the influx of millions of refugees from Syria and Africa into Europe in the past years; with the drowning of thousands of people making the Mediterranean Sea one of the greatest mass graves of history; with the radical shift from a *Willkommenskultur* to various anti-immigrant movements, the media feeds us with overemphasized bodies

4. Louise Bennett, “Independance,” in *Selected Poems*, ed. Mervyn Morris (Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Book Stores, 1982).

5. Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014).

and masses of peoples on capsizing boats, masses trying to cross barbed wired borders in Hungary, masses arriving at the train stations in Germany or walking on the highway in Denmark. This hyper-visibility of suffering, desperateness, precariousness lies in great contrast to the invisibility of the individual refugees the camera is focused on. Meanwhile, discourses, policies, decisions are made *about* rather than *with* the refugees whose voices are hardly heard. This yawning gap between the hyper-visibility and invisibility of the refugees can well be observed within the context of 2015–16 New Year’s eve incidents in Cologne, where through the intersectionality of racial, sexual, and religious prejudices, the otherwise invisible individual refugee became suspect and thereby hyper-visible.⁶

With regards to the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender, the black female body in particular has a long history of hyper-visibility amid invisibility. From the “Hottentot Venus” to Beyoncé, the hyper-sexualization or objectification of the black body as a sexual object has garnered gazes as it has been made hyper-visible by portraying it as deviant. This long history of hyper-visibility of the black body as always available to fulfill the sexual and labor fantasies of the white (wo)man goes as far back as the Middle Passage, when the black body was not meant to be visible, and these stereotypes are stretched, repeated, represented, and regurgitated until today in popular culture. The profiling of certain marginalized groups of people like the Sinti and Roma in Europe, or mass incarceration of Blacks in America is also attributable to this difference between being seen and watched based on certain stereotypes.

The history of slave trade—the act of making people disappear on one shore and appear on the other, or make them invisible in the belly of ships and hyper-visible on the plantations,

6. Kate Connolly, “Cologne inquiry into ‘coordinated’ New Year’s Eve sex attacks,” in *The Guardian*, January 5, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/05/germany-crisis-cologne-new-years-eve-sex-attacks> (Accessed March 10, 2019).

and invisible again in the chain of economic profit—cannot be omitted when thinking of cultures, philosophies, and politics of hyper-/in-visibility. Needless to say, this culture prevails today in the form of mass incarcerations and prison labour today.

The millions of art objects and artifacts from around the world languishing in ethnological museums especially in the West share similar destinies. Stolen, bought, seized as war bounty, some of these objects underwent an initial major wave of being rendered invisible in the violent act of taking them away from particular contexts and ritual practices to place and make them hyper-visible in museums and concurrently destroying them in what Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet termed *Les statues meurent aussi* [Statues Also Die], 1953. Another, not less violent, wave of rendering invisible would be the act of placing some of these non-Western artifacts in a rebuilt Prussian palace (an effigy of power) named after Humboldt (an accomplice in colonial structures and in the universalization of certain canonized knowledge systems), in an effort to make them hyper-visible by moving them from the peripheral Dahlem to in the touristic and commodified heart of Berlin. This also holds true for the invisibility and hyper-visibility of knowledge systems.

This proposal deliberates on the paradox of invisibility and hyper-visibility through five Reflections. The five chapters, the sites and the concepts are connected to each other by adopting the non-narrative, visual, and conceptual sequencing concept of the city symphony film genre—a musical score for an orchestra to accompany a silent film that portrays the life of a city—in this case 1927 Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis*.

Reflection 1

Who the Cap Fit: Notes on Rendering Invisible and Hyper-visible⁷

Some will hate you, pretend they love you now,
Then behind they try to eliminate you.
But who Jah bless, no one curse;
Thank God, we're past the worse.
Hypocrites and parasites
Will come up and take a bite.
And if your night should turn to day,
A lot of people would run away.
And who the stock fit let them wear it!
Who the (cap fit) let them (wear it)!

—Bob Marley, *Who the Cap Fit*.

This chapter—in the form of an exhibition—will its cue from the coloniality of power's mechanisms, philosophies, and cultures that produce and reproduce hyper-visibility and invisibility. Hereby, invisibility is also looked at as a space in relation to the Undercommons and in relation to concepts of the Third Space, wherein the uniqueness of the invisible or context is a “hybrid,” the invisible space as a space where the oppressed or the rendered invisible plots their liberation, but also a space where oppressed and oppressor might get together for a momentary parity. In other words, a space from which power can also be generated and emanated. This exhibition explores the appropriation of certain traits of hyper-visibility for purposes of empowerment.

7. The exhibition included works by Anthea Hamilton, Ahmet Ögüt, Laure Prouvost, Theaster Gates, Anawana Haloba.

Reflection 2

That High Yellow Moon Won't Come Out to Play: The Invisible Exhibition⁸

No sun will shine in my day today (no sun will shine)
The high yellow moon won't come out to play
(that high yellow moon won't come out to play)
I said (darkness) darkness has covered my light
(And has changed)
And has changed my day into night
(my day into night), yeah.

—Bob Marley, *Concrete Jungle*

Reminiscent of the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, for which visitors could only see the artworks with the help of flashlights, and also redolent of the seminal exhibition by David Hammons in 2002–3 *Concerto in Black and Blue* in an unlit New York gallery, which visitors could explore only using blue LED torches. The exhibition *Reflection 2* took place in darkness. The aim is to explore invisibility as a form-idea. Through flashlights, but also guided by olfactory cues and by touch, visitors were able to experience the artworks. Despite the fact that the exhibition will not be based on concepts of emptiness, it will reference Stanley Brouwn's 'how empty is this space?' (Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, 1970) for which he wrote "[...] walking consciously through the invisible cosmic rays in this space confirms, intensifies the presence of this space." The intensification of the presence of the artworks in the context of invisibility might provoke a sense of hyper-visibility. At the same time the exhibition, though, will look critically at the "darkness" and exoticization inherent in the display of objects from the nonWest in ethnological museums such as Quai Branly or Dahlem.

8. The exhibition included works by Stanley Brouwn, Cyril Lachauer, Zarouhie Abdalian, Pratchaya Phinthong, Manal Al Dowayan.

Reflection 3

There Is A Natural Mystic Flowing Through The Air: A Shift to Sonority and Audibility

Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*.⁹

Reflection 3 will consist of a sound installation exhibition that advocates for a shift from a predominantly visual culture or from a reductive visibility to a culture of listening in an effort to place more gravity on the audible and the sonic.

Reflection 4

There Is A Natural Mystic Flowing Through The Air: Sonic Discursive Programme

Reflection 4 will consist of a residency by a South African jazz trio for the duration of the biennial in a Berlin jazz club. During this residency, the jazz trio will form the backbone of the discursive program that will take place in the jazz club, wherein poets, philosophers, historians, sociologists, economists, curators and artists will give lectures, perform or do any intervention in an effort to reflect on Cultures, Philosophies and Politics of Hyper / Invisibility. The jazz trio will explore the Berlin music and art scene for coalitions and collaborations, with the aim of exploring that slightly different sense of time that keeps you never quite on the beat, which Ellison associated with invisibility.

9. Ellison, *Invisible Man*.

Reflection 5

'Alf the Story has Never Been Told: The Invisible Performance

Preacherman, don't tell me,
Heaven is under the earth.
I know you don't know
What life is really worth.
It's not all that glitters is gold;
'Alf the story has never been told:
So now you see the light, eh!
Stand up for your rights. Come on!

—Bob Marley, *Get Up Stand Up*

Reflection 5 consisted of a series of performances called invisible performances taking place in public spaces in Berlin. This reflection draws inspiration from Augusto Boal's and Panagiotis Assimakopoulos' *Invisible Theater*,¹⁰ which focuses on enacting performances in places in which one does not normally expect to see a theatrical performance. The performances in such a context intend to mingle within the people in their quotidian and call on the unconscious participation of the audience. Needless to add that the performances will reflect on the sociopolitical issues of our contemporary, especially pointing at the violence of rendering invisible or hyper-visible within people's everyday lives and settings, reminiscent of the invisible theater's links to the Theater of the Oppressed. These performative interventions will also aim at articulating exercises of disobedience and indiscipline as an attempt and a means of decolonizing the power machinations of visibility. Lastly, *Reflection 5* aim at putting a spotlight on *corporeality* and *corporealiteracy* as a form of learning, i.e. bodily knowledge, experientiality, and performativity as means of unlearning, but also acquiring, enacting, and disseminating knowledge.

10. See Augusto Boal, *Técnicas latinoamericanas de teatro popular* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones corregidor, 1974).

Reflection 6

The Invisible Cinema

A number of historical and contemporary artist films from all over the world. The peculiarity would be that the cinemas will be “upgraded” to fit Peter Kubelka’s concept of the Invisible Cinema.¹¹ In 1970 at the New York Anthology Film Archives, Kubelka transformed a cinema space into an all black viewing and listening machine like a camera, which demanded of the viewers to concentrate with utmost intensity on the films being shown. As Kubelka put it... “The idea is that you sit in blackness and the only thing you see is the screen. This is why I called it Invisible Cinema, because you don’t see the space, you only see the film.”¹²

11. Georgia Korossi, *The Materiality of Film: Peter Kubelka*, Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/materiality-film-peter-kubelka> (Accessed March 5, 2019).

12. *Idid*.

This following text was first published in the 58th issue
of *Mousse Magazine*, in April 2017.

The Globalized Museum? Decanonization as Method. A Reflection in Three Acts

No one took seriously that flight of fancy. And things continued as before, with men binding female feet until they turned into something like the hooves of goats. For over a thousand years, until well into the twentieth century, the canons of beauty would not allow a girl's foot to grow. The first version of Cinderella, written in ninth-century China, gave literary form to the male fetish for the diminutive female foot, and at the same time, give or take a year, the custom of binding daughters' feet from infancy took root.

It was about more than aesthetic ideals. Bound feet also bind: they were shields of virtue.

—Eduardo Galeano, *Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone*.¹

I

Every few years, the “art world” seems to recognize that it has some deficits and short comings, implying that it too is not so perfect. In an effort to close some of its very evident pit-holes, efforts are often made to integrate other voices within the otherwise very exclusive circles that make up this “art world.” In the past forty years or so, the sudden reoccurring finding has been that most of our museums, especially in the West but also beyond, are accommodated and commandeered by white men—dead and alive. Thus, the recurrent seemingly sudden outcry that we need to do something to change the situation.

1. Eduardo Galeano, “Foot Murderers,” in *Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone* (London: Portobello Books, 2011), 35–36.

This something has in the past decades meant various efforts to “diversify” the museum. At some point, the issue at stake was a gender issue, as museums were forced to notice that women, though a majority on our planet earth, were a rarity in many museum institutions. Then came the realization that most of our museum institutions and ideologies were carved around heteronormativity, and such institutions were challenged to consider LGBT communities and discourses as part of their infrastructures. The racial turn was lurking in the air too, as Western museums were made to realize that they had little space in their collections and programs for indigenous, black or other non-white artists and communities of African, Asian, and Latin American backgrounds. Now, the global turn—an effort that has kept museums in the U.S., England and France on their toes for the past decade as they strive to open up towards other geographies—seems to be spreading its tentacles into Germany. Before getting granular on what the “global” in the global museum turn might mean, it is worth looking, in a nutshell, at some few qualms regarding such—often good intentioned—efforts.

Looking at most of these efforts to “diversify” the museum in particular and the “art world” at large with regards to gender, race, class, geography or sexuality, one notices that very few of such initiatives are intrinsic. More often than not, such efforts are initiated and championed by either funding bodies or governmental apparatuses, with more or less transparent cultural and political agendas. This is not an issue per se, but three questions are worth considering here. Firstly, if one were to look at the bigger picture, what would be the political or cultural agenda guiding such initiatives? Secondly, do the museums that take part in such projects have a genuine interest in diversifying their collections and programs, as well as questioning the art and discourse canons that prevail within their institutions? Or is the fact of guaranteed funding a bigger bait that allows for participation, but no true engagement in pursuing this interest in diversification post-funding? Thirdly, how can one explain that very few museum institutions think of intersectionality of race, gender, class, geography and sexuality when it comes to diversifying their programs and collections, but rather focus on one of the aforementioned before proceeding to the other?

All these questions would require in-depth cogitation, which this short essay can hardly provide, but painting ahead with a broad-brush, the following random observations need to be taken into account. Tied to the aforementioned structural and conceptual shortcomings, one tends to observe that projects that aim at diversification of museums, maybe because of time, knowledge, interest or facility constraints tend to be just of symbolical value rather than an investigation and pursuit on how this opening up can be profound and sustainable. And in most cases, as soon as the funding is over, then it is business as usual. More often than not, the diversification leans towards some kind of tokenism, as a few well-known gatekeeping women, indigenous, LGBT, PoC artists are dropped into the scenario to fulfill these goals. Not that this is an issue per se, but opening one canon to another canon is never a revolution. Also, one often hears of a museum's claim of doing its "Africa show," "Arab show" or something of the sort, as a possibility of presenting its efforts of diversification. Beyond the usual arguments of ghettoization, it is legitimate to question the intentionality and objectives of such exhibitions, when for example, an "African show" is done, and then for the next years, no artist of African origin is ever invited to participate in a show in the museum, or when in such projects there is hardly an engagement with the local context and communities, especially taking into consideration the shared colonial history. That said, if any of such initiatives of diversification of museum collections and programs have to be taken seriously, museum institutions have to go the extra mile to implement the three Ps, namely the diversification MUST be reflected in their projects, their public, and their personnel. Thus, the issue at stake is how do we go beyond the stereotypes of white men producing knowledge for or about PoC, indigenous people, women, LGBT, or people from other geographical spaces without inviting them to the table of decision-making, nor offering adequate possibilities of developing a diverse audience. And since we are talking about sustainable structures here, it doesn't suffice to invite one black woman or LGBT to a panel, an internship or a residency, but rather engage in long term exchanges from within. Therefore, only when these are taken into consideration can one really claim diversification in general or a global museum in particular.

In this second act, it would be worth going over the concept of the global with a fine-tooth comb. Though often taken for granted, the global as perceived from the vantage point of geography relates to the whole world, promises internationality, universality, and puts them in contrast to the national or the local. In a recent interview, asked about the global and the local, Caribbean poet Vladimir Lucien said “I don’t see the local and the universal in conflict with each other. Some of the greatest works of literature were very provincial. They have lasted through time and transcended the context from which they originated. There’s a claim you can make for internationalism, but how well do we know the world as something other than an abstraction? For me, the world is too capacious a place to inhabit, and I think a poet ought to inhabit a place. The chief mechanism of a poem has to be vision and vision has to be connected with people and sharing in their fate.”² The issue at stake is: where is the local, especially in this postcolonial era and context, in the crafting of the concept of the global museum? And this local cannot be simplified, but analyzed in its complexity that goes beyond national or racial categories, and that takes into consideration historical and geographical entanglements, as much as geopolitical and social intricacies.

The global also relates to or encompasses concepts of wholeness, claims of completeness, of comprehensiveness, of universalism, or intentions of being encyclopedic. This too is crucial, when one considers how knowledge has been produced and disseminated over that past centuries, especially within the colonial enterprise. The universalization of Western knowledge systems, languages, understanding of the arts, culture, sciences, and religions played an important role in the power gradient established between the colonizer and the colonized.

2. Nandini Majumdar & Vladimir Lucien “Digging with My Pen: A Conversation with Saint Lucian Poet Vladimir Lucien,” *The Wire*, February 4, 2017, <https://thewire.in/uncategorised/digging-with-my-pen-conversation-with-saint-lucian-poet-vladimir-lucien> (Accessed February 12, 2019).

Thus, the question is how does the global museum position itself within or without this long and omnipresent history of epistemicide,³ if the global were to mean universalism? At any rate, one needs to consider issues of co-opting when one deals with the global. Since the global too might imply gross generalizations, there is the risk of overreduction and over-flattening, if everything is seen through a particular prism. Which is to say, if the world were to be seen only through the eyes of the Western canon, as is the case when Forough Farrokhzad is called Iran's Sylvia Plath,⁴ or Wilfredo Lam is called the Cuban Picasso,⁵ then global poetry or the global museum can be no good.

But one must also acknowledge that there are very thin lines between the adjective global, the verb globalized, and the noun globalization. Those thin lines are characterized by capitalist economics, often neoliberal economics, and political structures. The globalized world connotes a development that makes international influence and operations possible through often unbalanced relations, and globalization has become synonymous to the process through which businesses, governmental and non-governmental organizations alike strategize, develop, and conquer international markets, social and political spheres with profound and lasting implications. In *Fear of Small Numbers*, Arjun Appadurai specifies that one can hardly reduce globalization to just a new phase (and face) of capitalism, or imperialism, or neo-colonialism, or modernization or developmentalism.⁶

3. See de Sousa Santos, Boaventura, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, (London & New York: Routledge., 2016).

4. See, for instance, Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Former lover of the poet known as Iran's Sylvia Plath breaks his silence," *The Guardian*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/12/forough-farrokhzad-iranian-poet-ebrahim-golestan-sylvia-plath> (Accessed February 12, 2019).

5. See, for instance, Mark Hudson, "Wilfredo Lam: the unlikely comeback of the Cuban Picasso," *The Telegraph*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/wifredo-lam-the-unlikely-comeback-of-the-cuban-picasso/> (Accessed February 19, 2019).

6. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 36.

To Appadurai globalization is all these and even more sophisticated and accessorized with some new elements, namely the role of speculative financial capital, the power of electronic information technology as part of new financial instruments and new forms of wealth generated by electronic finance markets. The question is then how does the global museum situate itself within this trajectory in an age of museum self-aggrandizing through expansions, speculations and franchization? In her “Museums and Globalization,” Saloni Mathur describes the new mega-museum—which aspire always to be bigger and better than the last—like the Getty Center in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, or the Tate Modern in London.⁷ These mega-museums consider themselves to be global museums, and are agents of central urban (re-)development in certain places around the world, with their megalomaniac architectural structures, but also central in certain cultural propagations, as they introduce to certain spaces, geographies, and historical contexts—a certain canon framed in these institutions of power. Mathur describes how museums are suffering from an identity crisis, as they are perched precariously at the financial brink while overmarketing their collections and sacrificing their institutional integrity, and contaminated by the circuits of capitalism. The obvious example she offers is what she calls the “McGuggenheim” effect, a system of franchization of museums as chiefly implemented by Thomas Krens, the director of the Guggenheim Museum, who in the 1990s championed the expansion of the museum, a project he called the “Global Guggenheim,” which saw the Guggenheim Museum erect new branches in Berlin, Las Vegas, Bilbao, Abu Dhabi and pursued projects in Brazil, Russia, and China. We have seen other museums, such as the Louvre or the Centre Pompidou follow suit. Would this be the model for the global museum?

7. See Saloni Mathur, “Museums and Globalization,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 3 (2005): 697–708.



Every society develops its canon. And it is fair to say no canon is superior to another and none can or should supersede another, as canons are formed due to certain historical and social givens (or myths). But it is also fair to acknowledge that canons, just like History with a capital *H*, are epistemic, cultural, political and social power tools, whose power mechanisms have to be scrutinized and critically questioned. So making the museum itself global might just mean a conglomeration of various canons from around the world, and therefore a togetherness of power structures next to each other. Indeed, both the canons of the West and East have one thing in common: they were constructed and maintained by men. As Eduardo Galeano points out, the beauty canon established and promoted by Chinese men sold across the binding of female feet as a beauty ideal, but what they actually had in mind was how to tame, control, and subjugate women. The more destroyed your feet the less you can run away. Let's think about high heels too.

This process of radically questioning the power mechanisms that made and maintain canons is the onset of a process or project I will like to call decanonization as method.

Anne C. Shreffler, in her “Musical Canonization and Decanonization in the Twentieth Century,” responds to the traditionalist Carl Dahlhaus—who defended the legitimacy of the European canon on the basis of the authority of tradition by arguing that “the musical canon is ultimately unaffected by subjective matters such as taste and preference (whether our own or those of past actors), but rather is shaped by larger historical forces. Historians are not in a position to create or even alter the canon; they must reckon with what has been presented to them by tradition.”⁸

8. Shreffler, Anne C., “Musical Canonization and Decanonization in the Twentieth Century.” Published in German as “Musikalische Kanonisierung und Dekanonisierung im 20. Jahrhundert” in *Der Kanon der Musik: Theorie und Geschichte. Ein Handbuch*, eds. Pietschmann, K. & Wald, M. (Munich: Edition text + kritik., 2013). An English translation is available at <http://harvard.academia.edu/AnneCShreffler> (Accessed 12 February 2019)

She points out to a more critical voice Joseph Kerman, who in 1983 posed the ever so relevant question “How are canons determined, why and on what authority?”⁹ Shreffler observes that Kerman’s question shows that the canon is constructed in ways that are visible and identifiable, rather than simply “given,” and that “even if tradition’s inner workings are hard to pin down, there must be an authoritative instance behind any canon that exerts the force than enables it to be formed and to remain over time; these instances can be unmasked, and their inner workings revealed.”¹⁰

This seems to be the task that lies ahead of us all. Decanonization is that possibility of unmasking and revealing the inner workings of the canon—whether from the West, East, North or South—as the paradoxes of canon formation and maintenance. Decanonization should allow for the possibility of elastifying the canon, by bringing in works from indigenous people, PoC, LGBT, other geographies and not seeing these new additions only through the eyes of the works that already inhabit the canon, but also the possibility of reviewing, rejecting and declassifying some works that were thought to have been canonized. By so doing, one achieves an ultimate flexibility and elasticity of the canon that is akin to a non-canon. Decanonization should be the dismantling of hierarchical structures that produce canons, and strive at eliminating the emergence of parallel canons. So, if museums are spaces of knowledge creation, conservation, and propagation, museums too must grow with their times. Their programs and collections must reflect historical positions, that are susceptible to correction, just as much as their programs and collections must reflect issues that touch the nerve of time in the present and give a hint of the future. Museums must be sensible to the power gradients that reign through exclusion, for anything that is built on exclusion and limited knowledge cannot be a reference point.

9. Joseph Kerman, “A Few Canonic Variations,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1983), 124.

10. Shreffler, “Musical Canonization and Deconanization in the Twentieth Century,” 3.

Which is to say that decanonization as method must be understood both in the sense of the destabilization of existing canons, and of stunting the growth of new ones. Decanonization is de-erasure, that is the ability to make reappear, rewrite, rearticulate and rephrase that which was erased, but not in relation or reaction to an existing canon, but in relation to topics, themes, subjects at stake. Decanonization is a flux or flexibility of rank and files, a situation in which no one is in there to stay and is—at anytime—interchangeable, depending on the social, political, economic and ethical issues at stake. Decanonization is not limiting museums to certain national, geographical, gender, race or so questions, but constantly working at those points where all these intersect. Decanonization is when hierarchies are put in question, when the normalized modes of knowledge production and dissemination are challenged, when the normalized ways of object and subject displays and modes of view are defied. Decanonization is when knowledge is performed, and when the objects in museums are activated to be part of this performance rather than as relics or residues of times, spaces or epistemologies past. Decanonization as method is choosing embodied practices as mediums and formats of discourse and knowledge, delinking from the conventional referencing phenomena and proposing a more phenomenological approach of dealing with histories, memories, cultures, sciences, religions and knowledges at large.

The proposal of decanonization as method is thus a proposal for what might be a global museum of self-reflexivity, whereby the idea will not be to create another or parallel canons, or place them side by side, or universalize the Western canon, but to decanonize the notion of the canon as a whole.

This text was originally published as a preface to the publication of Thomas Sankara's Speech at the African Unity Organisation Conference (Addis Ababa, 29 July 1987) in issue 6 of *South as a State of Mind*, a magazine that was founded by Marina Fokidis in Athens in 2012. Beginning in 2015, the magazine temporarily became the documenta 14 journal, publishing four special issues biannually until the opening of the exhibition in Athens and Kassel in 2017. These special issues were edited by Quinn Latimer, documenta 14's editor-in-chief of publications, and Adam Szymczyk, its artistic director.

Intro to “On the United Front Against Debt”

The case of AKP, an eighty year-old Polish immigrant in England described by neuropsychologist Chris Moulin et al. in a 2005 paper in the journal *Neuropsychologia*, is one of many prominent examples of aggravated sensations of déjà vu.¹ AKP’s case was so chronic that he stopped reading newspapers and watching anything on television, as he was sure that he had seen all these things before, something Moulin described as persistent *déjà vécu*, the feeling of having already lived through something.

In recent months, some of us have more or less found ourselves in such a state, in captivity of an acute and persistent case of *déjà vécu*, but exclusively with regard to the media coverage, various discourses, and overall pandemonium surrounding the Greek economic crisis. Like AKP, I could hardly bear the sight of any newspapers or TV, but for me, it was not a case of paramnesia or some phantasms of memory, as most of the things by the media and specialists were genuinely familiar. The images spoke more than a million words of the suffering and angst: pictures of closed banks and hospitals without medication; the conversations about corruption, austerity, and whether Greece should pay its debts or not; the debates on whether Germany owed Greece even more than vice versa:

1. Christopher J. A. Moulin, Martin A. Conway, Rebecca G. Thompson, Niamh James, and Roy W. Jones, “Disordered Memory Awareness: Recollective Confabulation in Two Cases of Persistent *déjà vécu*,” *Neuropsychologia*, vol. 43 (2005): 1362–78.

all this tickled some of us, who have lived further south than Greece in the 1980s and 1990s,—as south as the Southern Hemisphere—sensations of *déjà vécu*. The mathematical equation and its result were the same. The constant in the equation was the West, or as some cardinal-coordinate freaks might choose to call it, the North, while the equation’s variable had changed. The South (or East) had sneaked closer to home, and someone had swapped Cameroon, Argentina, or the like, for Greece.

One of the many parallel examples one can name was the crisis in 1994 after the French devaluation of the West and Central African currencies, themselves a remnant of the colonial entanglements between France and Francophone Africa and a living example of neocolonialism. Violent demonstrations resulted after African governments bowed down to France’s decision to devalue. “People are trying to adapt to painful price increases for nearly everything they eat and drink,” Kenneth Noble vividly wrote at the time, in an article on the upheaval in *The New York Times*: “Prices for pharmaceutical products, nearly all of which are imported, have soared. The cost of drugs for malaria, the continent’s biggest killer, have nearly doubled in some places, putting them out of reach of many Africans.”²

Maybe this sense of *déjà vécu* over Greece was only possible because the scars of the austerity measures that the devaluation provoked—tax increases, spending cuts, unemployment, salary cuts—have been engraved in the African quotidian and in popular culture, such that it lives on and remains very much able to trigger memories of the period. In his legendary piece “Mimba We” from the early 1990s, the radical Cameroonian poet, musician, and man of the people Lapiro de Mbanga, alias Ndinga Man, sang out in Pidgin what was at the crux of that economic crisis:

2. Kenneth B. Noble, “French Devaluation of African Currency Brings Wide Unrest,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/23/world/french-devaluation-of-african-currency-brings-wide-unrest.html> (Accessed February 18, 2019).

For dis heure for austerité so,
 For dis heure weh cinq no mus change position
 Yes, austérité da be sei dollar no mus change foot
 Wusai we own espoir deh no?
 Me a di mimba say na tam dis weh all man mus ndéngwe
 for yi own secteur,
 For say we bumbula dan crise économique,
 Weh e don put all man a génou.
 (At this time of austerity
 At this time when a dime must stay where it is
 Yes, austerity means that each dollar must be spent
 wisely Where is our hope today?
 I reckon time has come for all sectors to come together
 And fight this economic crisis
 That has forced us all to our knees.)³

But years before the explosion of this tumult on the African continent in the 1990s, a man named Thomas Isidore Noël Sankara (1949–1987), who had taken power in 1983 in what was then Upper Volta at the tender age of thirty-three, had seen all this coming. Judging from his many speeches and interventions—starting with his symbolic act of renaming the country Burkina Faso (that is, “Land of Upright Men”), on through his 1984 speech to the United Nations General Assembly and his 1987 speech at the Organization of African Unity summit in Addis Ababa on foreign debt—one could see that Sankara never intended to let his country remain plugged into that aforementioned equation of exploitation. Neither did he intend to bow down to austerity measures prescribed by the West, nor buy the idea that Burkina Faso and the rest of the African continent were indebted to anyone.

A lot has been written about Sankara, what he embodied, and the causes he fought for. Though this is not the platform for enumerating his numerous causes, it is worth mentioning here his fight against poverty; his support for liberation movements against colonial structures; his outstanding environmentalist positions; his relentless fight against corruption,

3. Lapiro de Mbanga, “Mimba We” in *Mimba We*, 1989.

capitalism's infrastructure, and favoritism; and, most of all, his struggle for women's rights.⁴

The moments of *déjà vécu* for myself and others became all the more striking for the remarkable fact that, in the heat of the debates on Greek debt and the crisis in general, very few "specialists" were savvy enough to make the African connection, or were willing to do so. For those of us that come from further south than Greece, Sankara's words on debt and (neo)colonialism, debt and imperialism, debt as a means of conquest and currency for confrontation still ring in our ears. As Sankara said:

Debt cannot be repaid, first because if we don't repay, lenders will not die. That is for sure. But if we repay, we are going to die. That is also for sure. Those who led us to indebting had gambled as if in a casino. As long as they had gains, there was no debate. But now that they suffer losses, they demand repayment. And we talk about crisis. No, Mr. President, they played, they lost, that's the rule of the game, and life goes on. We cannot repay because we don't have any means to do so. We cannot pay because we are not responsible for this debt. We cannot repay but the others owe us what the greatest wealth could never repay, that is blood debt. Our blood had flowed.⁵

4. In his 4th of October 1984 UN Speech, Sankara declared: "I speak on behalf of women the world over, who suffer from a male-imposed system of exploitation. As far as we're concerned, we are ready to welcome suggestions from anywhere in the world that enable us to achieve the total fulfillment of Burkinabè women. In exchange, we offer to share with all countries the positive experience we have begun, with women now present at every level of the state apparatus and social life in Burkina Faso. Women who struggle and who proclaim with us that the slave who is not able to take charge of his own revolt deserves no pity for his lot. This harbours illusions in the dubious generosity of a master pretending to set him free. Freedom can be won only through struggle, and we call on all our sisters of all races to go on the offensive to conquer their rights." For the full text of the address, see "Freedom Must Be Conquered," in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution, 1983–1987*, (Washington, D.C.: Pathfinder Press., 2007), 154–75.

5. Thomas Sankara, "Speech at the African Unity Organisation Conference," Addis Ababa, July 29, 1987, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfzoToJEnu8&feature=youtu.be> (Accessed February 18, 2019).

It is vital to consider these statements within the context of the current European crisis. Who owes whom what, and under what circumstances are these debts to be repaid? What are the causes of such an economic crisis? And where is the hope in austerity measures that force a country to its knees?

The world has already lived through these situations. Thus, instead of dwelling in a state of paralysis and dumbfounded *déjà vécu*, we could rather reminisce on Sankara's words to help us understand the status quo and equip us to pose questions that might pave the way out, or solve the current conundrum.

This text was written in connection with the exhibition *An Age of Our Own Making* co-curated with Solvej Ovesen at Kunsthall Charlottenborg. The exhibition pursued and investigated the usage, appropriation, conceptualization of, and acting within, space and space politics as a possible trajectory of enacting citizenship, in parallel to other trajectories like quotidian politics and religion, which to give form and content to understandings of citizenship.

An Age of our Making. On Agency and Enacting Citizenship

Asked about her understanding of the concept of “enacting citizenship,” the Italian-Australian thinker and philosopher Rosi Braidotti proposed that the act of citizenship is whatever might increase one’s capacity to act or intervene in the world. She goes as far as saying that such actions, like any productive and creative mode of intervention—even when it might seem negative—such as acts of resilience, resistance, protest, even civil disobedience, are indeed models of understanding how citizenship can be enacted.¹ It goes without saying that the involvement of third parties to strengthen others’ capacities to act or intervene in the world—in ways ranging from subtle quotidian actions to civil disobedience—are also a means of enacting citizenship.

In an age of global renegotiation of relations, i.e. a period in which different cultures, religions, philosophies, spaces and histories of peoples from all four corners of the globe are being re-calibrated in an effort to find common ground, it is important to reflect even more on what it means to be, to act, to challenge the concept of citizenship, especially beyond the context of the nation-state.

1. Rosi Braidotti, “Interview: Enacting Citizenship,” *Oecumene: Citizenship After Orientalism*, March 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8ucjssh6pw> (Accessed March 18, 2019)

The notion of the nation-state, i.e. that cultural, ethnic, and geopolitical entity of world order and sovereignty—associated with the 1648 *Treaty of Westphalia*, modelled and radicalised by nationalist movements and states in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and propagated and exported to other continents in the twentieth century—brought with it varying concepts of equality under a given law and civic duty towards a state or government, but also a perfecting of territorialization, cultural encasing, nationalist and racial tendencies, and furthermore, the dependence and reliance of the constituents or citizens to the nation-state. The long history of the relationship between individuals and their state from pre-ancient Greek through Roman empires until modern understandings of citizenship has always been characterized by rights and responsibilities. Citizenship was thus understood as a concept of reciprocity, whereby citizens participate in the construction of a community, while the community gives the citizen basic protection. Though nuanced in its understanding or interpretation depending on the specific society and culture in question, the notion of citizenship—besides guaranteeing an individual membership of a political entity, which brings with it the obligation of political participation, exercising and conformity to certain legal rights—also always entails or symbolizes the idea of exclusion of those who are not or cannot be citizens.

The history of the twentieth and twenty-first century, as it still evolves, despite standing for a history of huge leaps in scientific and technological advancements is at the same time characterized by colossal religious, economic, political, and social crisis that have shaped this age until present day. These crises have mostly led to the alienation of humanity from one another and strained the relationship between individuals and the political entities to which they belong. It is exactly at this juncture that it becomes important to act or enact citizenship. In the aforementioned interview, Braidotti, paraphrasing Hannah Arendt, called the act of citizenship an act of enormous love for the world.²

2. See Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950-1973*, vol. 1 (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung, 2002), 523.

These acts of citizenship can take various forms, ranging from constructive, rational, and democratic interventions to blasphemous or aggressive acts full of rage or disenchantment. From a philosophical and sociological point of view, the capacity of individuals or living beings to act in his/her/its world is known as agency. This engagement of the being within a social, religious, economic, environmental or political construct might be intentional, but could also be involuntary or unconscious. Going beyond the socio-ontological questions on whether individuals' actions are influenced by the social structures or contexts within which they find themselves, or if their behaviors and actions are determined by their agency, this exhibition project addressed both structural, in this case as a sum of many individual voices and agencies, and individual acts that in one way or the other frame the enactment of contemporary citizenship, especially in these times of crisis.

Even in so-called secular societies, faith and religion still play a critical role on many levels, such that they directly or indirectly shape the society. But especially in non-secular societies, the capacity to make religious decisions and interpretations, be they right or wrong, and enact them in the world could be understood as trials to enact citizenship. If one were to situate this in contemporary occurrences, one might be tempted to ask the question if the terrorists (who might have had a religious motive or agency) that murdered the Charlie Hebdo journalists, just as the millions of protesters who went to the streets to protest against such a barbaric act and for *Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité* were both exercising, though in radically different ways, forms of enacting citizenship?

The politics of everyday life, the quotidian, forms the basis of actions that build a civil society. The politics of relations between individuals and their neighbors, the relation between humanity and its nature, which includes an awareness towards the necessity to protect other animal and plant species, as well as the relationship between nature and culture build the politics of the everyday. The way human beings cultivate family life, experience democracy on the ground, consume goods and use time on a micro, local and global level on a day to day basis is central to

how a given civic society might be created. Especially in times of crisis, one needs more than indifference and ignorance to enact citizenship.

The act of producing space and exercising the politics of space, as space is political, as Henri Lefebvre is known to have said,³ is another possibility to look at how individuals act to construct civil societies. Making a distinction between *espace perçu*, *espace vécu* and *espace rêvé* Henri Lefebvre in *La production de l'espace*—and later in *Espace et Politique*—explained how space is a social and a political product, how it is historically configured as a social formation and a mental construction.⁴

Space, just like citizenship, is inclusive and exclusive, and practices of marginalization can be seen as spatial politics: since the ancient tradition of scapegoating, or the medieval use of keeping out of the walls of the town the sick and “dangerous” people, the outsiders and the non-homogenized persons have always been relegated to a space pushed out of the public gaze, a space of darkness.

It is important to see how art can be a tool through which citizenship can be enacted, and how the artist can function as an agent within society. In Braidotti’s interview, she gives the example of feminist, protest punk-rock performance. One of the most spectacular cases of artistic intervention as an act of citizenship and citizenship critic would be the Nigerian Afrobeat musician, human rights activist, rebel, and pan-Africanist Fela Kuti (1938–1997). In his masterpiece *Akunakuna, Senior Brother of Perambulator*,⁵ he deconstructs the concept of citizenship within a postcolonial African and neo-colonial and dictatorial Nigeria. With a fantastic irony Fela sings “to be citizen them must fit kill u,” analyzing the sacrifice it takes them to be a Nigerian citizen...

3. See Henri Lefebvre, *Espace et politique* (Paris: Anthropos, 1973), 59.

4. See *Ibid.*, and Henri Lefebvre, *Rythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

5. Fela Kuti “Akunakuna, Senior Brother of Perambulator,” written in 1990, remains unrecorded.

“They must kill ur mother,” “Burn ur house” etc., while he goes directly into harassment of street vendors by the government, and ridiculing the courts and police. Fela criticizes the concept of the nation-state that doesn’t give space for African experiences such as simply selling on the street.

In their works *Jakarta Stories*, Tita Salina & Irwan Ahmett tackle the daily realities of Jakarta—a megacity with more than 15 million inhabitants and poor infrastructures—as it offers spontaneous interactive ways on how to survive in the city and triggers the creativity of citizens. They explore “organic” strategies and playful interventions to respond to urban issues, endless pollution, other unsolved problems, and celebrate chaos in the guise of development. In the public intervention and performance *1001st Island – The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago*, which is a giant floating island of trash that the artists collect and build in Copenhagen. Here, by creating a garbage island that floats in the canal in front of Kunsthal Charlottenborg react on the rising sea level and the grand garbage patches in our seas as a space. The patch becomes inhabitable and a dystopic extra space of ironic last solace. In *Collective Interventions* they create plays inspired by existing problems, collective memories and common sense, while they encouraged the public to get involved in the fun play of common experiences. In *A Journey*, they deal with issues of border conflicts, power struggles, and ideological hegemonies, while attempting to foster new awareness about humanity and explore what art can do in complex socio-political situations.

Kamal Aljafari’s film and installation *Recollection* is a conglomeration of excerpts, stills, footage material from Israeli and American films shot in Jaffa between the 1960s and the 1990s. Jaffa became a place to create fictional narratives of Israel on top of emptied Palestinian ruins, leading to the erasure of Palestinian histories and presents not only in reality, but also in fiction. In *Recollection*, Aljafari engages in acts of re-erasure, which one might also call acts of re-emergence, and what he calls enacting “cinematic justice,” as he takes out the Israeli frontline actors to give space to the people (both Palestinians and Iraqi Jews who were settled in the city)

who appear *par hasard* in the background, the involuntary walkers-on and passers-by in the films. *Recollection* thereby is a re-enactment of histories and citizenship through a re-assembly of space and memories.

Moshekwa Langa's work unfolds in a series of drawings, collages, installation and moving images. His beacon dragged drawings/ paintings will be documents/documentations of him driving through areas of his childhood with material attached behind the vehicle physically collecting the memory of these places from the gravel and mud roads. The resulting taints, tracks and damage will be the beacon for that road/ that area/ that place. In addition, Langa shows a reconfiguration of the installation *The Jealous Lover*, using hard and soft materials like columns out of paper tubes, plastics tubes to transport water and refuse, belts, ties, caps, ribbons, wool and hats to make an environment and a landscape.

Ibrahim Mahama's installations do not cover spaces, they create and transform spaces. These spaces then tell the stories of flow of commodities like cocoa and coffee, conditions of production in his home and elsewhere, stories of the hands that touched the jute bags, as they travel from Africa to the Americas, Europe or Asia. The markings of the jute bags are meant to symbolize ownership, place of departure, destination or some other relevant information, then become scarifications and ritual markings, just like the bags that are themselves transformed into archaeological material and the sites they enclose become archaeological sites. The olfactory element of the installation is not to be disregarded. Depending on the former content of the sacks—coffee, cocoa, coal, beans, rice etc.—the sacks testify to their various utilizations through the smells they emanate. In transforming and re-shaping spaces with these sacks, Mahama points at the politics of space, reflects on labor and processes of economic transformations, commerce, migration, and, not least, the spirituality of certain spaces.

Lorenzo Sandoval's *Broken Parliament* consists of an editor's room in which thoughts, video excerpts, and images are amassed. The intent is to make transparent an editing process that is eminent in exhibition conceptualization and making. *Broken Parliament* is made up of a set of foldable modules that serves as chairs, a modular book and discursive display composed of a set of foldable chairs, sculptures, paintings, and flags with a veined effect on the surface of the furniture.

AbdouMaliq Simone's *Urban Collective Life Down South* deals with the proliferation of notions—such as globalization, assemblage, complexity, hybridity, virtuality, topology, vortex, implicate orders, polyvalence, flow architecture, screens, hypermedia, transmutation, and risk—and how they have been generated to mark out often remarkable changes in urban life. As Simone writes “Yet how do we investigate these changes, their imprints, ephemeral traces, provisional configurations, and institutional modalities—particularly when the sensoria of researchers and residents are remade at the same time? In some sense the fundamental characteristic and dilemma of urban life has persisted for some time: In spaces and times of potentially complex intersections of materials and matters that exceed any particular set of analytical devices, vantage points, and controls, what amongst these heterogeneous elements actually connect, and how? What kinds of proximities and distances of connection are possible, and how are they affected?”⁶

6. AbdouMaliq Simone, “Urban Collective Life Down South,” *An Age of Our Own Making*, eds. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung & Solvej Helweg Ovesen (Berlin: The Greenbox, 2016).

Akunakuna, Senior Brother of Perambulator

(short version)

VERSE 1

Fela: eh no easy o, eh no easy to be Nigerian
Singers: eh no easy both 2 times

Fela: eh no easy o citizen no dey for Nigeria
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: eh no easy o public dey citizen no dey
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: eh no easy o, eh no easy to be Nigerian
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: eh no easy o even Head of State no be citizen
at anytime
Singers: at anytime all the time at all

Fela: at anytime anytime at all, at anytime anytime at all
Singers: at anytime all the time at all

Fela: because anybody fit go quench him neck at anytime
Singers: at anytime all the time at all

Fela: that is why you must get these bad minders at anytime
Singers: at anytime all the time at all

Fela: Bazooka must dey for front at anytime
Singers: at anytime all the time at all

Fela: at anytime to be citizen
Fela: to be citizen

Fela: dem must fit kill you
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: while dem kill you finish, you must wake up again
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: dem must burn your house too
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: dem must kill your mother
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: dem must charge you sabotage
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: dem must jail you five years
Singers: to be citizen

Fela: aah eh no easy o, eh no easy to be Nigerian
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: eh no easy o I be citizen for Nigeria
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: some citizen I fit talk something
Singers: eh no easy

Fela: Kachire repeat of earlier underground spiritual game

VERSE 2

Fela: in this State of Nigeria, we get important place,
one of the important place, the court of law and justice,
in the court of law and justice, serious people dey there
make you hear these nonsense things these serious people
dey do, make you hear these yeye things these serious
people dem dey do

Fela: police go arrest people for road for wandering
Fela: police wey no get destination
Fela: police wey waka about perambulating
Fela: harassing the man wey get destination
Fela: harassing the woman wey get destination

Fela: trying to fuck women by force by road by night
Fela: police go charge dem for wandering
Fela: police the wanderer go charge you for wandering
Fela: Stevie Wonder sef go start to wander

Fela: how police Go go start arrest people for selling
in the morning,
government people don start yeye, selling for road
is tradition of African people,
government people don start yeye, lebulebulebulebu,
police go start arrest

[...]

Fela: very very hot food, very very fresh food,
carry dem go for court
magistrate dey pass judgment; pof pof exhibit,
moinmoin exhibit,
akara exhibit, rice exhibit, eey ye, the exhibit me
I know na marijuana
the exhibit me I know na stolen property, but for
Nigerian court eh no dey happens so
inside which storage dem wan keep these kind exhibit,
lebulebulebulebu
pofpof exhibit, moinmoin exhibit akara exhibit,
rice exhibit, lebulebulebulebu

Fela: after dem don take the own from the owner...
trumpet section
magistrate go take some money from them, he go send
dem all away from the court
government of the people na spoilers, police go spoil
you by beating
government go spoil you by wahala, see dem look dem
watch everyday in the morning
see dem look dem watch dem in the street, after these
dey happen to you one time
you go start to make up your mind yourself, you go start
to point at your enemy

Fela/Singers: see army don come out me, spoiler international don dey go
spoiler international don dey go, see army don come out of me

Fela/Singers: because you know many thing eh must spoil, many eh must spoil, may things eh must spoil

Fela: Akunakuna kunakuna

Chorus: Akunakuna senior brother of perambulator

This speech was given on the 7th of June 2017 at the opening conference of the Kassel chapter of documenta 14.

An Age of Social Uncertainty. A Pledge for Defiance

When I meet others like me, I recognize the longing, the missing, the memory of ash on their faces. No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song, another tongue, or another language. I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't afford to forget.

—Warsan Shire, *Conversations about Home*
(at a Deportation Centre).¹

It is especially through and with Arjun Appadurai's thoughts in *The Fear of Small Numbers*,² which today seem more topical than ever, that I will like to carve out a picture of our age as an age of uncertainty and, later on, make a pledge for defiance as a model. Appadurai elaborates on various forms of social uncertainty which characterize our times and that include:

1. See Warsan Shire, "Conversations about Home (at a Deportation Centre)," in *Open Democracy*, November 2012, <https://www.open-democracy.net/5050/warsan-shire/conversations-about-home-at-deportation-centre> (accessed February 10, 2019).

2. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

Firstly, uncertainty as a direct reflection of census concerns—issues of demographic enumeration of population, age, sex, occupation, religion within a given territory especially with regards to migration and the state of refugeeness—which resurfaced drastically upon the influx of refugees since 2015. This concern primarily boils down to how many of “them” are there now among “us”: how many of “them” are productive enough and can contribute economically to a given society; and how many of “them” are taking away “our” jobs, “our” women or, even, “our” air?

Secondly, the uncertainty of identities and what these identities really mean. National identities, for example, pose the question: who belongs where, in what capacity and for how long? In short, how do you know if people are really what and who they claim or appear to be or have historically been?

Thirdly, the anxiety that arises because of the aforementioned uncertainties create distorted relationships between individuals in society, between individuals and state-provided goods and services like health care, accommodation, social security, or sanitation, which only become entitlements depending on who “you” are, and if you really belong to “us” or not.

As Appadurai rightly points out, these uncertainties intensify in magnitude “whenever there are large-scale movements of persons, when new rewards or risks attach to large-scale ethnic identities, or when existing networks of social knowledge are eroded by rumour, terror, or social movement,”³ in short whenever people are in crisis, dire straits and feel insecure or threatened by some “other.” Uncertainty very often translates into violence as a quest for certainty.

It is, at least in my opinion, obvious that the issue at stake here is not really uncertainty, as uncertainty per se is the substrate on which diverse knowledges, ways of being in the world and

3. *Ibid.*, 6.

practices can be exercised. Uncertainty is a challenge to take a trip into the unknown, it is the hotbed of curiosity, it is a trigger to engage and embrace that which is paradoxical, with zeal and zest—all this within the premise of respect for other epistemologies, and without the misuse of powers imminent in colonial structures and relations. The issue at stake is rather when uncertainty is performed as certainty, that is to say when a state of limited knowledge and disrespect for other knowledges and ways of being in the world are performed as certainty, reality, and are presented as incontestable facts; When the powers of capital, politics, coloniality and patriarchy are exercised not only disproportionately, but with certainty. The issue at stake is a *Faire-semblant*-ness, it is the celebration of ignorance as knowledge, vapidty as inspirational, and the privilege of exercising mediocrity as excellence. It is the cultivation of half-truths and falsehoods, that, upon excessive reiterations seem more and more factual.

It is the performance of uncertainty as certainty—driven by the most vicious forces of neoliberal capitalist mania—that a few days ago led to the withdrawal of the U.S., which is the world’s second largest emitter of greenhouse gases, from the Paris Climate Agreement. This withdrawal hinders and negates the possibility of internationally addressing global warming. It is the uncertainty of capitalism that claims with certainty that climate change is not an issue. And though some people are voted in to “represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris,” the effects of global warming won’t differentiate if the P stands for Paris or Pittsburgh, as the violence of climate change will be felt in all nooks and crannies of the globe.

It is the performance of uncertainty as certainty that led to the declaration of Afghanistan—despite daily fights and terrorist attacks—as a *Sicheres Herkunftsland* [safe country of origin] prompting violent deportation of Afghanis from all over Germany. Ironically, the decision was revoked, and Afghanistan declared an “unsafe country of origin,” only last week, when the fear of terror came closer, as a suicide bomb detonated in the highly secure diplomatic area of Kabul—in the vicinity of the German embassy.

It is the performance of uncertainty as certainty that led to the racial profiling, segregation, and violation of the basic constitutional rights of young “foreign” looking men on New Year’s eve 2017, bundled under the concept of “Nafri”—*Nordafrikanische Intensivtäter* [North African intensive offenders]. The police had sorted some 674 “Nafris” so as to avoid a potential sexual assault on women on that given night. But, soon after an internal police investigation, it was revealed that of the so-called 674 “North African intensive offenders” only 30 were actually from North Africa,⁴ and god alone knows how many of them were really “intensive offenders.” As Denise Ferreira da Silva aptly describes in *On Difference Without Separability*: “Fear and uncertainty, to be sure, have been the staples of the modern racial grammar.”⁵ And it is the manifestation of violence in such racial and nationalistic grammar that fuels the cultivation of hate, distrust, and “Otherness”, as exercised by the “*Besorgte Bürger*,” the Identitarians or perpetrators of the “*Leitkultur*.”

Uncertainties sold to the world as certainties sometimes translate into naivety bordering cynicism. You can’t murder Gaddafi and then claim to be surprised that Libya is destabilized, and thousands of refugees flock into Europe. You can’t sell weapons to dictators and terror organizations around the world, and then claim to be surprised that they use them at home and abroad.

It is the performance of uncertainty as certainty that urges the government and military of Cameroon to brutalize, imprison, kill its citizens in an effort to maintain colonial imbalance of political, socioeconomic and infrastructural power of the Francophones over the Anglophones. Basically, the reverberations of the colonial enterprise that still echo in our contemporary are portrayed and framed as factuality.

4. Lalon Sander, “Nafris zählen für Anfänger,” in *taz*, January 13, 2017, <http://www.taz.de/!5374213/> (accessed February 9, 2019).

5. Denise Ferreira da Silva, “On Difference Without Separability,” in *Incerteza Viva, 32nd São Paulo Biennale*, eds. J. Volz & J. Rebouças (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2016), 57.

As the notion of crisis becomes inoperative, it is the performance of uncertainty as certainty that can be witnessed in the political, social and economic crisis in Germany, Greece, Turkey, Venezuela, South Africa, Poland, you name it. Crisis used to connote a temporary state of exception, but in our times of crisis has stopped being an exception to become the norm. It is from the vantage point of coloniality and its ties to capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that one must analyze the current predicament of the nation-state and reflect on the fallacies and dangers of the idea of a “national ethnos” i.e. the “idea that there is a common community akin to an ethnic group which is the basis for the nation-state [...] especially in times of uncertainty, such as today.”⁶

At this juncture, prudence is warranted to circumvent the tendency of riding waves of performing uncertainty as certainty that seems to be the quandary of our times. For that, one needs to plead for defiance. An act of defiance against the imperative of productivity and the spectacle of neoliberal production, including the production of subjectivities, that is to say, the necessity to draw back, to recoil and to recourse—not as a sign of resignation, rather as a possibility of cultivating the necessary distance to address and deal with uncertainty differently. It is in such cognitive and physical spaces that commonality and communality are lived. It is in such cognitive and physical spaces that one harbors uncertainty—not as malaise, but as a space in which one can see and care for oneself and others, i.e. a space for rejuvenation and reinvigoration. In defiance of oversimplification, in defiance of racial categorization, in defiance of heteronormativity, in defiance of neoliberal capitalist agendas and a defiance of the national ethnos as guiding path. But defiance must also imply losing oneself and detaching from the ballast of belonging, detaching from the fetish of History with a capital *H*, and detaching from certain universalist epistemologies—reminiscent of the etymological *dis* and *fidus* which colloquially imply renouncing one’s faith. For it is by renouncing who and what we are, that we might have the possibility of renegotiating how we can all become human again and how we might learn to live together anew.

6. Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*.

The defiance in those spaces of uncertainty should also be seen in the light of what Seloua Luste Boulbina proposes as disorientation. Boulbina sees disorientation as a pivotal aspect in the process of decolonizing knowledge. She advocates for disorientation as a step towards becoming decentered within and outside of the self: “Disorientation should therefore not be understood as a failure or absence but as an action and a gesture. Disorientation also involves forgetting. If memory is linked to orientation, oblivion may be preferable.”⁷ Thus, defiance is an effort to find poise through disorientation, an effort to discard and unlearn conventional bearings; but also a way of letting darkness and the unknown guide us.

Defiance also has to do with losing or at least sharing one’s privileges. It is a detachment from the right to own exclusively. Defiance means giving away the privilege of the one who gazes and assuming the position of the gazed at. Defiance is maneuvering into the space of the subversive.

And, since the fear of small numbers and the performance of uncertainty as certainty are closely related to the construction of the “Other” and of “Otherness,” and the morphed methodologies employed by institutions and societies in constructing “Otherness,” I will like to propose “Dis-Othering” as a method of this age. With “Dis-Othering” I wish to propose a method in which social identity building is not made by projecting on the so-called “Other,” but rather a projection towards the self. Self-reflexivity. A boomerang. That is, instead of looking for or deflecting one’s faults, fantasies, angst on some other, one could embody them or find other ways of dealing with them. It is about acknowledging and embodying the plethora of variables that make us what we are.

7. Seloua Luste Boulbina, “Losing One’s Bearings: In Praise of Disorientation. On the Necessity to Decolonize Knowledge,” in eds. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung & Federica Bueti, *Incantation of the Disquieting Muse: On Divinity, Supra-Realities or The Exorcisement of Witchery*, (Berlin: The Greenbox, 2016).

In conclusion, I will like to think of an exhibition as a space of uncertainty that do not claim to perform certainty. Spaces—as Sylvia Wynter⁸ points out—of undoing and unsettling conceptions of what it means to be human, challenging concepts of race, upending the supremacy of whiteness, analyzing how “sociogenic phenomena, particularly race, become anchored in the ontogenic flesh,”⁹ defying liberal notions of gender, and resisting the omnipotence of the capitalist economic model.

These thoughts are dedicated to the man from Paramaribo—the master of uncertainty, the elusive artist who passed on in May 2017, aged 82— Stanley Brouwn.

8. See Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” in *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, n. 3 (2003): 257-337.

9. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 26.

The following text is a transcript of a lecture given at Cité des Arts Paris within the framework of *Converging Futurologies* that attempted to sketch possible patterns to think of what is yet to be reclaimed for our future. The lecture series was conceived by Mélanie Bouteloup and Nora Sternfeld addressing four main themes: ecology (territory, activism, autonomy), powers and counter-powers, museums and education, democratizing democracy. Speakers included: Athena Athanasiou, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Laurence de Cock, Giovanna di Chiro, Achille Mbembe, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Laurence Rassel, Kristin Ross, and Françoise Vergès. The lecture was later presented as a keynote at K, which proposed that the establishment of friction zones and healing spaces must become central to contemporary curatorial practice. The lecture inaugurated a two-day event entitled [K]uratorial Meet-up Berlin, which consisted of exchanges between students and staff from De Appel Curatorial Programme (Amsterdam), Bard Center for Curatorial Studies (New York), and Valand Academy (Gothenburg). The program continued on the 7 of June 2018 with Paul B. Preciado at Bard College Berlin.

Defiance in/as Radical Love. Soliciting Friction Zones and Healing Spaces

You, bowing, you, crying
You, dying, like that, one day without knowing why.
You, struggling, you watching over another's rest
You, looking no longer with laughter in your eyes
You, my brother, your face full of fear and suffering
Stand up and shout NO!

—David Diop, *Defiance Against Force*.¹

Once again, we woke up, rubbed our eyes, and tried to figure out if this was all true.

We woke up to the reality of what many have called a new era. An age in which our watches tick differently. Perhaps like they did in 1933. Perhaps not.

A new era? Or is it the continuation and affirmation, the transformation and amoebic reform of oversimplifications and projectionisms? For those of us gifted with an extra portion of melanin, women, LGBTQ, migrants and other minorities, the terror of class, capitalist economy, patriarchy, and the violence of “whiteness”—which must all be seen as intertwined and enabling each other—have always rained on and reigned us. And even for the average citizen—white or otherwise—the weight and violence of national sovereignty has always scourged.

1. David Diop, “Defiance Against Force,” *Coups de Pilons* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973). Translation by the author.

We are waking up to the reality that for the first time in over 60 years an extreme right-wing party marched in triumphantly into the German parliament and some 94 new right-wing parliamentarians made themselves comfortable in their seats, reflecting on the 13%² they won in the 2017 elections, becoming the third strongest party in the parliament.

We also woke up to the Czechs voting in a new billionaire prime minister in 2017 who is firmly against any kind of migration and despises anything to do with the European Union. We woke up to Austrians voting for the right-wing Freedom Party and a young politician whose only achievement has been to stand firm against immigration.

But back to my context. Germany.

Many reasons have been identified to justify these results, but most convincing of all is the argument that the AfD reached election by standing against Merkel's *Willkommenspolitik*, against immigration, migrants and refugees, against Islam, and against minorities of all kinds. Even after the elections, one of its leaders talked about hunting³ Merkel and her party-members, until AfD got their country and *Volk* back. There is of course a long history of this rhetoric. The rhetoric and act of hunting people like animals, as practiced especially in Nazi and Fascist contexts.

And...

The idea of *das Volk* is deeply rooted in Nazi ideologies, but it should also be looked at comparatively and in relation to what Ta-Nehisi Coates writes in *Between the World and Me*:

2. Cas Mudde, "What the stunning success of AfD means for Germany and Europe," in *The Guardian*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/24/germany-elections-afd-europe-immigration-merkel-radical-right> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

3. See Jakob Hanke, "German far right will 'hunt' Merkel from new perch in Parliament," *Politico*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/alexander-gauland-angela-merkel-afd-germany-far-right-leader-we-will-hunt-merkel/> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

The question is not whether Lincoln truly meant “government for the people” but what our country has, throughout its history, taken the political term “people” to actually mean. In 1863 it did not mean your mother or your grandmother, and it did not mean you and me. Thus, America’s problem is not its betrayal of “government of the people,” but the means by which “the people” acquired their names.⁴

He goes on to state that:

Race is a child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming “the people” has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the pre-eminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible – this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white.⁵

This is the chord of the sound called *Angst* that played throughout the election period. A fear that the country will be taken over by migrants, an anxiety that the country and its culture was being invaded by Islamists and indeed the fear of fear itself—cultivated by even more fear.

We are all accountable for these fears, just like other politicians, even those from the centre and left, the media, the cultural sphere and people of all walks of life were caught in this wild-fire of fear. And instead of discussing issues dealing with lack of housing possibilities and ever-rising rents in cities, instead of debating retirement age and benefits, instead of negotiating more affordable health care and social insurance, instead of deliberating on the future of cultural and public institutions,

4. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 6.

5. *Ibid.*, 7.

instead of discussing the humanitarian aspects of people fleeing their homes from political, economic, and social disasters, most, if not all political parties were caught in a web of *Angst* cultivated and propagated by instrumentalising something denigratingly called a “refugee-crisis.”

These results, though shocking, are reflective of a general trend: the radical shift to the far-right in the West, both on a governmental level, as well as with regards to sentiments amongst citizens—as evidenced by the events in Charlottesville in 2017, and analogues in many other places. Across the board, borders, and oceans, we seem to have invoked the chauvinist, sexist, racist, fascist, anti-Semitic, anti-love, and pro-hate demons. Here they have come. To reclaim positions they were afraid had been lost.

Them being the Dutch Freedom Party, Austrian Freedom Party, Front National, UKIP or otherwise;

Them being the skyrocketing scuffles between America and North Korea that could plunge the world into atomic conflict;

Them being the economic and political crisis in Venezuela, the Anglophone problem in Cameroon beckoning for the split up and creation of Ambazonia, or independence calls in Catalonia, or Kurdistan;

Them being the massacre, sexual assaults, and torching of the Rohingya peoples and villages in Myanmar...

Them being the weekly news on mass shootings somewhere in the world...

Them being the daily molestation of women in public and private spaces by men who have become synonymous of predators...

One must realize that the world is vortexing into a state of (self-) dilapidation characterized by increased and controlled sentiments and efforts of dehumanization. At such moments it is important to revisit Rendra’s 1960 poem “An Angry World”:

After two world wars
the chatter of guns and munitions in the air
how does the world look now?
After so many speeches and conferences
the establishment of fine institutions

merely to quarrel
through a thousand slogans
and stab each other in the back
how does the world breathe now?⁶

Here, breathing is a fervent protest against dying and death. Breathing is the greatest affirmation and evidence of love for life. The point here is not the proverbial two sides of the same coin, but a claim that through the metaphor of breathing, protest becomes or is love. Talking about the poetics of breath, Nathaniel Mackey points out that with music, jazz in particular, “breath becomes tactical, tactile, textile, and even textual” since “music, like speech, is made of breath. Breath is music’s open secret!”⁷ And, as Birago Diop put it in his poem “Breath”:

To the deeds of the breathings that lie
In the shadow that lightens and grows deep
In the tree that shudders, in the woods that weep,
In the waters that flow and the waters that sleep,
To the spirits of breath which are stronger than they
That have taken the breath of the deathless dead
Of the dead who have never gone away
Of the dead who are not now under the ground.⁸

Protest is action, reaction—in our times a reaction to the manifestations of a seed that was planted, a rupture that was affected some five or six centuries ago. A seed of hate and a failure of love. Yes, indeed this is the story of the era of human coming of age. Let its defining moment be that point when love of and within humankind experienced a drastic shift. A shift that left scars and whose ripples still produce waves until today.

6. W. S. Rendra, “An Angry World,” in *Ballads and Blues: Poems* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974), 214.

7. Nathaniel Mackey, “Breath & Precarity,” Lecture at Reed College on the 11th of November 2016. Available for listen here: <https://soundcloud.com/reedcollege/nathaniel-mackey-breath-and-precarity> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

8. Birago Diop, “Breath,” *French African Verse* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1964), 25.

Most of what we are experiencing today, on the four ends of the globe, are just ripples of that drastic failure of love. This love hernia is to be situated at that point of the shift of humanity into material—that is to say to object-hood. Commodified. Dehumanized. That is when humanity ceased to mean (wo)mankind, and some were defined as more human than others. It is at that point when we set to define time and space as modern. Modernity: It is at that point when we lose grip of communion and commonality, and when the issue at stake becomes Capital and its -isms. The failure of love is the failure of communion. The failure of the “we.” Profit becomes the order of the day, and humans, through dehumanizing ideologies, become materials. Goods. Labor forces. Human resources. In that capacity they could be bonded, shipped, delocalized, un-named and could produce the wealth from which the North Atlantic would be built on the plantations of the new world. It is from this wealth that “great” nations and the concept of the nation-state was built. It is from these human resources that infrastructural, social, economic, and military privileges were built. That rupture of humanitarian love prevailed, and gave birth to different enterprises and concepts of exploitation, dispossession, dis-appropriation, disentitlement, and othering. As objectified, dehumanized and stigmatized they have become the *refugee*, the *migrant* or the *other* that threatens the *Volk*.

The reconstruction of love is the most profound form of protest. It is from here that resistance can be built. As put it, “Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle; love is a war; love is a growing up.”⁹ Protest is, in most cases, love. And protesting is an expression of radical love. Through art, boycotting, civil disobedience, marching, rioting, vigiling or otherwise.

Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln set the pace and tone. *We Insist!*¹⁰ could be our anthem, a scream for peace, an insistence to

9. James Baldwin, “In Search of a Majority,” *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1980), 220.

10. Max Roach, *We Insist!: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, featuring Abbey Lincoln, Candid, 1960.

remonstrate and protest from 1960. The elasticity of the now, that is to say the continuum of the moment of 1960 is the now of 2018. Let's listen to "Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace"¹¹ time and time again: It is an invocation, as Abbey Lincoln fiercely airs out, makes air circulate, stretches the breath, asks for us to breathe along, and leads the cry of the oppressed in "Prayer," before she drives us through her uncontrollable outpour of rage, unleashing of cholera, and a purging of hate and bitterness in this cathartic piece. The epitome of art as protest. In "Peace" there is the satisfaction of a battle won. She can inhale. It is a sentiment and experience of freedom seized, taken—as Baldwin says—, sequestered using all weapons and tools at our disposal. It is post-protest mental, physical and social resuscitation.

This is what we should listen to while thinking about the failure of love and the failure of the "we" of our times. The "we" as a collective of loveless, neoliberal individuals won't work. It is time to rebuild love for oneself, for the individual and for the other, before setting to work on that "we." And thinking that art—in a larger sense of this word—can heal this rupture.

The concepts of "they" versus "we," "them" versus "us," "yours" versus "mine" have failed us. Just like the notions of superlatives—especially in relation to the nation-state and the "people," that is to say we are the greatest, best, first—have failed us and will fail us. If we heed Mary Louise Pratt's definition of "contact zones" as "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today"¹² how can we create, and actually imagine art spaces as spaces of contact, encounter, negotiations, renegotiations?

When the colonizers set foot in the colonies, one of the first things that became evident was the difficulty to communicate.

11. Max Roach & Abbey Lincoln, "Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace," *We Insist!*.

12. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," in *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

In order to bridge this communication deficit, the indigenous people developed syncretic languages—such as pidgin or creole—made of both indigenous languages and the languages of the colonizer. These languages are languages of negotiation, of arbitration, suitable for mediations and transactions. These languages are what sociolinguists call “contact languages.”¹³ But, contact languages are pregnant with the challenges of their history of conflict and of frictions. So they too are contact zones. As Nora Sternfeld points out in *Memorial Sites as Contact Zones*:

A further level of the contact zone, which is often misunderstood or forgotten in the use of the term, is that of conflict. An encounter in unequal power relations obviously holds many potentials for conflict. And these are not repressed in the term, but are instead an integral component. In this way, contact zones are no longer seen merely as powerful spaces, but rather as organic structures, in which different social struggles are reflected as ongoing processes of fighting for the power of interpretation.¹⁴

She then introduces the “agonistic conflict zone” as one that is open and decidedly partisan at the same time. In the agonistic contact zone it is not a matter of “socially acceptable speaking”, but rather of the possibility for all those involved to take a position. Our position here is therefore not exclusionary, but also not at all neutral, but rather dissentual and convincing.¹⁵

13. Also important to look at is Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of ‘borderlands’ for the Chicano community. “Borderland” is a place of divergent thinking that shifts our perception of reality and the way we see ourselves. To dwell in the borderland means to generate, “a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet.” See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

14. Nora Sternfeld, “Memorial Sites as Contact Zones: Cultures of Memory in a Shared/Divided Present,” *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, December 2011, <http://eipcp.net/policies/sternfeld/en> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

15. *Ibid.*

I am interested in this twist of the contact zone as conflict zone. I am interested to think of conflicts as frictions. And if my sense of physics doesn't fail me, when there is friction there are two possible outcomes.

1) The kinetic energy of the friction i.e. work is converted to thermal energy, or

2) there occurs an effect of wear and tear due to the friction.

Both effects of friction are what I am interested in. If there is something art—and the spaces in which it exists—should/could do in our complex times, it should/could assume the position of the “friction zone,” in which discrepancies in aesthetics, power relations, prejudices, complex issues of identities, notions of nation states, states of refugeeness, challenges of neoliberal economic tendencies, and complexities of sociopolitical, racial and class disparities can be investigated, negotiated, and challenged. This in the hope that, when subjected to friction, the issues at stake are either transformed into some form of useful energy, or wear down in intensity. Art could become a space of radical thinking. Of radical love. Of protest.

So, the issue at stake is: How can we create spaces where people and society could show their wounds? The process of turning to each other and acknowledging that we all have some kind of wound is a crucial step. For it is only by acknowledging vulnerability that we can truly see each other, converse with each other and heal each other. Protest is such a possibility of presenting the wounds of our times and thus a possibility of individual and collective healings. The healing exists in the protest itself as cathartic processes and moments.

So how can art and art spaces be spaces of *Auseinandersetzung*—of possible setting apart, of engaging entities in order to be able to reshuffle them, but also of confrontation, debate, quarrel, fight—spaces which lead to the transformation of negative energies to more conducive ones, and otherwise abrogate through wear and tear? How can art and art spaces become spaces for Social Healing, which one must understand as “an evolving paradigm that seeks to transcend

dysfunctional polarities that hold repetitive wounding in place. It views human transgressions not as a battle between the dualities of right and wrong or good and bad, but as an issue of wounding and healing. Thus a key question driving the work of social healing is how do individuals, groups and nations heal from past and present wounds?"¹⁶

We need to care for each other by engaging in *Auseinandersetzungen*, by being defiant, by protesting and initiating processes of making and unmaking or becoming sound again—cognitively, emotionally, corporeally, societally and humanly.

Protest, be it as/through art or otherwise, is indeed an expression of radical love. It is the repair or an unconditional love, even at the cost of one's self. Protest for the right goals is a conquest of love.

It is obvious that there is a pertinent question lurking in the air, namely: can art be a play-field for politics and the political?

A similar question was asked to Adam Szymczyk on the last event of The Parliament of Bodies for documenta 14. Szymczyk responded that artists, besides being artists, are first and foremost humans and citizens. Thus thinking and working with political realities and politics of their times and past is not a matter of aesthetics only, but a responsibility and a means of enacting citizenship. But it also goes without saying that every public utterance—in word or act—is a political gesture in a Gramscian sense. The abstinence to take positions is thus not apolitical but a most political way of siding with the aggressor. Neutrality¹⁷ is neither apolitical nor is it an option, for neutrality, in the

16. See Judith Thompson, & James O'Dea, *The Social Healing Project, Harmonic Humanity: Music with a Social Mission*, 2011, 6.

17. *Neutrality* here means not taking a position, but there is also a long tradition of philosophical thinking and mysticism which looks at neutrality as that which exceeds differences, something that is at the core of existence, all existence, a sort of humanness of humanity beyond borders... Clarice Lispector, Simone Weil, Hélène Cixous and, to a certain extent, Audre Lorde address this in their writings.

context of the challenges of our time, is the ignorance and silencing of the pains and burdens of the oppressed. Art cannot be neutral. One might even go as far as saying that it is imperative for art to be political, for with the emotional intelligence, the sensibilities, the ability to perceive and respond to the world in ways beyond the ordinary, artists are in the position to pose the right questions for the problems of our times.

The following text was written as a proposal for a series of discourses, performances, and an exhibition, which took place at SAVVY Contemporary in September 2018 within the framework of the project *Dis-Othering: Beyond Afropolitan and Other Labels*. The Berlin chapter, entitled *Dis-Othering as a Method: Leh zo, a me ke nde za* (which literally translates from Ngeṃba as “Keep yours and I keep mine”) was conceived in order to reflect upon contemporary processes and technologies of “Othering.” It was not about the “Other”—which is simply a “product.” Rather, it was a deliberation on the amoebic and morphed methodologies employed by institutions and societies at large to construct and cultivate “otherness.” Finally, it attempted to re-evaluate the concept of “post-otherness” from the vantage point of “Dis-Othering” wherein questions of who and how one bears historical Othering, as well as who represents whom or who tries to shape whose future become superfluous.

The exhibition accompanying this project—*Geographies of Imagination*—engaged in confabulations to build connections between the varied and conflicting uses of imagination in constructing otherness and the role of geography as a tool of power. How is power situated at the core of processes of othering, and how are these processes connected to forms of belonging that we could also relate to notions of territoriality and possession? The other, writes Ta-Nehisi Coates, exists beyond the border of the great “belonging,”¹ something that contributed to producing the sense of anxiety that brought white, patriarchal supremacists of the far right to politically emerge again in recent elections, in the US as much as in several European countries.

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Foreword” to Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), xv.

DisOthering as Method. (Leh zo, a me ke nde za)

I dislike interviews. I'm often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed and easily definable.

—Mona Hatoum, interview with Janine Antoni.¹

Just in the nick of time when we, by repetition and reiteration, start believing the concepts we have postulated and disseminated; just at that point in time, when we think that the notion of post-otherness²—which we have reflected upon for years in reference to that double moment of awareness and transition—begins to actualize, we seem to experience a quake that pushes us to reconsider, but not reject, the paradoxicality of the Post-Other moment,³ reconsider who and how one bears historical

1. "Mona Hatoum by Janine Antoni" in *BOMB*, April 1, 1998, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/mona-hatoum/> (Accessed February 27, 2019)

2. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung & Regina Römhild, "The Post-Other as Avant-Garde," in *We Roma: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, eds. Daniel Baker & Maria Hlavajova (Utrecht: BAK & Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 206–225.

3. Here we discuss the concept and moment PostOtherness as follows: In that paradoxical moment, the figure of the "PostOther" emerges, a figure still bearing the signs of historical Othering while at the same time representing and experimenting with unknown futures beyond it. In the shadow of the dominant political imagination a cosmopolitanized reality of convivial struggles unfolds, speaking and acting against that imagery. The moment of the "PostOther," however, is still in the state of emergence: it unfolds in the everyday practices of the 'unconscious' kind when, e.g., the anonymity of urban life allows or infinite examples of everyday cosmopolitan interactions. [...] Such practices are still waiting to be united and made visible.

Othering, reconsider the mechanisms of rendering Other, as well as reconsidering who represents whom or who tries to shape whose future in contemporary societies and discourses.

This quake has spurred on the necessity to drop off prefixes and concentrate of root words. It seems as if to be able reconsider, one needs to, at least temporarily, abrogate “Post” to be able to situate “Otherness” within our day’s context. Especially, taking into account that the “Post” in Post-Otherness might be dangling off a cliff, threatening to fall either on the side of the “Post” in “Postcolonial”—which doesn’t imply an aftermath but rather intends to announce a continuity of an era shaped by its colonial past—or drop on the side of “Post-racial”—which tends to be a distraction from metamorphosed formats and technologies of racisms. At any rate, this proposal announces the descaling of the prefix in other to scrutinize “Otherness” properly.

This quake has been prompted by three random observations: Firstly, if one, even with a minimum of sensitivity, took a glance at some current political headlines, one is likely to hear the reverberations of discourses ranging from building walls to separate nations to discussions of “bad Hombres” and of the Islamization of the Occident. As Sasha Polakow-Suransky puts it:

They (the Right) have effectively claimed the progressive causes of the left – from gay rights to women’s equality and protecting Jews from antisemitism – as their own, by depicting Muslim immigrants as the primary threat to all three groups. As fear of Islam has spread, with their encouragement, they have presented themselves as the only true defenders of western identity and western liberties – the last bulwark protecting a besieged Judeo-Christian civilisation from the barbarians at the gates.⁴

4. Sasha Polakow-Suransky, “The ruthlessly effective rebranding of Europe’s new far-right,” *The Guardian*, November 1, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/01/the-ruthlessly-effective-rebranding-of-europes-new-far-right> (Accessed February 27, 2019).

This becomes interesting as one observes the efforts of the right to co-opt certain historically “Othered” subjects with their political strategies, brewing new alliances and forging common denominators that were historically regarded as contradictory, while constructing other “Others” upon which long-cultivated angst, prejudices, and resentments could be projected. This process should be understood as a cannibalization of “Otherness” and a subsequent regurgitation of “Otherness.”

For some historically “Othered” subjects, the only thing that has changed has been the mechanisms and methodologies through which they are objectified and othered.

So, in our socio-political contemporary, one can rather observe an intensification in the construction and cultivation of “Otherness,” morphing old conceptions of the “Other” to cloth new groups of people, while at the same time one can observe the appropriation of the “Other” for purposes profitable to the privileged and powerful.

Secondly, one can observe, especially within the context of the cultural industry, the resurfacing of what one might call “geographical specification-ing,” which is to say, the need to put a spotlight on certain geographical regions. This is of course not a new phenomenon, especially within Western museum institutions, or other cultural infrastructures in which, based on certain cultural and political agendas or strategies, certain geographical regions are put in and out of focus at will. Some have seen this practice as part of what is termed “Soft power,” whereby culture is used as a means to gently exercise political power on certain cultural and social groups. Take for example a museum or library in France which chooses to put a spotlight on Algeria, in the hope that it would appease the Algerian community and soothe or clean the wounds of its colonial past. Or take for example the British council, the Goethe Institute or the Institut Français opening cultural centers around the world to “promote culture.” Soft power.

This “geographical specification-ing” is not bad *per se*. The long list of, for example, “African shows” or “Arab world shows” around the world did indeed do a great deal in presenting to the world what an African or Arab contemporary could be.

That said and that done, one must now take stance to ask: what does it mean to do an “Africa exhibition” or an “Arab exhibition” today, as we have seen at the New Museum, MMK Frankfurt, BOZAR Brussels, Fondation Louis Vuitton and many other museums in the West?⁵ What does it mean to make geography the subject matter rather than conceptual or philosophical discourses of relevance?

What about issues of representation? How would one represent the 54 African countries, thousands of African languages, and communities within such an exhibition? These necessitate re-questioning and reconsidering.

5. For example *Contemporary African Art*, Studio International, London & New York, 1969. Camden Arts Centre, London, 1969, *African Contemporary Art*, The Gallery, Washington D.C., 1977, *Moderne Kunst aus Afrika im Rahmen des WestBerliner Festivals Horizonte Festival der Weltkulturen* (Nr. 1, 1979), *Art pour l’Afrique: Exposition internationale d’art contemporain*. Musée National des Arts Africains et Océaniens, Paris (08/06–25/07/1988), *Art contemporain arabe: collection du Musée du l’Institut du Monde Arabe*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1988, *The Other Story: AfroAsian Artists in PostWar Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1989, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, Barbican Concourse Gallery, London, *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, Center for African Art, New York, *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale*, Museum for African Art, New York, 1993, *Seen/Unseen*, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, 1994, *Rencontres Africaines: Exposition d’Art Actuel*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1994, *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa*, Flammarion, New York, 1995, *An Inside Story: African Art of Our Time*, The Yomiuri Shimibun, Japan Association of Art Museums, Tokyo, 1995, *New Visions: Recent Works by Six African Artists*, Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts, Eatonville, 1995, *Africana*, Sala 1, Roma & Adriano Parise Editore, Verona, 1996, *Africa by Africa: A Photographic View*, Barbican Centre, London, 1999, *Authentic/ExCentric*, Forum For African Arts, Ithaca (NY), 2001, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Prestel, Munich-New York, 2001. Curated by Okwui Enwezor, *Villa Stuck*, Munich (15/02–22/04/2001); *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, Berlin (18/05–22/07/2001); *Museum of Contemporary Art*, Chicago (08/09–30/12/2001); *P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center & The Museum of Modern Art*, New York (10/02–05/05/2002), *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art Shifting Landscapes*, inIVA, London, 2003, *Africa Remix*, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (24/07/11/2004); *Hayward Gallery*, London (10/02–17/04/2005); *Centre Georges Pompidou*, Paris (25/05/15/08/2005); *Mori Art Museum*, Tokyo (02–05/2006)... just to name a few.

But what prompts this reflection now are the following suspicions: Primarily, while “geographical specification-ing” might be well-intentioned, one can’t avoid thinking of the fact that the occasional presentation of an Africa, Arab, Asia or similar shows is another, and, for that matter, a *reinforced* act of “Othering.” This suspicion is brought about by the fact that institutions tend to content themselves with the fact that they have done an “Africa show” and therefore do not necessarily need to put in other artists of African origin in their regular program. Such “geographical specification-ing” projects then tend to become a compensation for a lack of proper engagement with issues of diversity at the level of program, personnel and public, and also tend to trust the “Other” they construct into the “Savage slot,” as Michel-Rolph Trouillot would put it. Secondly, there is something about the rhetoric through which such “geographical specification-ing” projects are accommodated. By this I mean the rhetoric of “giving a voice to,” “giving space to,” “making visible,” “taking care of,” “making heard” the African, Asian, Arab or whoever in question. These phenomena which could be likened to a paternalization and infantilization strategies push us to think of Gayatri Spivak’s pertinent question “Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁶ But since Spivak, we have learnt that the issue at stake is not whether the subaltern can speak, but rather, as Seloua Luste Boulbina twists the saying, “Can the non-Subaltern Listen?” The crucial question is whether these geo-social groups stereotypically put together in such shows, especially in Western museums, do actually wish to be given a voice, space or otherwise? And under whose terms? Don’t they already have their spaces and voices? Again, the issue at stake is the agenda behind such rhetoric, and the fact that this rhetoric is indeed an important part of the process of constructing and cultivating “Otherness” within a bubble. Which is to say that the exclusive mechanism in relation to such projects marks a difference between a constructed “norm” and the constructed “anomaly,” which is the one off, spaceship-like project that lands and then disappears. Thirdly, it is important to point to the capitalist economic model lying behind such “geographical

6. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a reader*, eds. Williams, Patrick & Chrisman, Laura, (New York: Columbia University Press., 1993), 66-111.

specification-ing” projects. The use of slogans, captions, and simplifications is the epitome of Neoliberal economic practice. This goes hand in hand with the concept of Soft power, wherein culture is not only used for political aims, but also serves to shift and control the economic paradigm. In the past years, we have heard from philosophers, economists and politicians alike that the future of the world will be determined in Africa.

Prompt was the reaction from the cultural sector, with projects like “African Futures,” “Africa is the Future” and various sorts of “Afrofuturisms,” as tags and labels well packaged for easy sales. It all becomes a commodity. The commodification of the “Other” and of “Otherness.”

But it’s worth taking a few steps back to reflect. Otherness as a phenomenon seems to have always existed in many societies all over, and rendering “Other” as a process seems inherent in processes of identity formation of individuals and societies. In *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*,⁷ it is reiterated that “the existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world.”⁸ That is to say, for an individual or society to know or define itself, it needs to define another individual or society which the former individual or society is not or doesn’t wish to be. Often a time the “Other” then becomes a projection surface for all sorts of unwanted identitarian characteristics. That is the thin line that separates the mere wish to “other” in order to find one’s own identity, and othering that is discriminatory and segregational. But if one is the other, then who is another?

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin are fast to point out that it is often an interchangeable position of other and othering counterparts, where power probably determines who objectifies at what time. One is tempted to think that “geographical specification-ing” projects are then vehicles through which such power gradients are defined, and through which binaries of norm and anomaly, or self and other are defined. This of course applies to all categories through which majority and minority identities are defined and cultivated in relation to political, economic and social

7. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York & London: Routledge, 2000).

8. *Ibid.*, 139.

power and how they come to define race, cultural, gender and class identities, geographies, geopolitics and economics.

From a feminist discourse and practice vantage point, Cherrie Moraga pointed out that “what the oppressor often succeeds in doing is simply externalizing his fears, projecting them into the bodies of women, Asians, gays, disabled folks, whoever seems most ‘other.’”⁹ Without wanting to equate the “otherer,” the one enjoying the privilege of making another “other,” with the oppressor, Moraga’s argument holds ground with the tendency of the “otherer” externalizing and projecting his/her fears on another in the enactment of othering. Moraga proceeds with an expatiation on the phenomenon:

But it is not really difference the oppressor fears so much as similarity. He fears he will discover in himself the same aches, the same longings as those of the people he has shitted on. He fears the immobilization threatened by his own incipient guilt. He fears he will have to change his life once he has seen himself in the bodies of the people he has called different. He fears the hatred, anger, and vengeance of those he has hurt.¹⁰

Taking this into consideration, what could “Dis-Othering” possibly imply?

Perhaps dis-othering starts with the recognition of the acts and processes of othering. With the revelation of the undercurrents that feed, justify, enable and maintain acts and processes of othering. It is in and upon this awareness and consciousness of and towards these acts and processes of othering that one might be able to build resistance and protect oneself both from being othered and from the urge to other. Which is to say, it is in this recognition of the mechanism or technology of othering that a circumventing of the embodiments of both noun and verb—the othered and othering—can be achieved.

9. Moraga, Cherrie, “La Guera,” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press., 1983), 27-34.

10. *Ibid.*, 32.

Dis-othering could imply any effort to resist the internalization of any constructs that are said to make one that “other.” The tendency is to see oneself through the prism of the constructor of otherness or the oppressor, which is to say that faced with the violence of continuous belittling or jammed in that space of the savage slot in which one has been thrust, the psyche of the “othered” forces that being to accept an existence within a marginal and liminal space.

Dis-othering must be a self-break, a self-resistance by the “otherer” to externalize his/her fears, aches, and longings to any being considered a possible recipient. Therefore, with the term “Dis-Othering” I wish to propose the phenomenon in which social identity building is not made by projecting on a so-called “Other,” but rather a projection towards the self. A self-reflection. A boomerang. That is to say, instead of looking for or deflecting one’s faults, fantasies, angst on some other, one could embody them and live them. It is about acknowledging and embodying the plethora of variables that make us be.

Dis-othering has to do with the realization or the putting in practice of what bell hooks calls the “The Oppositional Gaze” (1992), which is to say the possibility of interrogating the gaze of the “otherer,” but also the importance of looking back at and against the “otherer,” and looking at one another in that space of the “othered.”

Dis-othering must be a deeply non-capitalist, non-exploitative and non-profit-oriented act, wherein the principle of “what goes around, comes around” reigns. This is to say that if geopolitical, geo-economic and neo-liberal capitalist economic goals of “profit, come what may” are catalysts to acts and processes of othering, then dis-othering must entail a negation and exemption from relations based on such principles.

Dis-othering must mean getting out of the *cul-de-sac* of power relations as the basis of being in the world. Dis-othering is a call for explorations of the cosmic vastness of the imagination, of new futures, identities, ways of being, and ways of living together in the world, and of doing so not *despite* our differences, but *because* of the importance and richness of our differences.

Dis-othering is a pledge for a reimagination, as much as a dismantling of cartographies of power, and a reinvention of geographies. Dis-othering is a recalibration of human and non-human, spacial and social relations independent of the given powers, but based on an interdependency of all animate and inanimate that cohabit this world.

Dis-othering is the practice of what Sara Ahmed calls the feminist killjoy,¹¹ which is to say the act of resisting the joy or taking part in the joy of laughing at or mocking or belittling or denigrating or othering someone. A refusal to accept the comfort of societal *status quo* in relation to misogyny, patriarchy, racism, classism, and genderism. Dis-othering will have to entail speaking up, pointing out, calling out inequalities, as much as proposing alternative ways of being in and perceiving a world of justice and justness.

11. See Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys (and other willful subjects)," *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2010).

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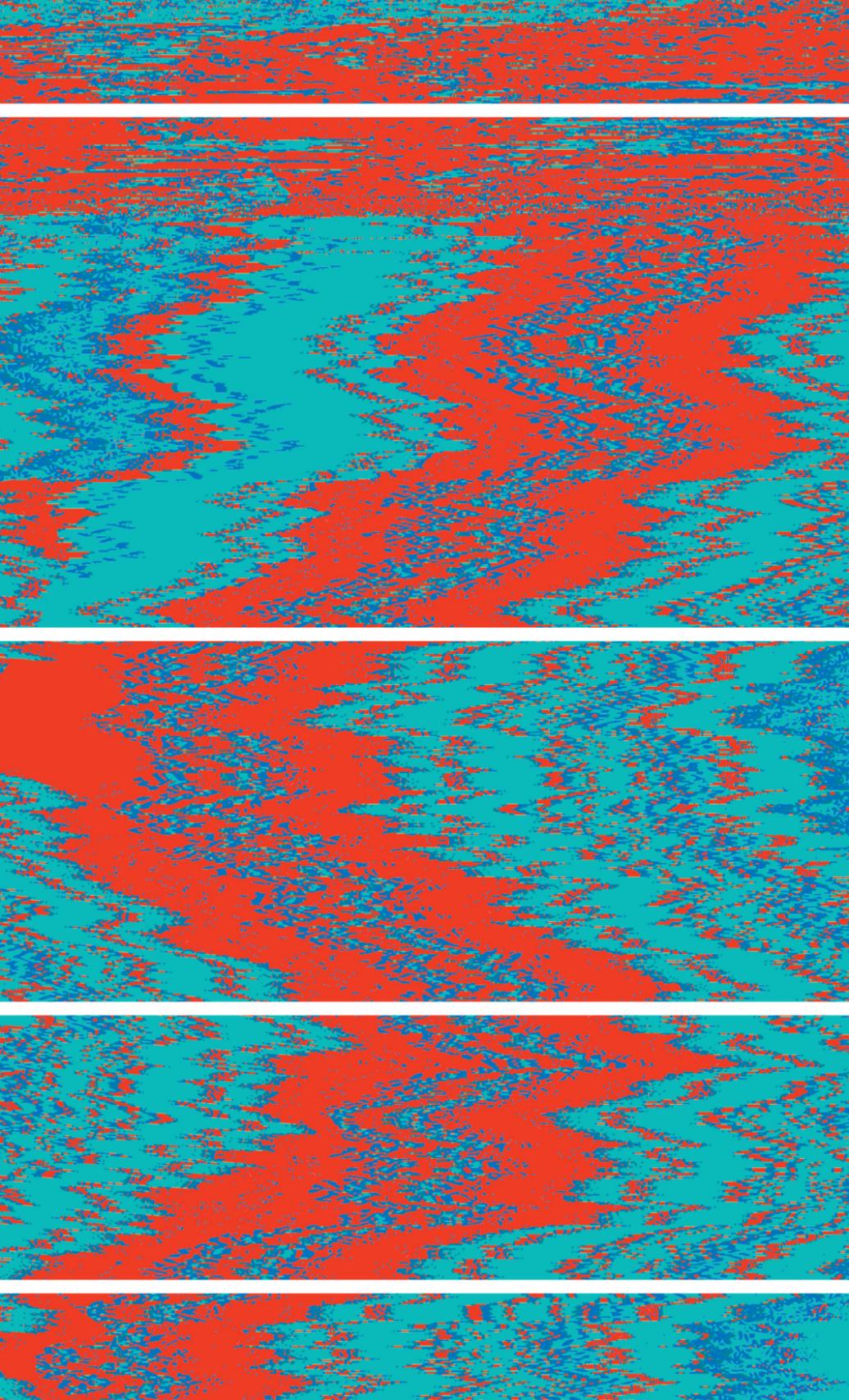
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This collection of writings from Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung presents, for the first time in one volume, essays and proposals edited anew.

Ndikung's expanded curatorial practice delineates the space of exhibition making as a space of critical thinking and of experimentation. By proximity, these texts echo each other, resonate with each other, interfere with each other, and present perspectives on the political, poetic, and philosophical potentials of exhibition making, beyond the tight corset of the discipline itself.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, PhD (born in 1977 in Yaoundé, Cameroon), is an independent curator, author and biotechnologist. He is founder and artistic director of SAVVY Contemporary Berlin and editor-in-chief of *SAVVY Journal for critical texts on contemporary African art*. He was curator-at-large for documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel 2017, artistic director of the 12th Rencontres de Bamako 2019, a biennale for African photography in Mali, as well as guest curator of the 2018 Dak'Art Biennale in Senegal. Together with the Miracle Workers Collective, he curated the Finland Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019, and is artistic director of Sonsbeek 2020-2024, a quadrennial contemporary art exhibition in Arnhem, the Netherlands. He was guest professor in curatorial studies and sound art at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, and is the recipient of the first OCAD University International Curators Residency fellowship in Toronto in 2020.



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