

Spiritual Revolutions: Afropean Body Politics and the “Secularity” of the Arts

Alanna Lockward

“By creating a society in which all people, of all colours, were granted freedom and citizenship, the Haitian Revolution transformed the world. It was a central part of the destruction of slavery in the Americas and therefore a crucial moment in the history of democracy, one that laid the foundation for the continuing struggles for human rights everywhere.”

—*Laurent Dubois, Avengers of the New World: A History of the Haitian Revolution, Boston: Belknap Press, 2005, 6–7.*

“In my language, the tz’utujil, a visual artist, a medical doctor, a musician and a spiritual guide are all called q’manel.”

—*Benvenuto Chavajay, interview by Salazar Ochoa, “Identidad, descolonialidad y resistencia, un acercamiento al pensamiento de Benvenuto Chavajay,” in La Hora, 30.01.2015. Free translation by the Author.*

Marronage, the lifestyle, ethics and socio-political organization of run-away communities outside the plantation, has been an intrinsic component of the radical imagination of countless liberation struggles in the Americas. The interest in these transcendental yet hidden narratives is consistently gaining attention in the humanities. Its legacies and current

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entanglements in Afro-Ecuadorian communities confirm that ethno-education and marronage are inseparable. Teachings of the ancestors that have been labelled as “primitive” and even “diabolical” by state and private educational systems are now part of a decolonized curriculum entirely conceived and implemented by maroon descendants.

There are distinct analytical and ethical implications embedded in the problematization of enslavement, the Triangular Trade and the plantation system when their factual co-existence with marronage is silenced. Oral archives are instrumental in this regard and performance art and the moving image are invaluable in challenging this erasure. Analysing the problem of freedom under subjugation has proven to be a theoretical conundrum, hence the lack of self-awareness on this issue in canonical and even liberation philosophies. The same applies to the arts. Such a downfall is brilliantly exposed by Carol Boyce Davis in a film review with a lapidary title: “12 Years a Slave Fails to Represent Black Resistance to Enslavement.” To substantiate her analysis she writes:

Northup indicates that not a day passed without him contemplating escape. References to the Great Pine woods are a constant symbolic evocation of the possibilities for living elsewhere than on the plantation. The journey between that “free” space and the plantation marks the boundaries between being free and being enslaved. Northup chooses the plantation, and in the end attempts to secure his freedom the “legal” way in a context where the illegality of slavery itself was in question. But in focusing so much on the plantation, the film misses the Great Pine woods, as a free space symbolically and literally. Thus in the end we see Northup getting his freedom ostensibly through the beneficence of a few white people who supported him, and then actually attempting to go through the courts when black people still were not able to testify against *whites*.

In an often quoted statement Édouard Glissant affirms that,

[t]he fact remains, and we can never emphasize it enough, that the maroon is the only true popular hero of the Caribbean . . . an indisputable example of systematic opposition, of total refusal.¹

However, some of his critics argue that in his writings maroons are limited to “fragmentary and opaque utterances,”² and I add that maroon women are symptomatically invisible. Fortunately, the celebrated photographic series by Renée Cox honouring the legacy of Queen Nanny of the Maroons contributes to expand the imprint of women narratives in this scenario. This Jamaican national heroine who lived in the first half of the eighteenth century was abducted from Ghana

and became an expert in guerrilla tactics. She has been considered the most relevant cultural and spiritual leader of the maroons, liberating more than eight hundred abducted Africans in a span of thirty years. Another female maroon figure discussed further on is the character *Yambaó* in the film by the same name (1957), analysed by Teresa María Díaz Nerio in her lecture-performance “*Ni ‘mamita’ Ni ‘mulatita’*” (2013).

In Sergio Giral’s *Maluala* (1979) the portrayal of maroon resistance is accomplished majestically. Although verbal, mental, and physical abuse intertwine in a symphony of cruelty, Giral’s faithful accounts show how resistance counteracts the barbarism of the European “civilizing” mission with courage and blood, supported by prayers of Islam, Yoruba, Congo, and Christian traditions. Quilombo, Palenque, Maniel, and Manigua are some of the many names of those physical and spiritual safe spaces where maroons reinvented themselves as inhabitants of a free world, creating their own rituals in conversation with their surroundings. The following ideas discuss the relationship between body politics and the liberation Pan-Africanist legacies of the maroon leaders that created the first Black Republic and some Afropean Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis practitioners working basically with performance and moving image. In the embodied and screened narratives of Caribbean Diaspora artists, including Teresa María Díaz Nerio, Jeannette Ehlers, Quinsy Gario, and Patricia Kaersenhout—members of what has become the working group BE.BOP. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS – as well as in others residing in the USA or the Antilles, such as Adler Guerrier, Nicolás Dumit Estévez, Barbara Prézeau-Stephenson, and Charo Oquet, the three axis of maroon legacies, namely the constitution of a safe space, the development of experimental spiritualities and the strategies of armed struggle are arrestingly eloquent.

BE.BOP. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS has been my contribution as a curator to the further expansion of these Caribbean radical endowments by means of introducing the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality options of de-linking from the colonial matrix of power to the discussion of Black and African Diasporas artistic practices in Europe and beyond. BE.BOP operates as a safe space, a quintessential maroon category, and as such has become an utterly rewarding collective experience. Rolando Vázquez, an active member of the group and co-founder with Walter Mignolo and myself of the Transnational Decolonial Institute, explains how the collective conceptualization of Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis³ is particularly relevant in the issues at stake:

Unlike contemporary art that is ensnared in the search for the newest abstraction, Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis seeks to bring to the fore those other forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been subsumed under the long history of this western-centered world, of the modern/colonial order. In my view, decolonial artists are not seeking innovation and abstraction for the sake of it, they are not seeking the recognition of the contemporary art world; rather, they are bringing to light through their practices, through their bodies and communities the histories that have been denied, the forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been disdained or erased.⁴

Body and landscape, the mediated experience of our surroundings, are quintessential elements of what the Situationists articulated as psycho-geography, considering it “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.”⁵

A maroon reading of this useful concept involves the necessary unrigging of the masquerade known as modernity and its inseparable shadow, coloniality.⁶ Given that European modernity has been prolific in the politics of confusion—namely the interchangeable usage of terms such as modernism, modernization, and modernity to designate similar but different phenomena—I start by clarifying how decoloniality sees the relationship between body and landscape within the colonial matrix of power.

Colonial matrix of power is a term coined by Aníbal Quijano in the early 1990's. Later, Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova (2009) analysed how it has operated since the sixteenth century within its four interconnected spheres. In all of these spheres the notion of the *individual* illustrates the first disambiguation from the Situationists' symptomatic reproduction of a so-called universal human condition, so treasured by the rhetoric of modernity. According to this narrative the category “human” is self-explanatorily white, patriarchal, hetero-normative, Christian, and European. It is in the struggle to dominate entire populations outside of this notion of an “authentic” human that the economic enterprise known as European colonialism came into being with brutal and continuous consequences. One of the four spheres of this modus operandi of coloniality is related to the control of knowledge and subjectivity. For the purpose of substantiating my arguments, this is where the focus is set.

Before further elaborating my arguments I briefly name the other three spheres which offer an equally transcendental understanding of how an entire system known as modernity/coloniality has until today ruled human relations within the context of the nation-state. The first is the violent appropriation of land and its resources, which ensured that control of the economy rested in the hands of a few. The second sphere is the control of political, financial, military, and governmental organizations which give authority to either the same few or others associated with them. Third, we find the control of the public sphere organized around the inevitability of the nuclear family and its hetero-patriarchal capitalist gender relations. This set of spheres has mutated in different periods and moments, changing its rhetoric “according to the needs and the leading forces shaping them” as Mignolo and Tlostanova observe:

In the period from 1970 to 2000 neo-liberalism was consolidated in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The neo-liberal agenda translated the previous mission of development and modernisation, into the Washington Consensus of granting the market economy priority over social regulation.⁷

If we listen to the lyrics of Aboriginal Australians we experience how these four spheres are articulated dramatically in the relationship between landscape and body. In these spiritual landscapes, coloniality—which is the preservation of the *modus operandi* of colonialism after formal decolonization—challenges the so-called crisis of testimony inherent to modernity/coloniality. Australian Aboriginals experience a reality inseparable from their spiritual world, which they call “Dreaming,” in the same way than Dominican and Haitian Vodoun practitioners understand the human condition as being one with the ancestors. Those cosmological landmarks that have been considered unworthy of being legitimized by canonical historiography in the name of the so-called secular imperative of modernity have been carefully preserved orally; their physical locations and psycho-geographies are poetically embedded to those accounts. There is freedom of movement among these narratives, one which is completely lacking in Ferguson, Melilla, Gaza, the Mexican-US border, Guantánamo—the “highlights” of coloniality today. In other words, in all those places the romantic endeavours of the Situationist’s *flâneur*⁸ or *flâneuse* become irrelevant and even aggravating when mirrored with the criminalization of

movement institutionalized in Europe by Frontex⁹ as well as the anti-Black racial profiling on the rise both in England as well as on the continent.

Legendary decolonial flâneuses such as Maya Deren and Ana Mendieta have imprinted their own bodies in both natural and urban landscapes, challenging coloniality and becoming obligatory references on the subject. In “*At Land*” (1944) Maya Deren immerses herself in a time-space capsule using her own body as the leitmotiv that links dreamlike scenes taking place in different contexts. This notion of inseparability between the visible and the invisible is a direct output of her scholarly and personal involvement with Haitian Vodoun cosmologies. As the mother of (North) American experimental cinema Deren was also a film theorist, like Jean-Luc Godard and Sergei Eisenstein, but unlike them her writings and films are almost exclusively discussed in feminist courses. In her outcast status we can clearly trace the so-called secularity of the arts in action. Haitian Vodoun as a philosophical point of departure is, according to this Western notion, simply unthinkable. As Shelley Rice explains:

[Maya Deren’s] years in Haiti and her intense involvement with [Vodoun] can be seen as her quest to experience a living culture that gave “credibility to the unreal,” and thereby embody the vision she sought in her experimental films. Maya Deren’s most significant contribution to postmodern discourse might be her profound understanding of the ties that link the avant-garde and the “primitive” [sic], the Western and the Other.¹⁰

In the forest of Bois Caiman, a Vodoun ceremony heralded the beginning of the end of Europe’s savage capitalist enterprize in the Caribbean and elsewhere. According to the opening quote by Laurent Dubois we are all descendants of the Haitian Revolution, and therefore accountable to its ancestry. Jeannette Ehlers is a Caribbean diaspora artist born and based in Denmark who has consistently followed this predicament in her digital video art, photography, and performances. In *Black Magic at the White House* (2009) she performs a Vodoun dance reminiscent of the foundational narrative of the Haitian Revolution. The video is staged in a landmark house of Copenhagen built, as countless similar continental architectural highlights, with profits from the transatlantic slave trade. The silencing of Danish brutal and corrupt history is defiantly challenged by the ubiquitous and phantasmagorical appearance of the artist whose presence is alternatively erased and exaggerated. Today this building,

Marienburg, is the official Summer residency of the Danish Prime Minister. This notion of inseparability between the visible and the invisible on the spiritual and material realms is masterfully articulated by Michel Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995). In other words, the Haitian Revolution's canonical erasure is inseparable from the counter-narrative of Vodoun's oral history and its systematic demonization by the West. As explained earlier, legendary avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren is a case in point.

Sound is as crucial in *Black Magic at the White House* as in the rest of Ehler's video art. The drumming in crescendo is a powerful reminder of the vibrations that brought together the maroon leaders who summit in *Bwa Kayiman* with *white* freemasons, dissidents from the plantation system, and heralded the biggest blow ever received by modernity/coloniality until today. *Black Bullets* (2012) was shot in black and white (b/w) at Henri Christophe's phenomenal Citadelle Laferrière—the biggest fortress in the Americas, and in the context of these ideas the biggest monument to marronage, since it was built by a maroon leader following the notion of a safe space, as mentioned before one of the basic premises of this radical lifestyle. The fact that in *Black Bullets* the monument itself is rendered invisible speaks volumes about Ehler's phenomenal skills as a storyteller. We see a line of school students slowly marching along the horizon suspended in a sea of ever connected clouds. They drown at the end of the horizon and reappear again at the left edge of the screen. Accompanied by a discretely hypnotic soundtrack, this interpretation of the continuities of resistance is poetically embedded to what Erna Brodber has described as the Continent of Black Consciousness¹¹:

That so many persons at so many different times and in so many different areas felt spontaneously moved towards this behaviour is what gives Pan-Africanism its essence. This feeling, common to so many, described a Continent of Black Consciousness which included Africa and the geographical areas to which Africans were dispersed from the early days of New World's slavery to Garvey's time.

The second component of this video triptych, *Off the Pig*, reproduces the voice of Angela Davis describing how resistance to enslavement has been an intrinsic part of its history from day one. The hymn of the Black Panther Party is chanted while images of one of Port-au-Prince's

best-known neighbourhoods, Cité Soleil, are projected. The third element, *The March*, is positioned in the middle of the installation and resembles a rhizome but in fact is a neurone permanently growing in all directions. The following quote by freedom fighter Malcolm X is vigorously conclusive on how these continuities of marronage are clearly detectable beyond the Caribbean in the African continent itself. Asked about the influence of the descendant of Jamaican maroons, the legendary Marcus Garvey, in his own mental and spiritual liberation, Malcolm X responded:

[M]ost people in the Caribbean area are still proud that they are Black, proud of the African blood and their heritage, and I think this type of pride was instilled in my mother, and she instilled it in us too, to the degree that she could. [...] In fact she was an active member of the Marcus Garvey movement. [...] It was Marcus Garvey's philosophy of Pan-Africanism that initiated the entire freedom movement, which brought about the independence of African nations and had it not been for Marcus Garvey and the foundation laid by him, you would find no independent nations in the Caribbean today. [...] All the freedom movements that are taking place in America were initiated by the work and teachings of Marcus Garvey.¹²

In her latest piece, in front of an audience, Ehlers finally performed what she had done previously in works such as *Black Magic in the White House*, as well as in *Three Steps of Story* (2009). However, instead of dancing, in this her first live performance, *Whip it Good!* (2013), she challenged the audience with a deceptively simple action: whipping. A human-size white canvas hung from the ceiling of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, a post-migrant theatre space in Berlin, and she flogged it with in-crescendo intensity for fifteen minutes. She then stopped and invited the audience to repeat the action. One by one, people stood up to follow her appeal. The white canvas was by then tainted with charcoal which the artist rubbed on the lash each time. During the discussion session that followed some painful and puzzling issues arose: Why do we as Black people feel so uncomfortable when a *white* man or woman is holding the whip? Why do we as Black oppressed people feel so guilty about showing our anger in public? How long should we keep talking about the aftermath of African enslavement? Who can claim the legitimacy of holding the whip? Who is the "authentic" Black and African Diasporic subject? Many of these questions might remain open, as they have been for as long as we have been

defying the silencing of the colonial matrix of power on the Black experience. Before continuing the discussion on these ideas on marro-nage as a psycho-geography of resistance I would like to quote a definition by Agustín Lao Montes, an Afro-Colombian decolonial thinker, since it feels closer to my own experience as a member of the Caribbean Diaspora:

If the world-historical field that we now call the African diaspora, as a condition of dispersal and as a process of displacement is founded on forms of violence and terror that are central to modernity, it also signifies a cosmopolitan project of articulating the diverse histories of African peoples while creating translocal intellectual/cultural currents and political movements.¹³

In her combined attention to both African and Caribbean historical narratives Amsterdam-based Dominican artist Teresa María Díaz Nerio has consistently polarized gendered dramatizations at both ends of the spectrum, on the one hand the despotic hyper-virility of a dictatorial persona and on the other the tragically exploited nudity of Sara Bartman, objectified to the point of absurdity. Frozen in a landscape of epic dimensions, these historical reverberations are also accompanied by a meticulous manual work.

Throne of Gold and *Trujillo's Island* (2007) illustrate the narratives that she has mainly heard from historical and familiar accounts and later on invested considerable time in researching. In these two performances Díaz Nerio comments on the hyper-masculinity embedded in an autocratic persona. Avoiding over-simplifications by mimicry or caricaturization, these portrayals rely on a hieratic mode.

In a radically new direction the staged paralysis of these performances is transformed into dance and spoken word in the lecture-performance *Ni "mamita" Ni "mulatita"* (2013). In her analysis of the hyper-sexualized "mulata" and the "faithful servant" or "mamita" in the Cuban film *Yambaó* (1957), Díaz Nerio describes how these figures emerged in Cuba during colonialism, often becoming symbols of nationalist renderings after independence. Alternatively dancing a rumba, screening sequences of the film and reading her analysis, Díaz Nerio departs from the hypothesis that:

These roles are so ingrained in Caribbean women's view of themselves that it greatly affects their choice of social performance. In turn, these stereotypes

are being taken for granted by *white* Europeans, which in the long run contributes to perpetuate the misrepresentation of Caribbean women and in this regard prevents their accessibility to other spheres of life in the West.¹⁴

The film features rumbera Ninón Sevilla and is set on a plantation in 1850s Cuba. Sevilla plays the role of a “*mulata*” called *Yambaó*, personifying Ochún the goddess of love in Cuban Yoruba religion; also Caridad, a maroon heroine nurtured and trained by her grandmother in the safe space of a hidden cave. Her character is brownfaced, a common practice of this popular genre of Mexican films of the 1940s and 1950s known as “Rumbera Cinema,” embodying a category that Díaz Nerio has named “Light Skin Blackmestizas.” The stereotypes of the domesticated enslaved “mamita” or hyper-sexualized seductress “mulatita” played by these actresses are pervasive even today—the hypermediated persona of Jennifer López as a “hot Latina” is a case in point. As Kamala Kempadoo points out:

[These] two main stereotypes of Black femininity have been identified as specific to the [Caribbean] region during [enslavement]. The first drew from general perceptions of Africans by Europeans as “slaves by nature” and defined slave women as passive, downtrodden, subservient, resigned workers and the second centred on Black female sexuality and sexual functions whereby notions of slave women as sexually promiscuous “cruel and negligent as mother, fickle as a wife,” and immoral, became widespread.¹⁵

By challenging these heteronormative parameters Díaz Nerio provides a much needed space for knowledge creation from a Black woman’s perspective, simultaneously honouring African ancestral devotions. In her performance at Nikolaj Kunsthal (Copenhagen) as part of BE.BOP 2014. SPIRITUAL REVOLUTIONS AND THE “SCRAMBLE” FOR AFRICA she was playing the clapsticks, an instrument of Cuban Rumba that marks the rhythm, while the audience took their seats. Dressed in yellow—the colour that identifies Ochún as the goddess of rivers and love—she rang bells at different moments to invoke the *loas*. Towards the end, as a final decolonizing gesture, Díaz Nerio removed from her neck an *iruke*, a consecrated horse tail amulet used in Cuban Yoruba religion, in this case made from her own hair sprinkled with gold leaves and a *nazar boncuğu*, a Turkish evil eye pendant. By swinging this intercultural amulet above the heads of the

audience and whispering a protection blessing, she creates a moment of intimate communion materialized in the name of some of the spiritualities that inform her daily life in Amsterdam.

The Haitian Vodoun equivalent of Ochún is Erzulie Fréda. In Barbara Prézeau-Stephenson's *The Fréda Circle* (2013) the myth of the seductive Erzulie Fréda is invoked by the Vodoun chanting of seven women while they embroider petals of artificial flowers on a transparent veil circle measuring five meters in diameter. Originally conceived as spiritual and emotional support for women who lost their partners during the earthquake, the essential components of this piece celebrating womanhood and solidarity, spoken word and embroidery, are also exposed in *The Fabrication of the Creole Woman* (2014), presented at Yale University. Six women (including Prézeau-Stephenson) prepared blog posts about the role of sewing in their families. After contemplating and sharing these stories they came together, bringing assorted scraps of fabric brought from home. This work dedicated to Audre Lorde was a multi-media performance experience documented through pictures and texts that spoke volumes about the reinterpretation of socio-political misconceptions across racialized class boundaries, facilitating much needed curative spaces in the island and beyond.

The social mosaic of religious beliefs, rituals, and healing has been an integral part of Bronx-based, Dominican artist Nicolás Dumit Estévez's praxis since 2001, specifically with his iconic piece *La Papa Móvil*, presented during the III International Theatre Festival in Santo Domingo.¹⁶ This was his first local appearance after relocating to the traditional diaspora landmark of many Dominicans: New York City. Twelve years later his characteristic interactive approach to what is known as performance art has crystallized in *C Room*, the third work presented on the island after his departure. As a collective re-enactment in the context of carnival, *C Room* could be understood both as a return as well as an epistemic turn in the artist's long-term engagement with public space. For example, *La Papa Móvil* queered practices of Catholicism, the official religion of the Dominican Republic; *C Room* found inspiration in what is known as Popular Religiosity or Dominican Vodoun, legally proscribed even today as "an outrage to public decency" and therefore considered as a punishable criminal activity.¹⁷

Haitian and Dominican Vodoun became powerful religions in zones of liberation, where newcomers from the African continent learned by trial and error how to communicate with the citizens of the forest, the rain, the

rivers, and stones, assisted by their native African spirits and camouflaged under the tutelage of Catholic imagery. The original idea of *C Room*¹⁸ was to emulate the consultation room of Dominican Vodoun, which the artist himself experienced growing up in Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros. In his own words:

If anything, I recall the surprising naturalness with which as a child, I understood that a man or a woman, irrespective of their sexual identification, could be mounted, possessed, by a gender-fluid *loa*. In short, some of the horses, people who received spirits, were my first introduction to queerness before the term made it to the academic world, or before I knew its English double meaning. As the Afro-Caribbean altar was the locus where I was exposed to the vast possibilities of performance art, and initiated as an artist who could have the freedom to turn upside down, not only the lithograph of Saint Anthony, but also gender rules.¹⁹

The “Server of Mysteries” channels the spiritual imperatives of the *loas* or spirits, incarnating the triple role of priest/ess, healers, and oracles, embodying therefore the cult in itself.²⁰ This fluidity, as well as an absence of animal sacrifices, temples and a hierarchy of religious authorities, are other elements that characterize Dominican Vodoun as a mixture of Kardecist Spiritism and Haitian Vodoun.²¹

During the eight hours of *C Room*, Estévez was simultaneously artist, performance facilitator, and spiritual catalyst. Guests entered through the rear part of the Museo Folklórico Don Tomás Morel, into the only room that this devastated native had to offer. Mirroring the quintessential chaotic atmosphere of the institution, Estévez installed all types of props that guests could use to forge their own carnival personae—those who were performance artists in their own right also brought their own elements. At a certain moment Estévez became aware that his peers’ savoir-faire and mastery of the carnival had to lead the way and, in doing so, resonated with the characteristic fluidity of Dominican Vodoun. The result was documented photographically and on video and eventually inserted surreptitiously over three or four days as five-second silent commercials on two local television stations. This second component successfully overlapped carnival and national independence celebrations, challenging the separation between art and life while at the same time contributing to counteract patriotic discourses with carnival’s endemic

queerness. The artist's conclusion of *C Room*'s epistemic turn is concise: the carnival is both an orifice and a vortex, it swallows-up any attempt of "Art" to impose an agenda. By embracing this self-evident truth Estévez continues to expand his ambitions of creating spaces of interaction where the congenital voyeurism of "Art" becomes neutralized—or rather, it dissolves into oblivion.

A work outside of what Huey Copeland refers to as "the storied history of performance"²² is Miami-based Adler Guerrier's *Is What Chomsky Said About Prometheus (Nine to Five)* (2001), a three-channel video featuring a man in a suit carrying a briefcase. He waits at the bus stop; walks down the street; walks into a building; enters a cafeteria. However, his activities begin at 9 pm, when it is dark and downtown is completely deserted. This is definitively the view of an immigrant that sees himself as part of the scene, not as an accessory; there is a strong sense of dignity and self-respect in this perspective. According to Guerrier²³ this film was based on three jazz compositions: Charles Mingus's *Haitian Fight Song* [1955], Duke Ellington's *Fleurette Africaine (African Flower)* [1963], and the Modern Jazz Quartet's *Valeria* [1972]. *Haitian Fight Song* is the piece more strongly connected to the above-mentioned sequences of the film, where the idea of the Situationist's flâneur is linked to the maroon leaders who conceived and ultimately achieved the first successful enslaved peoples uprising. This particular type of awareness implied by the presence of the Black body in the urban landscape represents both a transgression and an affirmation of being. In Guerrier's native Haiti young people also transgress the unmarked boundaries of class and racialization by becoming contemporary *pa gen pwogram*, defying pervasive notions of belonging attached to public spaces, such as those beaches that until very recently were only accessible to the elite, as well as the streets of Pétiön-Ville which today are as promiscuous socially as the traditionally crowded areas of downtown Port-au-Prince. This displacement of landscapes' "legitimacy" dooms any attempt at social engineering to be an exercise in futility. The illegality of the Black body is a de facto impossibility in Haiti and the absurdity of its criminalization is what keeps the legacy of the Haitian Revolution a glorious reminder in the face of Ferguson et al. In Haiti the Black body in the landscape has a decolonial history that is as real as it gets, a living and defying memory that has been consistently and painfully erased by canonical historiography as mentioned before in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's study.

The maroons never completely disengaged from colonial society. As in Haiti and other Caribbean palenques, also in Colombia, the total abolition of enslavement was an integral part of the future envisioned by its leaders and inhabitants, and many recorded accounts attest to this fact.²⁴

Maroons had to create new maps, new orientation strategies, and new spiritualities all connected to the common goal of securing survival. The plantation remained a locus of oppression and a constant reminder of the fragility of their condition. Similarly, the museum is a place where Afropean decolonial artists visit mainly to obtain some supplies and occasionally to attend a request for their presence. Quinsy Gario's campaign *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* presentation at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) in Barcelona as part of *Transfigurations Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations* (2014) is a wonderful example of how the so-called secular imperative of modernity was dismantled on its own terrain. Gario started his performance-campaign after a phone call from his mother. She was in tears because someone had just called her *Zwarte Piet* at her job. Quinsy's Mom is an accomplished woman who has an amazing elegant aura and who raised her two sons to be proud Black men. After being raised as everyone in the Netherlands under the general assumption that racism is a subject of the past, as well as colonialism, and that of course Christmas is not a religious celebration but rather a "cultural" one (yet another powerful example of the fallacy of "secularity"), it was to be expected otherwise from him. Maybe that he would have asked his mother to calm down and buy herself something nice to forget the incident. Instead he chose to do something about it, as many activists in the Netherlands have done before him many times—those who planted the seeds of what today has become the most effective coup d'état for the Dutch establishment's perennial denial of its structural racism. The Black and People of Color Coalition in the Netherlands has many reasons to celebrate. Gario's contribution is extremely significant due to its multi-dimensional and dialogical approach.

I remember joining the celebrations of the abolition of the enslavement triangular trade in Amsterdam in 2011, and I also remember my immediate reaction to the t-shirts hanging from a booth. After buying a couple of them I invited Quinsy for BE.BOP 2012. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS. What is extremely telling about this curatorial impromptu was that I had never in my life heard about *Zwarte Piet*, and there were no explanations or illustrations about

what this was. All I needed to see was a t-shirt denouncing something in Europe that was racist. To read that phrase made me instantly happy. My reaction is symptomatic of how difficult it is to utter that word in the realm of academia or the arts on the continent. The fact that this discussion has arrived in the realm of the museum is illustrative of how seriously some institutions are engaging in a dialogue with decolonial thought. Furthermore, the undeniably Christian, heteronormative, and patriarchal values embedded in the figure of the Zwarte Piet have been successfully unmasked. Institutionalized blackfacing in Europe has arrived at its final days and to witness this historic achievement as members of the African and Black Diasporas in Europe is particularly healing.

Being a descendant from Surinamese parents born in the Netherlands, Patricia Kaersenhout's artistic journey became an investigation of her Caribbean background in relation to being raised in a West-European culture. A recent interest in performance has introduced her Black radical imagination to a mesmerized audience. Her performance *Stitches of Power. Stitches of Sorrow* (2014) combines her long interest in (in)visibilities with the juxtaposition of moving image, sound, three-dimensional objects, and audience participation. By means of unveiling the inherent violence of the apparently innocent act of embroidering she triumphantly conveyed key contestations of epistemic disobedience. The narratives of the Continent of Black Consciousness become embodied knowledge during the thirty minutes in which members of the audience alternated their seats and the portion of a shared piece of cloth where their stitches were permanently embroidered as a collective memento. Kaersenhout herself was embroidering in a separate chair. Silence is almost ritualistic, while the voice of Angela Davis on a loop challenges the white reporter who asks her opinion on violence over and over. On the floor a sequence of the film *Cobra Verde* (1987), in which a young Black woman is emerging from the pits of a slave ship to face imminent rape, is projected. The atmosphere is simply electrifying. At the end of the performance each piece of fabric is revealed. The artist has been embroidering a gun manufactured by a factory founded by Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann, a German born Dane aristocrat who owned sugarcane plantations in the Caribbean, was active in the Triangular Trade (specifically in Ghana), and was instrumental in the foundation of the infamous Danish East Indian Company. All along the

audience has been collectively stitching a huge portrait of an anti-colonial fighter, a Dahomey Amazon, carrying a von Schimmelmann' rifle on her shoulder, bare-breasted and defiant.

I would like to finish with a powerfully illustrative anecdote on the urgency of establishing alternative archives of Black knowledge as proposed by Fatima El Tayeb at a recent meeting on decolonizing the museum organized at the MACBA in Barcelona by Paul B. Preciado. El Tayeb presented before me, and as I usually do in my keynotes I started by screening a video by a BE.BOP artist. On that occasion it was the video documentation of *Stitches of Power-Stitches of Sorrow*. During the ensuing discussion El Tayeb pointed out how important it is to recognize the voice of the person speaking on the video. Symptomatically, none of the members of the audience—all committed to learning and more familiarized with decolonial thought—was able to recognize the voice of Angela Davis saying:

[When] you talk about a revolution, most people think: violence; without realizing that the real content of any kind of revolutionary thrust lies in the principles, in the goals that you are striving for, not in the way you reach them.

This is a classic example of how the psycho-geographies of our internal landscapes have been systematically silenced by Western narratives, but also of how the legacies of maroon armed struggle are articulated by those still considered today as impossible subjects in the four spheres of the colonial matrix of power.

NOTES

1. Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999, 60.
2. Régis Antoine quoted by Britton (1999), 61.
3. Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto: <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>
4. Email conversation with Rolando Vázquez, 26.02.2015.
5. Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," 1955, trans. Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Online*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/geography.html>

6. The modernity/coloniality research program was inspired by the groundbreaking contribution of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. It offers a tool to dismantle the continuities of colonialism after formal decolonization. Decolonial thinkers consider postcolonial studies to be limited in scope since, in addition to omitting this inextricability, their genealogy is anchored in rather provincial theories of (post)modernity based largely on Eurocentric historical and intellectual genealogies.
7. Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, "Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option," in *Kult 6*—Special Issue (Fall 2009), 134–36.
8. "Literally translatable as 'stroll; strolling; sauntering,' *flânerie* is most often associated with a rich tradition of unencumbered, non-confrontational movement through physically and socially shifting Francophone geographies. In late nineteenth-century Parisian visual and poetic discourse the aimless looking of the 'gentleman of leisure' was key to understanding the city's spatial transformation into a center of modern capital. For Haitian writers in the 1920s living under American occupation the wanderings of bourgeois *pa gen pwogram*, meaning those with no programme or schedule, were seen as central to the gathering of native knowledges that might be amassed and mobilised in the making of a national culture. Amid the upheavals of mid-twentieth-century France the related concept of the *dérive* or drift—an uncharted, meandering journey through an urban landscape—would become central to the radical practice of the Situationist International, particularly the group members' exploration of 'the effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behaviours of individuals.'" Huey Copeland, "Sinuous Coordination: On the Photography of Adler Guerrier," in *Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot*. Exh.Cat. Miami 2014, 45.
9. Frontex is an external and internal borders program founded in 2005 with the fastest growing budget in the European Union—a European Union that was first known and conceptualized as inseparable from (the exploitation of) Africa, therefore named by its founders as "Eurafrica" (Hansen and Jonsson 2011). Indeed, there are irrefutable historical continuities between the Berlin-Africa Conference (1884–1885), the original Eurafrica (European Union) project, and current "mappings" of migration routes in the African Continent. This border externalization "initiative" could be defined as a de facto "cartographic war" against Africa. <http://www.frontex.europa.eu/>.
10. "Like Claude Cahun, she was a friend of André Breton. Deren, however, denied any connection with the movement's aesthetic aims. The Surrealist obsession with duality—with the lines separating the real and the imaginary, the rational and the irrational, the waking life and the dream—was, in fact, diametrically opposed to Deren's fascination with the continuity of life and

death, the physical and the spiritual, and ‘I’ and the ‘non-I.’ Her films were intended as imaginary arenas where this point of contact could be visualized—where boundaries normally fixed could dissolve, or become wildly flexible; where protagonists could move freely between dreams and waking life without ever resolving the differences between the two; where nature and culture, urban and rural environments could be separated (and linked) by a single step; where past and future selves could meet along the road, fracturing into clones moving along parallel paths of time and space.” Shelley Rice, *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cabun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*, New York: MIT University Press, 1999, 70.

11. Edna Brodber, *The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day*, London: New Beacon Books, 2003, 102–3.
12. Noel Leo Erskine, “What Method for the Oppressed?,” in Lewis V. Baldwin and Paul R. Dekar, *“In an Inescapable Network of Mutuality”: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Globalization of an Ethical Ideal*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013, 251.
13. Agustín Lao Montes, “Hilos Descoloniales. Trans-localizando los espacios de la Diáspora Africana,” in *Tabula Rasa*, Bogotá, Colombia, No. 7, July – December, 2007, 55.
14. Teresa María Díaz Nerio, *Ni “mamita” ni “mulatita,”* (2013). Performance text. Manuscript.
15. Kamala Kempadoo, “Gender Race and Sex: Exoticism in the Caribbean,” 2000. <http://www.desafio.ufba.br/gt5-003.html>. Quoted by Teresa Maria Diaz Nerio in *Ni “mamita” Ni “mulatita”: Caribbean women’s stereotypes and the Diaspora* (2014). Manuscript.
16. After *La Papa Móvil* in 2003 Estévez undertook a series of pilgrimages entitled *For Art’s Sake*, evoking the pilgrimage of El Camino de Santiago de Compostela (Spain), where Catholic devotees travel to the reliquary of St. James the Apostle. Estévez’s secular twist took him on pilgrimages to museums in the New York metropolitan area, each time with a new penance (on his knees, walking backwards) while spreading “the Word”—of Art. This project raised issues such as art as ritual, the artist as an emblem of secular religion, the place of the museum in the modern art world, and the legitimizing figure of the curator.
17. Law 391 of 20 September 1943 was promulgated during Trujillo’s dictatorship. It decreed the practice of African-based religions to be illegal, and in spite of the activism of public intellectuals and artists it is still in force today. Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz, *El Vudú en Dominicana y en Haití*, Santo Domingo: Edición Indefolk, 2014, 96–7.
18. This first component of the experience took place at the Museo Folklórico Don Tomás Morel in Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros (Dominican

Republic) on 26 January 2014. At that time it was an institution temporarily closed to visitors due to a traumatic loss of part of its collection. In the early 1960s Don Tomás Morel, a Dominican folklorist and avid collector, launched a museum in his home that became the main repository of the material culture of Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros. The collection took the shape of an eclectic archive (from artisanal kitchen tools documenting life in the countryside to authentic pre-Columbian artifacts) exhibited with contemporary replicas. The centerpiece of his archive was a considerable collection of carnival costumes and masks. Still shaken by the loss of most of its objects due to the vandalism inflicted by one of its employees, the Museum is still an invigorating space for Santiago's cultural memory. Nicolás Dumit Estévez' statement for "C Room" (2013). Manuscript.

19. From a talk presented by the artist at the event "Gender and the Caribbean Body," 28 April 2014, organized by CUNY Diversity Projects Development Fund and Barnard College. Manuscript.
20. Luis Alejandro Peguero Guzmán, "¿Vudú Dominicano o Vudú en Santo Domingo?" in *Boletín Americanista* 49, 1999, 213.
21. There are different opinions on the provenance of Dominican Vodoun. Some, like Fradique Lizardo, argue that since the Spanish colony of Saint-Domingue (today the Dominican Republic) received enslaved Africans before Haiti, Dominican Vodoun predates the Haitian one.
22. "Taken together, Guerrier's flâneur-style pictures from the late 1990s to the present offer a peculiar articulation of imagistic practice that stands in contrast both to contemporary large-format color photography, which aims for the immersive effect of a tableau, and to the storied history of performance documentation, perhaps the series' closest analogue in terms of its structural underpinnings. [...] Even more importantly, in his practice there is no initial target that spurs either action or interaction, distinguishing his work not only from performance art more broadly, but also from influential models of African diasporic urban intervention predicated on the [B]lack subject's visual recognition by unnamed passersby. As opposed to Stanley Brouwn's requests for directions in early 1960s Amsterdam, Adrian Piper's cross-dressing as a black man on the make in 1970s Cambridge, or William Pope.L's abject crawls through 1980s Manhattan, the ambit and ambition of Guerrier's movements through space seem less testaments to the racialization of civil society and more functions of the unknowable terrain of his own subjective inclinations at a given moment in time."
23. Huey Copeland, "Sinuous Coordination: On the Photography of Adler Guerrier," in *Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot*, 44.
Rebecca Zorach, "Place Becomes Sweet and Great. A Conversation with Adler Guerrier," in *Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot*, 80.

24. Anthony McFarlane, “*Cimarrones and palenques*: runaways and resistance in Colonial Colombia,” in *Slavery & Abolition*, 6 (3), 1985, 142.

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Editors

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Image, Racialization, History

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