What do we actually know about Africa? In western culture, AFRICA has become synonymous with a potpourri of exotic ingredients and anxieties: sun, rhythm, intuition, bodily liberation, grand landscapes, wild animals – and on the other hand disease, crime, war, failed states, shantytowns, famine, a flood of refugees.

This book – published in connection with the AFRICA exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art – attempts to challenge the stereotypes. It speaks in both short and extended form of new architecture and urban development projects from various parts of Africa south of the Sahara, and artworks from the same region appear as independent contributions to the overall experience.

All the projects point inwards to a discussion of the future – or futures – of Africa: there is in fact no unity, and the generalized ‘Africa’ only stands in the way of our feeling for the true developments in this enormous continent. The book – and the exhibition – make up the third and last instalment of Louisiana’s series on regional architectures and their interactions with culture and the formation of identity.

Generously illustrated, AFRICA includes essays by among others the curators of the exhibition, Kjeld Kjeldsen and Mathias Ussing Seeberg, expert consultant Morten Nielsen, and Achille Mbembe, Edgar Pieterse, Antoni Scholtens Folkers, Daan Roggeveen & Michiel Hulshof, Filip de Boeck, and Nnamdi Elleh.
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FOREWORD

The exhibition AFRICA rounds off a trilogy that set out to explore the new architecture’s connections with identity formation and culture in a wider sense. Historically and intuitively, one can see a continuity between surviving construction types and general features of a culture: in one and the same process the man-made, built environment reflects and creates the societies of which it forms a part. But is the connection straightforward or more roundabout now in the 21st century? Does the kind of place-specificity and local character that has typified construction until modern times apply at all any longer? And if one can still point to such continuities and shared features regionally, what do they actually tell us about the cultures associated with them? Do internationalism and globalization go hand in hand with the free exchange of design formulae and materials, or is the long historical experience of weather, geology, daily routines and social conditions, despite everything, more resistant than that?

After dealing initially with our own Nordic region in 2012, in 2014 we shifted the focus southward to the Arab cultural sphere which, besides the Arabian Peninsula, includes most of North Africa. In the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, we mainly looked more closely at the fast-growing ‘Babel cities’ and at the emergence of new public spheres. How can Arab and Islamic traditions incorporate the acceleration of high technology and the new transformations in society that appear to be inevitable, for example in the relationship between the genders?

The third and last investigation – AFRICA – concentrates on the remaining part of the African continent, the countries that lie south of the Sahara. It is the ambition of this exhibition to show that there are a multitude of alternative narratives about African culture and history. Both in the continent itself and for the surrounding world, the reconsideration and nuancing of our ideas about Africa are much needed, and as will be evident from the following it is a rather more complex picture that emerges than when the aim is to describe ‘the Nordic’ or ‘the Arab’ (although this already requires a certain boldness). Trying to extract common denominators for ‘the African’ could easily end up looking like an attempt to sum up ‘the human’ – not impossible, but perhaps not so productive either. All the same we think that with the wealth of examples and fundamentally different approaches that both the exhibition and this catalogue offer we can contribute ideas and fragments to a new vocabulary, upgrade discourse and enrich the conceptual world of the individual observer.

To sum up, the aim of this type of architectural exhibition is precisely to gather together images of the time we live in – to let both professionals and experts of many different kinds and the wider public make the acquaintance of new aspects of the state of the world.

On all sides we are surrounded by images, detached from their origins, launched into circulation with entertainment, profit, political or other interests as the motivations. An exhibition project like this attempts by contrast to contribute to coherence, true understanding and the special kind of entertainment that consists of the pleasure of having one’s curiosity aroused. This requires expertise, optimism, energy and a constructive view of the future. We have therefore allied ourselves with the best people we could find.

Kjeld Kjeldsen and Mathias Ussing Seeberg
Exhibition Curators

Poul Erik Tøjner
Director
THANKS

We owe a debt of thanks to the architects and artists who have agreed to create the exhibition and give it its unique character. In the park the visitor meets a work by the Namibian architects Andre Christensen & Mieke Droomer – a fence around the largest tree in the park that symbolically frames the exhibition.

Another construction in the park is a pavilion designed by Spanish architects selgascano and erected by project supervisor Julian Ocampo, Sixto Cordero and Austin Smith of helloweverything. The pavilion will later be reassembled in Kibera in Kenya. Thanks to the entire team.

It was natural that one of the first architects to be contacted was Burkinian Diébédo Francis Kéré, who has created an important installation inspired by his home village, Gando in Burkina Faso, for the exhibition. Our warmest thanks to the entire Kéré Architecture team, including in particular Adriana Arteaga and Dominique Mayer.

For the urban theme of the exhibition it was natural to invite South African architect Heinrich Wolff, who has worked with urban culture in his projects in South Africa. Thanks to Wolff Architects – Heinrich Wolff, Ilze Wolff, Maria Wolff Carew and James Pierre du Plessis.

In the theme ‘Re-Building’ we have collaborated with architects Nerea Amorós Elorduy and Tomà Berlanda on an installation that tells us about their work in Rwanda. We are grateful for their commitment and generosity.

For the introduction to the exhibition entitled ‘Belonging’ we have asked a number of artists and cultural personalities to relate to the question of belonging, and the answers have been manifested in a number of stimulating, highly varied features. In this connection we would like to thank all the following for their engagement: Omar Victor Diop (Senegal); Invisible Borders (Nigeria); Wanuri Kahu (Kenya); Selly Raby Kane (Senegal); Anton Kannemeyer (South Africa), Sindiso Khumalo (Botswana); Mokena Makeka, Makeka Design Lab (South Africa); Ato Malinda (Kenya); Imbolo Mbue (Cameroon); Nástio Mosquito (Angola), Ng’endo Mukii (Kenya); Maxwell Mutanda (Zimbabwe); Emeka Ogboh (Nigeria); Wura-Natasha Ogunji (Nigeria); OJUAFRICA, Eserick Fouché (South Africa); Joe Osae-Addo (Ghana); Diriyе Osamа (Somalia); Athi-Patra Ruga (South Africa); Pume-Bylex (DR Congo); Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Kenya); Ada Umeofia (Nigeria); Billie Zangewa (Malawi).

Questions about contemporary African cosmological and cultural factors across the African continent have required dialogue with a number of academic resources – for example throughout the process from planning to completion we have drawn on anthropologist and researcher Associate Professor Morten Nielsen of Aarhus University and his large network and thank each and everyone for their invaluable sparring.

From the beginning we have engaged in dialogue with experts in various aspects of life and development in parts of the African continent. Here we would like to thank the following: the Centre for Culture & Development/CKU, Professor Holger Bernt Hansen from Africa Studies at Copenhagen University, architect Carin Smuts from South Africa, and architect Tomà Berlanda, ASA Studio Rwanda, who has recently been appointed principal of the school of architecture in Cape Town in South Africa. And we have drawn on architect and chairman of ArchAfrica Joe Osae-Addo from Ghana, whose considerable knowledge of African architecture and culture has been of great importance. We would like to thank all of them for the fruitful dialogue.

For the many themes of the exhibition we have invited a number of people to curate their own narratives. Warm thanks to architect Manuel Herz/Manuel Herz Architecten, Basel, for the story of African modernism; to architects Jørgen Eskemose, Johan Mottelson & Marco Prahm, KADK, for their analysis of the informal city in Maputo; to Raw Material Company/Koyo Kouoh and Delphine Calmettes for their story about the Dakar Biennale; to Daan Roggeveen and Michiel Hulshof for their insightful contribution on the Chinese presence in Africa; and to Professor Dr. Filip De Boeck, University of Leuven and photographer Sammy Baloji for their fine narrative on Kinshasa; finally a special thank you to Lard Buurman for his great contribution.

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A special and warm thank you to the following lenders who have generously made
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Thank you also to galleries that have helped us along the way:

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Last but not least, thanks to all the participating architects, artists, photographers, authors, designers, film makers and others – mentioned here in alphabetical order:

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A warm thank you also to the authors of this catalogue, all international leading figures in their fields who have kindly risen to a great challenge. We are extremely grateful to them for their contributions to the continuing discussion.

Louisiana’s team for this exhibition has made an extraordinary contribution during the preparations for the exhibition. Particularly great thanks to Mette Marie Kallehauge, cand. mag., who has been involved from the outset in formulating the basic concept of the exhibition. Thanks also to exhibition architects Luise Hooge Lorenc and Brian Lottenburger, art history student Nanna Friis, architect student Sara Brinkmann Jønner, architects Janne-Mari Fredly and Mathias Mentze.

We thank the following technical sponsors for their contribution to the realization of some of the installations in the exhibition: Colorgruppen, Hinds ga by Retailment A/S, PileByg a/s, SkovTrup, Petersen Tegl A/S og ZUMTOBEL.

Finally, the collaboration with and financial support from Realdania – sponsor of architectural exhibitions at Louisiana – has been of crucial importance for the realization of the entire exhibition. We thank them warmly.
A land without a people for a people without a land is a widely cited phrase associated with the movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine during the 19th and 20th centuries. Although usually assumed to have been a Zionist slogan, the phrase was used as early as 1843 by a Christian Reformationist clergyman by the name of Rev. Alexander Keith and it continued to be used for almost a century by Christian Restorationists.

This tapestry work forms part of a series charting the Exile and Return of the pantheon of characters, the fantastical The Future White Women of Azania Saga (2010-Present). This is depicted as a cartographic ‘procession’ back to the Lands of the New Azania, a land considered boundless by the Exiled Azanians. However, the viewers sees the borders that mark territories - through changes in stitch texture - and are aware that the ‘procession’ (indicated by the black arrows) could lead to conflict.

In The Future White Women of Azania Saga I turn my attention to an idea intimately linked to the apartheid era’s fiction of Azania – a southern African decolonialized Arcadia. This is a founding myth whose realization almost seems less attainable now than when the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) appropriated the name in 1965 as the signifier of an ideal future South Africa – in what was at least a time to dream more optimistically, largely because the fulfilment of the idea seemed so infinitely remote.

However, in my imaginings of Azania, I have grossly deviated from the original myth, situated in eastern Africa by the Roman, Pliny the Elder, in the first written record of the name (The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea 40 AD). At the beginning of the series, in the map The Lands of the New Azania (2014-2094) I created lands suggestive of sin, of decadence and current politics. Countries named Palestine, Sodom, Kuntistan, Zwartheid and Nunubia are lands that reference pre-colonial, colonial and Biblical regions with all their negative and politically disquieting associations. However, in what seems like something of a response to the ‘politically’ embroidered maps of the Italian artist Alighiero e Boetti, I infer that the politicization of words is in a sense prior to the constructed ideology of the nation state.

Wool and thread on tapestry
Canvas, 165 x 210 cm
Courtesy of the Whatiftheworldgallery Gallery
A polyphony of voices typifies this section, in which artists, writers, designers and architects across the African continent relate to ‘belonging’. They deal with the issue in widely different ways. The point of departure is their own creative practice and place in the world. One relates to the grand narrative of Africa, another forges a link with a long-vanished father, while a third discusses the relationship of his native language with the English of the colonial power, and a fourth tells a visual story of the world’s youngest nation.

Together they exhibit huge diversity and cultural richness. The contributions popping up here and there in this catalogue, are but a few voices in a great river of art and culture that flows out of the African continent. The polyphony is not necessarily harmonious. And the lack of harmony is a point of the exhibition – for who actually decides where others belong?
A survey with random American schoolkids let them choose between the true geographical proportions and a distorted version of the map. The majority chose the latter, meaning they lacked the necessary geographical knowledge to recognize the larger than life-sized Africa.

The reason for this is that the map purposely uses the familiar shapes, proportions, and sizes of the predominantly used mapping projections. Numerous other side-by-side comparisons have been made, mostly with the American schoolkids. None of these comparisons have led to a change in the perception of the world's population or the true proportions of the continents. It is worth looking at this and keeping it in mind when judging the quality of education in the world, and the quality of the resulting knowledge in the clerk of the average person.

The simplistic and too literal approach in creating maps and educational materials is more widespread than one may think. This map is based on the work of Kai Krause, a cartographer from Germany, who created a series of maps to show the real size of countries compared to what is commonly perceived. It is a visualization of the commonly known outlines and proportions to tell the story, even if this is drastically larger than the worldwide misjudgement of the true size of Africa.

This work is placed in the context of a larger discussion on the importance of geographical education and the need for accurate representations of the world. The graphical layout of this map is meant purely as a visualization of the problem, and it is not intended to be a precise representation of the world. The graphical layout is meant to show the relative size of countries and their proportions, but it is not intended to be a precise representation of the world. The graphical layout is meant to be a tool for educational purposes, and it is not intended to be a precise representation of the world.
THE DOOR OPENS FROM THE OUTSIDE

By Mathias Ussing Seeberg

Introduction

The initiative for the exhibition *Africa – architecture, culture and identity* is grounded in a simple observation. Even though Africa is the world’s second-biggest continent, surprisingly little contemporary culture from there comes our way. It is therefore fundamentally a matter of opening a door that has been as good as closed. And this door opens from the outside. The usual narrative about Africa viewed from our part of the world has often focused quite one-sidedly on abysmal poverty, drought, famine, genocide, ebola, AIDS and misdirected foreign aid. Reproducing such a picture of Africa fixes the continent in a kind of (negative) disciplining, even though there may be good intentions behind it. Our image of Africa seems to lack narratives that go in other directions, that seek other perspectives and offer people an alternative to this monolithic tale of woe.

It is paradoxical how many charitable events Denmark alone has mounted to help Africa, while at the same time we can note that most people here know nothing about the continent. Neither its history, its geography nor its contemporary culture is part of our general education. It is the claim of the exhibition that there are alternative stories of the culture and history of Africa that are just as valid as the common one, but are all too rarely told, and which are necessary to the reconsideration and nuancing of the West’s gaze at Africa.

The exhibition, as it takes form through seven themes, is by no means a cosmeticizing of the continent. But the focus has been turned on more encouraging and inspiring narratives that can counterbalance the idea of Africa that is so zealously maintained in the media. It should thus be seen as a possibility that opens up a number of new perspectives for us and offers us narratives about building and dwelling from which we can learn.

Louisiana’s long-standing commitment to new architecture has increasingly made us aware of Africa as the home of interesting new architectural projects. The tendency has been underscored internationally in a number of striking exhibitions by which we have been inspired, including *Afritecture* at the Museum of Architecture TU in Munich in 2013, which focused on a number of social, user-involving construction projects; the Milan Triennale’s gigan-
tic exhibition *Africa – Big Change Big Chance* in 2014, which described changes both in the cities and in the countryside, and not least the potential that can be seen for the continent in the future; and *Re-Enchanting the World* at the Cité de l’Architecture in Paris in 2014, where a number of architects from the African continent contributed to a narrative about architecture and sustainability that involved construction projects all over the world.

In the field of art too we see an increased attentiveness towards Africa. This tendency was consolidated at the recently opened Biennale in Venice (May 2015), which with the world-famous Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor in charge of the whole affair has attracted a succession of young artists from the African continent on to the international scene. There have been similar developments in music, literature, fashion and design: everywhere Africa is contributing to globally interwoven cultural production. Louisiana would like to be a part of bringing attention to this fact.

**ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE**

*Africa – architecture, culture and identity* is the third and last exhibition in a series that began in 2012 with the exhibition NEW NORDIC, which examined the role of the tradition and the phenomenon of place-specificity in Nordic architectural culture. The exhibition was followed in 2014 by ARAB CONTEMPORARY, which spoke of new tendencies in the Arab world with a special focus on the relationship between private and public space. ARAB CONTEMPORARY included the Maghreb countries of North Africa, which is why the current, third exhibition focuses on the rest of the continent, which is referred to as sub-Saharan Africa – Africa south of the Sahara Desert; a huge area that consists of 49 different countries, each with its own special historical and cultural background and demographic complexity. In the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria, many hundred languages are spoken – so many that there is disagreement on how many there actually are – it varies from a couple of hundred to over five hundred. From that very simple statistical estimate alone it is evident that sub-Saharan Africa is far more culturally composite than the Nordic countries or the Arab world, and that the basis and project of the exhibition are correspondingly complex.

Hence, it should be emphasized that one cannot of course offer an adequate portrait of a continent as enormous as Africa that even approaches its diversity. Nor is it the aim of the exhibition to represent or pinpoint the specifically African: generalization remains a problem in itself in the standard portrayals. Africa, Africans and ‘the African’ are replaced in the various ‘cases’ in the exhibition by Senegal, the Kenyans and ‘the Nigerian’, just to single out three specific examples. Throughout the exhibition we take local samples, and talk about what is happening there in the local context, distilled-out and close-up – while at the same time cross-regional tendencies in the continent that seem particularly marked and relevant are brought out. One example of this is the past shared history (different yet comparable) of most of the countries as colonies of European powers.

The exhibition in other words does not tell us whatever we think Africa may be; it should rather be seen as a number of stories about a cultural here-and-now, not necessarily products of the ‘African’, but of the local and the global, now and in potential futures. Or as Nnamdi Elleh puts it in his text in this catalogue: “The physical and the social spaces shown in this exhibition are the arenas for fulfilling individual and collective aspirations in the modern and contemporary ‘life-world’ of African countries”. Exactly because the ‘life-world’ is regarded as a complex weave of local impacts and global tendencies, the exhibition’s contributors consist not only of people who were born in the continent, but also for example of people from Europe, the USA and Asia, who have lived, travelled and worked in Africa, because this approach reveals the inspiration, innovative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit that flows into and out of the continent. The exhibition is thus also about the new that is taking place in various parts of the continent, often in collaborations and exchanges between local and international forces. It can be added that several of the African contributors are based outside Africa; in Europe and the USA – notions of the authentic, the original and ‘the African’ thus continue to elude us in many ways.

In its entirety the exhibition is a kaleidoscopic image of a world we still do not know. Not because its incomprehensible, but because we have not taken the time to get to know it. Our ambition is to give people what, considering the size of the continent, could be called an appetizer. It is to be hoped that more people will take an interest in Africa and themselves seek new knowledge.

**IDENTITY: PERSONAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL – AND A LITTLE AFRICAN?**

The exhibition consists of seven selected doorways to a huge body of material which in different ways relate to architecture, life and its preconditions among surroundings from huts to skyscrapers. Quiet fundamentally, the exhibition attempts, with the chosen themes and the projects and artworks included, to avoid the most common representations of sub-Saharan Africa. Lions, elephants, beautiful landscapes, Masai; these are all part of Africa, but not part of the
African continent, typified as it is by great internal
futures, the familiar and the alien. Co-existence
and modernity, present-day reality and imagined
projects: the visible and the invisible, tradition
in a number of striking architectural and artistic
collectivities in fragile social environments
with different voices in the section, a polyphony of per-
sonal diversity and complexity that counteracts
hidebound notions of Africa and the picture of a
unitary African culture.

The issue of identities leads on to a narrative
of navigating in a present that appears opaque and
fragmented. In many parts of the world people
live with very fixed partitions between different
aspects of their social life (public/private, living/
dead, inside/outside). In sub-Saharan Africa these
overlap and are interwoven. The interlacing of the
social domains (religion, kinship, politics, etc.) re-
fects a need for openings and flexible adaptation;
what one could call a kind of controlled imperfec-
tion. This need is manifested for example in the
incorporation of an entirely foreign building style,
an acceptance of the foreign in the local commu-
nity and the maintenance of co-existence with the
European colonial powers.

The openness is not about creating a ho-
ogeneous sense of unity, but about permit-
ting interactions in a fragile social environment
without getting in one another’s way. A strong will
to reconcile the irreconcilable seems crucial: the
co-existence of paradoxical opposites is marked
in a number of striking architectural and artistic
projects: the visible and the invisible, tradition
and modernity, present-day reality and imagined
futures, the familiar and the alien. Co-existence
is crucial to the way one builds and dwells across the
African continent, typified as it is by great internal
differences and paradoxes, even
within the individual countries.

CITIES – ‘SMART CITY ARMATURES’
VERSUS INFORMAL RESOURCES

The cities are increas-
ingly becoming the scene of
co-existence – and the biggest
challenge. The African conti-
nent is experiencing population
growth in the cities, surpassing
in numbers the same – already
very clear – tendency in other
parts of the world. The local
rural population and refugees
from other countries meet and
mix in the horizontal endless-
ness of the African metropoles.
“Though African cities are quite
different from one another,
these are the main struggles
that most African cities share:
overcoming colonial inherit-
ances of poverty, underde-
velopment and socio-spatial
inequality; dealing with inform-
mal sectors and settlements;
governing justly; forging non-
violent environments; and cop-
ing with globalization.”

Looking at construction projects and
life around them renders visible
the challenges in six widely dif-
fering cities: Dakar in Senegal,
Lagos in Nigeria, Nairobi in
Kenya, Kinshasa in the Demo-
cratic Republic of the Congo,
Maputo in Mozambique and Jo-
hannesburg in South Africa. A
crucial feature of the selection
has been the great geographical
spread and the very different
colonization histories repre-
sented by the cities.

The history, topography, de-
ography and development of
Dakar are quite different from
those of Maputo. Rather than
a comparative study of the six
cities, their respective stories
resemble the exhibition as a
whole: a succession of samples
of materials and narratives that
we have considered particularly
important to describe.

Across the whole range of
these six cities one of the most
salient themes is the informal
neighbourhoods – that is, the
self-grown, unplanned, never
officially recognized and there-
fore also only scantily serviced
areas – which are usually home
to the great majority of the
population of the city in ques-
tion. One of the interesting and
instructive features of these
informal neighbourhoods, as
Edgar Pieterse puts it in the
present catalogue, is that “Ur-
ban dwellers are nothing if not
resilient. Somehow, across dis-
perse urban settings, people are
able to find room to hustle, in-
vest, hedge, negotiate, contract,
support, extract, deal, consoli-
date, expand and continuously
recalibrate their positions in
relation to scarce resources and
opportunities.” The informal
neighbourhoods, which are of-
ten and actually rather mislead-
ingsimply described as slums,
are one of the examples of the
resources that these cities pos-
see. People’s ability to create a
life in the absence of much pub-
lic assistance is quite admirable.
The informal neighbourhoods
are in fact whole cities in their
own right with all the authori-
ties and businesses one could
expect; created by the citizens
themselves – and in reality one
could claim that here it is the
distances between people that
are the infrastructure.

In direct opposition to the
people’s self-constructed neigh-
bourhoods stands the tendency
that Pieterse calls “made-up
urbanism” and describes as
“the decontextualized, elite-
oriented investments in enclave
living, sometimes with impeccable green building credentials and increasingly draped in smart city armatures. As African cities become more and more attractive landing pads for speculative international capital, there is a growing appetite for these ‘next generation’ real estate developments in evidence from Kinshasa to Lagos, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, and Luanda, among an ever-growing list.”

The six cities have their own narratives of making ends meet, of impatient grasping at a flickering future, of youth culture and colonial legacy, of empowerment and state power, of art scenes and the film industry. Composite narratives that bring out the paradoxical conditions of life.

**MAKING SPACE**

As a dissection and examination of the different scenes of co-existence, the exhibition delves into a number of spatial typologies related to everyday practice across sub-Saharan Africa. When food is cooked, when sacrifices are made to the ancestors, or when the elders meet in council. These events are determinative of the form and function of the architecture, and they all take their point of departure beneath the tree, the simplest example of a space – the place where there are shade and shelter. This is where the relations among people – living and dead – begin. The functionality of the architecture is closely linked with co-existence and is quite fundamentally about how the spaces create a framework for a life together with others. Central to this is the balance between proximity and detachment: it is about being close to others while at the same time maintaining a functional distance. The theme juxtaposes fundamental spatial typologies with a number of new architectural projects that take their cue from regional building customs. Particularly striking is an installation by the architect Diébédo Francis Kéré. The inspiration comes from his own village, Gando in Burkina Faso, where he has identified the tree as a central element that provides shade from the sun and at the same time is an element that makes a space where people can gather. His contribution is thus a covering with highly informal seating arrangements beneath it where the visitors to the museum can gather, reflect and meet in an intimate setting. The installation underscores the power of architecture to contain cultural narratives, traditions and dreams.

**CHALLENGING THE TALE OF WOE**

The standardized narrative of Africa, as mentioned initially, seems very much to be associated with the history of countries like Rwanda. For although Rwanda is one of the smallest nations in the African continent, the country looms large in people’s consciousness as a result of the abysmally macabre genocide of 1994. In that sense Rwanda is the Africa in our minds, replete with a horror hardly to be borne. The paradox is that Rwanda, twenty years on from this atrocity, is one of the best-functioning countries in the African continent, with a growing economy and a firm administration that will do anything to improve the nation. It is crucial to make room for a narrative from Rwanda in the exhibition, because this example stands so clearly in people’s minds, and the need for a counter-image is all the greater. This is about reconciliation, education and a general strengthening of the social infrastructure through the erection of school buildings, kindergartens and other fundamental functional constructions. It is crucial to the aspirations of a country that it can change its image, and all the more so for a country that seemed so hopelessly cursed not so long ago.

Socially rooted architecture must on the whole be described as one of the most outstanding architectural tendencies in sub-Saharan Africa: the building of schools, hospitals, children’s homes, women's centres, religious institutions etc. The characteristic of several of these projects is that there is a high degree of local specificity, which means that to a great extent they make use of local resources and try to engage in dialogue with an existing building tradition in the given region. And it becomes even more specific to the place insofar as the future local users of the project are involved in the construction process such that the finished building matches the needs people have locally. At the same time the participants are trained in the maintenance of the project once the architects have left the arena. The socially grounded construction projects are not judged exclusively on ‘architectural’ (aesthetic, constructional) criteria, but must also be seen in the light of their capacity to add real value to a given reality. These projects are an investment in the future: they imply that the future can be changed – and the future is an absolutely central theme across the African continent.

**BUILDING FUTURES**

The Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor said in an interview with another Kenyan writer, Benyavanga Wainaina, that she was incredibly tired of talking about Kenya’s potential, and thought it was time it was fulfilled.” Owuor’s remark is interesting in this context, because it underscores one of the most telling questions asked in the continent: What will the future be like? Or perhaps rather: When will it arrive? In contemporary art one sees great interest in the issue, often expressed polemically in relation to the (in)ability of the current powers—that–be to make good decisions for the individual countries.

African contemporary art’s exploration of potential futures...
has been given the name *Afrofuturism*, but in the field of architecture too the future plays a special role. ‘White elephants’ are what we call often-ambitious building projects that have been conceived on the grand scale for a desired future, but whose reality is oblivion and decay, because for one reason or another the project, in its wish to reach the future now, has not been properly rooted in the real here-and-now of the surroundings. Several new construction projects across the continent are thus criticised for a lack of socio-economic realism. At the same time the houses, palaces and skyscrapers of the colonial era lie in several places as ruins from a bygone age and remind us that political and ideological power shifts can make any building into a white elephant.

One of the foremost ways in which the young post-colonial nations could distance themselves from colonial power and profile themselves was precisely through architectural idioms. Often the young nations moved their capitals to start anew. In the architecture of independence we see the will of the respective states to create great nations, anticipated in imposing edifices.

Louisiana’s exhibition and catalogue do not presume here to pontificate about the prospects for the various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead they speak of the different versions of the here-and-now, and how these are influenced by what went before and what will perhaps follow. This is necessary if we wish to know more about the word’s second-largest continent. And even with this exhibition we can safely say we still don’t know Africa.7

NOTES

5  In ibid., p. 132
6  Interview on Youtube, Kwani Trust 27-30 November, 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzR8nKSexP8
7  The Ghanaian architect Joe Osae-Addo asked me whether the exhibition could start with the words “We still don’t know Africa”, and I am grateful to him for the remark, which ends the introduction to the catalogue.
With the Dordabis Community Spine the South African architects Droomer & Christensen are attempting to activate public space in a village where social life traditionally takes place in less firmly established spaces. As a dynamic backbone in the landscape the ‘spine’ underscores the many functions that the fence has in the traditional Namibian village: it creates connections, it is a pathway, a boundary and a place for activities. The Dordabis Community Spine began as a sculpture in the landscape that slowly developed into a cultural gathering-place. An amphitheatre and stage have been established, and a number of market stalls are on the drawing board.

THE FENCE

In many rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, fences mark the outer and inner boundaries of a village that is made up of a number of households. The fence divides and unites. It divides between village insiders and outsiders, who are sometimes enemies, and it unites the village residents as a collective. Inside the village, the space might be further subdivided with fences around each household and even within the household where it creates divisions between co-wives or between different generations. While the village fences often trace a concave line, the huts within the fence are circular. By contrast, fences in urban areas mark straight lines and separate rectangular and square areas with rectangular houses within. Differing greatly in size and diameter, the fence defines an enclosure that contains a varied number of households. In many rural areas, households within the fence are imagined as being related by kinship, whereas, in reality, members of the community come from many different clans.

Construction materials vary greatly. In Karamoja in northern Uganda, the fence surrounding the settlement is constructed of rather thick pieces of wood that are all weaved together and have the height of a grown up man. The fence is effectively a fortress, which serves the purpose of keeping enemies out of the compound. Likewise, each household has its own fence that demarcates its boundaries in relation to other households just as it serves to keep enemies out. Effectively, this makes the interior of a compound a labyrinth of narrow and fenced off parts that one has to navigate when entering the compound. Some of these parts are deliberately constructed as dead ends in order to confuse an enemy that succeeds in entering the compound. Similarly, all openings into the village as well as between households are extremely narrow, which forces visitors and, indeed, enemies to crawl when entering.

Morten Nielsen
MAXWELL MUTANDA / ZIMBABWE: POSTCARDS, 2015

How do we explore the realities that Africa faces today?
How do we communicate modern Africa to the world?
How do we depict daily challenges the continent faces such as access to clean water, lack of power and diversified terrain and habitat?

This illustrated postcard take you on a journey to Africa, jolting you into a reality where you don’t belong, where you can gaze at local life as an outsider. However, be advised that not everything is what it seems. This postcard is far removed from it’s traditional counterparts – it do not depict a perfect reality – the idyllic ‘wish you were here’ photographs designed to foster envy in the recipient. Instead, it tells stories of the challenges and constraints of Africa’s people, their everyday journeys and the magic that is Africa.

Courtesy of the artist
OJUAFRICA/MAURITIUS: AN AFRICAN SMILE, 2015

As Africans, we celebrate patriotism and pride in everyone and everything African. We love Africa and we pride ourselves on being African.

Africa as a continent is a powerful force, culturally, financially and socially, but has been overlooked for decades. Oju needed to remedy this oversight.

We Africans need a voice in today’s modern world, in the computer-driven present and future: an African voice that supports all our diverse cultures and brings to life all our emotions, passions and warmth as a continent.

*We are not African because we are born in Africa, we are African because Africa is born in us.*

– Chester Higgins, Jr.

Oju represents this new generation that believes in Africa’s future. A generation that believes in what Africa can be.

Evoking Oju’s dream for our continent: a digitally united Africa.

Oju’s aim is to inspire the world; Africa has a strong, proud voice – all 1.1 billion of us. Our revolution is liberating Africans from digital exclusion. Sharing our soul, funk and our unparalleled African smiles with the world.

Oju should be shared and shared alike...

Oju follows global trends but is differentiated by our African voice. Oju aspires to strengthen our digital African-ness and include Africans in the world’s rapid digital progress.

We believe Oju can help to share our positive ‘can-do’ African spirit and to connect everyone globally. ‘It’s our time’.

Join our African journey. Everybody smiles in the same language.
In many parts of the world, rather fixed divisions have been set up between different realms of existence (public/private, living/dead, inside/outside, etc.). In sub-Saharan Africa these domains are often seen to overlap. Incorporating foreign building styles, accepting outsiders as members of local communities, integrating local rituals into Christianity or Islam, even enforced coexistence with European colonial powers (or, more accurately, managing it), can be seen in the light of this strategic flexibility.

Here we present examples from across the continent of the ‘paradoxical’ coexistence of what might at first sight be considered opposites. This could be an artwork dealing with the relationship between local realities and global pop culture. It could be an architectural project that at its core embraces reconciliation with a still present and painful past. Or a photograph indicating the coexistence of visible and invisible family members. Openness to the unknown or contradictory is a key element of social life in sub-Saharan Africa. Coexistence is built on the training of cultures and individuals in embracing categorically different worldviews, judgments of taste, tones of discourse and states of being.

COEXISTENCE
DHK Architects / South Africa: Ahmed Baba Institute, Timbuktu, Mali, 2009
Kudzanai Chiurai / Zimbabwe: Moyo, 2013
Single Channel film, Edition of 5
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Capetown
Wangechi Mutu / Kenya
All you Sea, came from me, 2014
Collage painting on vinyl
Collection of CJ Follini, New York
Courtesy the Artist and Victoria Miro, London
© Wangechi Mutu. Photography: Bill Orcutt
Not Vital / Switzerland
House to Watch the Sunset, Aladab, Niger, 2005
The Mozambican House:
House for the living
and house for the ancestors
Courtsey: Fasten Seat Belt Production
Wangechi Mutu / Kenya
Sleeping Serpent, 2014
Mixed media fabric and ceramic
91 x 91 x 945 cm
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London
Jean-Claude Moschetti / France: Volta Noire – Lopohin #04, Burkina Faso, 2010
Courtesy of the artist
Pascale Marthine Tayou / Cameroon: L’Ecole des Clowns, 2009
Photograph on wood
Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins
Frédéric Bruly Bouabré / Ivory Coast: Alphabet Bété, 1982
Courtesy of CAAC - The Pigozzi Collection, Geneve
Nurith Aviv / France:
L'Alphabet de Bruly Bouabré, 2004
The Swiss visual artist Not Vital began building his first house in Niger in 2000 and has since built sculptural houses all over the world. A characteristic feature of these houses is their pure functionality, as the titles clearly express: *A House to Watch the Sunset*, *House Against Heat and Sandstorms*, *Moon House*, etc. Vital’s sculptural buildings question the nature and function of architecture.

After the completion of the MEKAFONI & MAKARANTA, I wanted to continue to build & the 55 Hausa workers who constructed the 2 buildings were in need of work. That’s when I acquired the oasis in Aladab, 5 Km north of Agadez. The first building in Aladab was the HOUSE TO WATCH THE SUNSET. To achieve a frontal view of the sunsets, the building had to extend over the palm trees, like a huge giraffe’s neck.

No drawings were done but a model in dung. The Hausa were astounded to be confronted with a project of a 4 storey building made solely of clay & they asked me if I had lost my goats, meaning gone crazy. This construction, 13 meters high, was the biggest challenge for them & for me.

A few years ago, a flood destroyed hundreds of buildings in Agadez. The Tuaregs protected the Sunset House with sand bags saying that this is their favored house.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
The story of *A House to Watch the Sunset* exemplifies the capacity to take something one regards as alien and let it become a part of one’s world. It is the coexistence of the familiar and the foreign.

Not Vital/ Switzerland
House to Watch the Sunset, Aladab, Niger, 2005

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**Bopitikelo Community and Cultural Centre** is a centre for the preservation of cultural heritage. It was conceived as a meeting place, a centre for the strengthening of cultural history for a people who to a great extent have been deprived of their traditions, first by the colonial powers and later by the apartheid regime. It functions as a meeting place for the local community and houses social functions that promote dialogue between the local communities and visitors from South Africa and abroad.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
*Bopitikelo Community and Cultural Centre* is an example of how people are working today to reconcile themselves with a painful past.

Peter Rich Architects / South Africa:
Bopitikelo Community and Cultural Centre, Molatedi, South Africa, 2005

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The film *Moyo* is the third in a series that also includes *Iyeza* and *Creation*. *Moyo* – which means air – delicately articulates the moment when death occurs and the breath or soul leaves the body. The woman in the film experiences this moment and cries out *Warazulwa ngenxa yami* (‘You are torn apart for my sake’) as she cleans the wounds of a lifeless figure. The trilogy explores public acts of violence and the role of women in these conflicts. *Moyo* makes use of references to Michelangelo’s iconic *Pietà* and points to the sacrifice made by those killed. The song being sung is an old Methodist hymn that is sung when someone dies.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
Chiurai’s work shows us the crucial moment when someone passes from visibility to invisibility. For anyone who believes in *Moyo*, the deceased does not cease to exist. Instead he or she lives on in an immaterial world that is interwoven with the visible world. The paradoxical coexistence of the two worlds is a central condition of life in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Kudzanai Chiurai / Zimbabwe:
*Moyo*, 2013
Single Channel film, Edition of 5
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Capetown

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Kudzanai Chiurai / Zimbabwe:
*Moyo*, 2013
Single Channel film, Edition of 5
Courtesy of Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Capetown
Wangechi Mutu creates hybrid creatures – often erotic and dangerous female figures with fragmented, disparate historical and mythological origins. In other words what we are looking at is composite women: they look both like cyborgs and primitive human beings – they appear supernatural. The figures are somewhere between creation myth and futuristic fable – the first and the last beings in this world. The fragmented body does not quite belong either here or there – it is a bodily in-between phenomenon whose identity flickers, remains obscure and is hard to pin down.

Serps are a symbol of transformation in many cultures both contemporary and ancient. Serps are also frequently heralded as symbols of rebirth, desire and even fertility. They are often seen in representations alongside mythical female figures as divine tricksters or guardians. The Sleeping Serpent presents a gargantuan female snake in repose, seemingly following a substantial meal (her belly filled with shredded paper from magazines and junk-mail that propagates and encourages materialistic consumption). She is both vulnerable and potent in a position of slumber and display. A host of small objects placed near her resting head serve as talismans or votive offerings.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
Mutu’s works forge a bond between worlds which on the face of it look like opposites: a coexistence of modernity and tradition in a complex present. In many of her works we see a reworking of aspects of religion and belief. The strong belief in magic and invisible powers goes hand in hand with a burgeoning consumer culture.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
The story of the attack on the library is paradoxical, because its function is to protect Islamic culture in the area. The Ahmed Baba Institute is an image of great religious diversity and the coexistence of widely different worldviews.

Timbuktu has been a university city for more than a thousand years, and the Ahmed Baba Institute was built with the aim of gathering and preserving the innumerable Islamic writings that exist in the area. The building has been erected with inspiration from the labyrinthine streets of Timbuktu and is situated between the old city nucleus and its more modern outskirts. In 2013 Malian Islamist rebels attacked the library, and many manuscripts were lost.

The French photographer Patrick Willocq lived in the Congo as a child and has later returned. His Old Colonial Villas of Mbandaka is a series of photographs that show a number of houses from the Belgian colonial era seen from the outside, coupled with a picture of the interior and those who live in the house now. It is clear that the houses are not what they used to be – they represent a long gone age and remain as monuments – or ruins – commemorating the Belgian colonial regime, which ended in 1960.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
The series shows the omnipresent memories of a highly oppressive colonial regime and reminds us of the ideological roots of the architecture.

Wangechi Mutu / Kenya
All you Sea, came from me, 2014
Collage painting on vinyl
Collection of CJ Follini, New York
Courtesy the Artist and Victoria Miro, London
© Wangechi Mutu. Photography: Bill Orcutt

Wangechi Mutu / Kenya
Sleeping Serpent, 2014
Mixed media fabric and ceramic
91 x 91 x 945 cm

DHK Architects / South Africa:
Ahmed Baba Institute, Timbuktu, Mali, 2009

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COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:

Patrick Willocq / France: Old Colonial Villas of Mbandaka, DR Congo, 2013
Courtesy of the artist
Jean Claude Moschetti’s photograph shows a person in a traditional Bwa costume and mask, flanked by grain stores. The Bwa are animists, and their masks and costumes have important meanings and functions. They are used for example in connection with rituals meant to ensure a good harvest, when young men and women are to be taught the mysteries of adult life, and not least when the dead are to be escorted from the visible to the invisible world.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
Moschetti’s work shows us the very specific coexistence of a visible and an invisible world.

Jean-Claude Moschetti / France:
Volta Noire – Lopohin #04, Burkina Faso, 2010
Courtesy of the artist

Sunday in Brazzaville, 2011
Sapeurs are young Congolese men who try to create new identities for themselves. Through a decadent use of fashion they link the towns of the third world with Paris and Brussels and social impoverishment with psychological salvation. La Sape (fashion) gives authenticity and validity to the search for a new social identity that the African town has been unable to give its mainly young population.

In a certain sense La Sape permits the individual Sapeur to define the boundaries that separate them from otherwise inaccessible domains of the world, but at the same time it also serves as a defined social territory that distinguishes Les Sapeurs from the rest of society.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
Through La Sape the young Congolese thus create a potential for the momentary coexistence of a precarious present in city neighbourhoods with an imaginary future somewhere else. At the same time this crates the possibility of coexistence with an inhospitable social environment.

Enric Bach & Adrià Monés / Spain:
Sunday in Brazzaville, 2011

The Mozambican house always consists of two architectural forms: the rectangular cement building and the round mud hut. Both buildings are occupied by members of the family. In the rectangular one live family members, while the round mud hut is occupied by the dead of the family, in other words the spirits of the ancestors.

COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:
The living and the dead are equal members of the family; the only difference is that they live in different realms, the visible (the living) and the invisible (the dead ancestors). The Mozambican house visualizes the coexistence of the living and the dead.

The Mozambican House:
House for the living and house for the ancestors
A historic gathering of over 50 African heads of state in Beijing reverberates in Zambia where the lives of three characters unfold. Mr Liu is one of thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs who have settled across the continent in search of new opportunities. He has just bought his fourth farm and business is booming. In northern Zambia, Mr Li, a project manager for a multinational Chinese company is upgrading Zambia’s longest road. Through the intimate portrayal of these characters, the expanding footprint of a rising global power is laid bare – pointing to a radically different future, not just for Africa, but also for the world.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
The Chinese presence in Africa is omnipresent and the locals are forced to make the best of the situation. In a series of key scenes in the film we witness the dialogue between the foreign Chinese and the local Zambians challenging tolerance and conditions of coexistence.

Mark and Nick Francis, Speakit Films / England: When China Met Africa, 2010

On a trip to Cameroon, Pascale Marthine Tayou took some costumes and masks that were unknown in the area. He gave them to some children in a village, who quickly began to play with them, while Tayou documented the events. Later he also asked the adults to put on the masks.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
The photographs from the event present a kind of hybrid of two conflicting worlds that are brought together in a paradoxical image. This is a world upside-down, a carnival where the poor can be rich and children from the countryside in Cameroon dress up as if in a world of Western affluence.

Pascale Marthine Tayou / Cameroon: L’Ecole des Clowns, 2009
Photograph on wood
Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano/Beijing/
Les Moulins

South Africa is a country with a turbulent history typified by the struggle for freedom of various groups.

*Red Location* was the first occupied black township in Port Elizabeth. The name comes from a number of corrugated iron barracks that have rusted on the outside so they appear with a deep red colour. The place became a battleground during the apartheid years. Many prominent political and cultural leaders were either born or have lived in *Red Location*.

*Red Location Museum* consists of a series of 12 rusty silo-like containers with different memories of struggles in South Africa. The containers were inspired by the boxes the migrant workers used as storage places for their possessions when they were separated from their families in the countryside.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
*Red Location Museum* is an image of the widespread efforts to be reconciled with the past, a past that still leaves a trail of social challenges behind it in South Africa.

Noero Wolff Architects / South Africa, *Red Location Museum, Port Elizabeth, 2005*
Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, but at the same time a centre for film and theatre in Africa. Nevertheless the German film and theatre director Christoph Schlingensief’s visions of enhancing the village of Laongo’s cultural identity with a new opera may not on the face of it seem like the best solution to the poverty of the region. When a storm struck the village and almost devastated it, the Burkinian architect Francis Kéré saw the potential to rebuild – and redefine – the village as an opera town in collaboration with Schlingensief. The funding from the opera project was used to build a new school, new homes and a new hospital.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
Schlingensief’s and Kéré’s project is a collaboration of locals and foreigners that is about the flexible absorption of something fundamentally foreign.

Kéré Architecture / Burkina Faso: Opera Village, Laongo, Burkina Faso, Under construction

Bouabré’s artistic activity was formed by a revelation he had on 11 March 1948 in Dakar. The Heavens opened before my eyes, and seven radiantly coloured suns formed a circle of beauty around the mother sun. I became Cheik Nadro, ‘He Who Does Not Forget’. This was a turning point. From then on his life was dedicated to working as an artistic chronicler: one who describes the situation of the world in images and text. One of the most striking projects was to create an alphabet consisting of 448 on syllable pictograms for the Bété people, whose language was not recognized in the French colonial era, and who could therefore not be taught in their own language.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
Bouabré’s project links two different cultures: oral storytelling and the Latin written tradition. It re-orients the tools of colonial power so they are used for a positive purpose. Bouabré’s alphabet, which can transcribe all human sounds, is meant to fulfil his fundamental ambition: to achieve universality and unite mankind.

Anne Aghion / France: In Rwanda we say ... The family that does not speak dies focuses on the release of one suspect, and the effect of his return on this tiny hillside hamlet. What unfolds is an astonishing testament to the liberating power of speech: little by little, people begin to talk in a profound and articulate way – first to the camera, and then to each other – as these neighbours negotiate the emotional task of accepting life side by side.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
The Gacaca court system in Rwanda is an example of a strong commitment to openness even when this is extremely painful. The film shows that coexistence is not rose-coloured, but rather the best choice if you look at the alternative.

Nurith Aviv / France: L’Alphabet de Bruly Bouabré, 2004
Frédéric Bruly Bouabré / Ivory Coast: Alphabet Bétè, 1982
Courtesy of CAAC – The Pigozzi Collection, Geneve

Ten years after the 1994 genocide, as close to 16,000 suspects, still untried, are released across the country: having confessed to their crimes, and served the maximum sentence the Gacaca will eventually impose, they are sent home to plow fields and fetch water alongside the people they are accused of victimizing. In Rwanda we say ... The family that does not speak dies focuses on the release of one suspect, and the effect of his return on this tiny hillside hamlet. What unfolds is an astonishing testament to the liberating power of speech: little by little, people begin to talk in a profound and articulate way – first to the camera, and then to each other – as these neighbours negotiate the emotional task of accepting life side by side.

**COEXISTENCE PERSPECTIVE:**
The Gacaca court system in Rwanda is an example of a strong commitment to openness even when this is extremely painful. The film shows that coexistence is not rose-coloured, but rather the best choice if you look at the alternative.

Anne Aghion / France: In Rwanda we say ... The family that does not speak dies focuses on the release of one suspect, and the effect of his return on this tiny hillside hamlet. What unfolds is an astonishing testament to the liberating power of speech: little by little, people begin to talk in a profound and articulate way – first to the camera, and then to each other – as these neighbours negotiate the emotional task of accepting life side by side.

Nurith Aviv / France: L’Alphabet de Bruly Bouabré, 2004
Frédéric Bruly Bouabré / Ivory Coast: Alphabet Bétè, 1982
Courtesy of CAAC – The Pigozzi Collection, Geneve
THE MARKET
THE MARKET

The hallmarks of many urban as well as rural settlements are the marketplaces. Market trading is a complex social phenomenon. At the market, commodities pass through different economic spheres: gift-economies, kinship-based negotiations and formalized monetary exchanges.

Aside from different exchange economies, the markets also function as sites of dynamic identity formation, for example in relation to ethnicity and gender. Particularly in weak economies, there is a rise in males entering traditional female occupancies, such as cooking and weaving, which is gradually affecting the gender specification of labor division outside the markets.

With the arrival of European colonial powers from the 16th century and onwards, numerous African tribes were brought together in the large coastal cities where they were later exposed to the influence of Arab labor migrants, who settled and set up their shops among local peoples.

The presence of global powers are widely felt at local markets across the continent. Until the mid-1970s, European colonial regimes influenced the financial transactions. Most recently, the growing number of Chinese settlers has affected the economic and social coherence of markets. As with the Arabs, the Chinese establish shops in the market places among locals, thus contributing to the increase of these huge economies.

Morten Nielsen

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation / Switzerland

CENTRAL MARKET,
KOUDOUGUI, BURKINA FASO, 2005
Bongayi, a newlywed living in Chitungwiza, Harare’s largest township, supplements her household’s income by selling fruit and vegetables from her own garden from this market stall in front of her house.
MAXWELL MUTANDA, STUDIO [D] TALE / ZIMBABWE

CROSSROADS, 2015

Crossroads seeks to design low-cost sustainable solutions for roadside vendors by emphasising access to clean water, sanitary considerations and renewable energy. The ‘vulnerable economy’ or informal sector is very important to people living in the Global South. In Zimbabwe this trade accounts for close to 46% of the economy. However the built environment where this trade takes place is often a result of the resourcefulness of people rather than the careful consideration of urban planners or architects. At most road intersections in Africa one is likely to buy credit for one’s mobile phone, the day’s newspapers, shoes, vegetables or even furniture. These small stalls define African cities in the same way that convenience store like 7eleven or large stores such as Tesco, Walmart and Carrefour do elsewhere. The project leverages the skills of these traders – who usually construct their own stalls – allowing them to continue to create their own spaces.

It is not unusual to find semi-skilled labourers and artisans operating from roadside markets. At this crossroads a cobbler working in the suburb Hatfield repairs men’s and women’s shoes for known clients and passers-by.

Freddy is a married father of two. He is physically disabled and commutes from his home in Msasa Park to sell confectionary in a market near Harare’s main train station.

Freddy’s mainly sells mobile telephone airtime vouchers and individually wrapped bonbons and candies. He also sells loose cigarettes that he will light up for customers with a box of matches he keeps on hand. This new unit allows him to sell and display more goods.
When a new market in Gugulethu was to be designed, the architect held a workshop with the future users. They were very unwilling to have a concrete floor laid, since among the vendors there is a tradition of burying so-called umuthi (medicine) from a sangoma (traditional healer) beneath the stall sites to influence sales positively. The architect suggested the concrete floor for hygienic reasons, and it took many meetings to convince the users. They still maintain the medicine tradition, but in new ways, for example by placing umuthi beneath a crate in their stalls.
In the preface to the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that, “Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer” (Potter 1993:188). While such cosmological principles are considered fundamental to existence, they are also paradoxical in nature; by retrospectively searching for the cosmological foundation of human life, we are faced with the infinite regress of a cause searching for its own cause. Recalling the well-known fable of the turtles standing on each other’s backs all the way down, infinite regress is, in a sense, the manifest consequence of a cosmological thought that tries to think through its own conditions of possibility.

**INVISIBLE WORLDS**

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COSMOLOGIES IN A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE**

MORTEN NIELSEN is an associate professor at Aarhus University and the coordinator of the interdisciplinary research network Urban Orders (URO). Since 2004 he has been working in Mozambique doing ethnographic research in peri-urban areas of Maputo as well as in rural areas of Cabo del Gado, the northernmost region. He has published on issues such as urban aesthetics, time and temporality, materiality, relational ontologies and political cosmologies. His monograph *Bricks of Time. Inverse Governmentality Through Informal House-building Projects in Maputo, Mozambique* is forthcoming with Berghahn Books, Oxford & New York.

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It is perhaps relevant to ponder whether Kant was correct in assuming that those crucial questions, which ‘transcend’ human powers, by themselves remain unanswerable. In many Euro-American societies, there is a tendency to think of the cosmological foundations of existence based on the Greek notion of *kosmos* as the ‘ultimate principles and/or grounds of the phenomenal world and the human place in it’ (op.cit.:4). While such cosmological principles are considered fundamental to existence, they are also paradoxical in nature; by retrospectively searching for the cosmological foundation of human life, we are faced with the infinite regress of a cause searching for its own cause. Recalling the well-known fable of the turtles standing on each other’s backs all the way down, infinite regress is, in a sense, the manifest consequence of a cosmological thought that tries to think through its own conditions of possibility.

**INVISIBLE WORLDS**

Considering the paradoxical nature of Euro-American cosmological thought, it is quite remarkable that sub-Saharan African cosmologies have for so long been exotized as the radical ‘Other’. A few centuries ago, European travelers visiting the continent were not able to find holy scriptures, sacred buildings or organized forms of priesthood and therefore concluded that Africans had no religious or spiritual life at all. Much later, colonial administrators discovered ‘ethnic religions’ as integral to local cultural traditions, e.g. regarding Yoruban or Zulu religions, but they were still reluctant to consider these as parallel to European religious belief systems. As have been documented by anthropologists working in Africa, the
problem in understanding sub-Saharan African cosmologies was that many African societies did not use concepts that corresponded to what Europeans understood as ‘religion’ (Ellis and Haar 2008:183). In many if not most societies across sub-Saharan Africa, human life continues to be guided by an understanding of the universe as animated by spiritual forces, which are knowable only through by their effects (Arens and Karp 1989). Not unlike Euro-American societies where the ultimate principles of existence are fundamentally hidden, there is thus more to life than meets the eye. Reality contains not merely the visible realm but, equally, an invisible world ‘distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world’ (Ellis and Haar 2004:14).

In contrast to Euro-American religious belief systems (say, Protestant Christianity), however, spiritual powers residing in the invisible world are not imagined as supernatural but, rather, as natural forces and beings. Crucially, in many sub-Saharan African societies, the invisible world is occupied predominantly by deceased ancestors still asserting their influence on the lives of the living (Peek 1991; see also Nielsen 2012). In his classic study of the Tallensi of northern Ghana (Fortes 1987), Meyer Fortes describes how, ‘(A) person's physical extinction does not obliterates the impress of his life on his society. Material objects he created or was associated with outlive him, and what is more the living (especially his progeny) continue him, partly physically, but more mysteriously in their personalities and in their relationships with one another, as if he were in some sense still among them’ (op. cit.:7).

In an altered and inherently invisible form, deceased ancestors thus continue to exist as central figures to be reckoned with. In southern Mozambique, for example, it is widely held that when a person dies, the spirit remains “as the effective manifestation of his or her power and personality” (Honwana 1997:296). Death merely signals the transition to a new dimension of life from where spirits continue as real beings to assert their influence on everyday matters. According to Junod, any deceased individual becomes a shikwembu (god) who should be seen as an “exact continuation of this earthly existence” (1962b:373, 376). In that regard, the Changana2 notion of moya is significant.2 Literally it designates the wind or spirit – even air, as people in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, will say. In his analysis of personhood in the South African Lowveld, Niehaus describes the concept as the human spirit leaving the body after death (2002:195, 201), and from my conversations with urbanites living in Maputo, I got the same impression. Spirits live as omnipresent beings detached from their human body, while still remaining on the same existential level as human beings, as is most clearly apparent from their relative limited powers and ‘want of moral character’ (Junod 1962b:425). Ancestor spirits focus on their own lineage and do not hesitate to punish severely those who do not abide by their rather idiosyncratic normative rules.4 Most Mozambicans have two names, their Portuguese public name, which is what defines the individual as a national citizen, and a traditional name, given concomitantly after birth to confirm the relationship with the particular ancestor who is the living person’s namesake (Junod 1962a:38). Name-giving essentially constitutes an extension of the living person (Changana nàvàlàlì) whereby his or her personhood is formed in a relationship between the living person and the deceased spiritual namesake (Changana màb'ìzweni). In order for the living person to benefit from the relationship, he or she must consequently reciprocate the actions of the màb'ìzweni through rituals and commemorative ceremonies in honour of the ancestors.

Through divinatory rituals, ancestral spirits guide their descendants while also enabling the latter to control particular forces in the world that shape or affect their lives. The possibilities for increasing one’s own resources and possibilities among the living by harnessing the powers of the invisible realm is, however, also what constitutes the greatest threat to one’s existence. Not everything is known, and what is known is that power works in hidden and capricious ways. Basically, it is never possible to fully gauge whether someone else is attempting to gain a wrongful advantage by inflicting harm on his or her peers. As Ashforth tellingly argues in his analysis of witchcraft in Soweto, South Africa, ‘unless you have good reason to believe otherwise and only for so long as those reasons remain plausible, everyone must be presumed able and willing to cause you harm’ (2005:66). In this particular context, life was built on a ‘presumption of malice’ where it could be assumed that anyone with the motive to cause harm would cause harm, e.g. through witchcraft attacks orchestrated by ancestral spirits guiding the lives of their descendants. According to Geschiere (1997), witchcraft is closely linked to understandings of kinship, as occult forces always operate from within. Witchcraft is the “flipside of kinship” (ibid.:25), as it were. In the urban Soweto community like in many different settings across sub-Saharan, people Africa live with witchcraft as a constant and latent possibility, implying that a person’s spirit is continuously exposed to harmful intrusions by witches secretly lurking in the community (cf. Stewart and Strathern 2004:79). If the witch successfully captures a person’s spirit, the victim’s
neighbours without whom one could probably words, while living close to relatives, friends and a certain kind of ‘intimate distantiation’. In other other and thereby allow social life to be guided by community can signal how they are mutually required. In various ways, members of the same mechanisms of concealment and distantiation are often in close proximity to others potentially exposes one to the harmful forces when approached through specialists capable of seeing the hidden dimensions of existence. In these instances, witchcraft crystallizes the otherwise unattainable possibilities that are only accessible by engaging with powers which at the outset are ambiguous and imbued by uncertainty even to the expert (Geschiere 1997:23-24; Peek 1991:14).

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY

While communities in both urban and rural environments across the continent are built around the need for physical proximity, social intimacy is not unproblematic. In many African languages, notions of intimacy between people rely on registers of spoken as well as unspoken ambivalences: Intimate relations are seen as essential but, at the same time, it is also those who are closest to you who pose the greatest threats to one’s very existence. This might pertain to relatives, neighbours, friends, state officials or deceased ancestors still affecting the lives of the living. While it would not be possible to occupy social positions in local communities without having to engage with these significant others, they might also be potentially harmful, say, when seeking to appropriate one’s belongings or simply by attempting to cause harm out of envy or vengeance. Hence, in a world ‘whose every crevice potentially conceal(s) peril’ (West 2005:34), a fundamental question is how to properly distance oneself from one’s intimates who are crucial to one’s social existence, but who may also turn out to be detrimental or even lethal. To live in close proximity to others potentially exposes what is best kept hidden and that is why mechanisms of concealment and distantiation are often required. In various ways, members of the same community can signal how they are mutually other and thereby allow social life to be guided by a certain kind of ‘intimate distantiation’. In other words, while living close to relatives, friends and neighbours without whom one could probably not survive, it is equally important to try to conceal ‘purposes, possessions, propensities, practices – and, even more subtly, to conceal concealment, to hide the fact that anything at all was being hidden’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:275). Let me briefly expand on this point by referring to a concrete example from Maputo, Mozambique:

According to residents living in Mulwene, a neighbourhood in Maputo, a household is protected against harmful witchcraft attacks by its family spirits resting under the gândzëló (the ancestors’ altar), which is usually the largest tree on the plot. In several instances, however, additional measures are put in place, as the malevolent spirits might be stronger than the ancestral spirits protecting the house. A sorcerer is then summoned to perform kubiamúnti, i.e. a ceremonial act intended to protect the household from harmful intrusions (cf. Ashforth 2001:213). Ideally, kubiamúnti occurs before people move into the house, but as it is a costly ceremony (approximately 250 USD), it is usually performed only when the house owners discover that they are being attacked by malevolent spirits. Andréa Machava, a resident living in the area, had been ill for some time and despite several visits to the community hospital, her condition continued to worsen. Andréa therefore decided to consult a local sorcerer (Changana nyamu-soro), who confirmed what she was already suspecting, namely that she had been attacked by a malicious spirit. According to Andréa, her father had killed a person during the civil war and now the spirit of this person wanted revenge. Hence, in order to resolve the unfortunate situation, Andréa and the sorcerer decided to make a kubiamúnti ceremony in order to extract the spirit causing the illness while also securing Andréa’s house against further attacks. The ceremony had two phases. First, the sorcerer located and extracted the evil spirits. This was done by the sorcerer physically ‘eating off’ Andréa’s body until the harmful forces were removed. During the second phase, the house was shielded by burying magical items treated by a secret mixture of herbs in all corners of the plot. Whereas an unprotected household is visible to harmful spirits, irrespective of whether it is occupied by ancestral spirits, after the kubiamúnti ceremony it was completely invisible to them.

MAKING SPACE

In many sub-Saharan societies, then, spiritual and physical realities interweave to such an extent that any radical distinction is obsolete. There is essentially no ontological distinction between relationships established with (physically living) peers and those established with deceased ancestors. Still, while it is possible to communicate with invisible worlds, it is not always apparent what is being said. Ancestral spirits are erratic beings, whose intentions and desires cannot always be predicted in advance. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to engage with the invisible realms of existence without exposing oneself to the harmful forces that always lurk underneath...
attacks from those significant others without harnessed without having to endure harmful ties and benefits of social relationships can be therefore have to be made where the opportunity of social existence is never a given and spaces contrasting and often opposing forces in the world. One’s social existence is never a given and spaces that is, for creating physical, social and spiritual cosmologies is the capacity for making spaces conjuring paradoxes that are both perplexing and even unfathomable, they also generate imaginar- y of viable distinctions between the visible and the invisible realms of reality? Perhaps the recent upsurge in the spread of religious movements across the continent should be read as a possible response to this widely felt state of acute insecurity. In Ghana, for example, Pentecostal- ism has become increasingly popular and not least because it takes seriously people’s fears and concerns about living in an increasingly volatile and ambiguous social environment by offering to reveal the occult forces that operate underneath the surface of the visible world. Considered as such, modern Christianity has not displaced ideas about the importance of ancestral spirits. Rather, it has ‘provided a new context in which they make perfect sense’ (Moore and Sanders 2001:16). Invisible worlds exist everywhere. While conjuring paradoxes that are both perplexing and even unfathomable, they also generate imaginaries, connections and opportunities that would not otherwise be considered. What is particularly unique about certain sub-Saharan African cosmologies is the capacity for making spaces; that is, for creating physical, social and spiritual room to accommodate the coexistence of contrasting and often opposing forces in the world. One’s social existence is never a given and spaces therefore have to be made where the opportunities and benefits of social relationships can be harnessed without having to endure harmful attacks from those significant others without whom social life would be impossible.

REFERENCES

I am interested in the concept of skin and race, in the ideas and theories written into our flesh. In *Yellow Fever*, I explore the colonization of the African female body under the Western gaze and its effect on our self-image. In *The Travelogues*, I visualize the land and body as one, combining panoramic photos with details of the female body.

I create a visual diary reclaiming the land and body through my travels, and reflecting on colonial travelogues written by explorers traversing Africa.

Courtesy of the artist
WURA-NATASHA Ogunji/Nigeria
Untitled (Neon), 2012 & Precious and Semi-Precious Gems, 2012

After my father passed away, I discovered a collection of journals in which he recorded his dreams over the course of 15 years. He included several lists of minerals related to his work as an engineer. As I never met him in person, I became especially interested in our creative connection via the sketches, diagrams and lists he left behind. Because I live between the United States and Nigeria, belonging is something that is defined by a constantly shifting set of relationships to people and places. It seems natural that a sense of belonging exists when one has experienced the opposite. The dream drawings create a space to speak about and visualize what is possible when you don’t belong or connect to a fixed way of being in the world. There is beauty in that dissonance.

Courtesy of the artist and Antonio La Pastina and Dale Rice
According to the UN, two thirds of the world’s population will live in cities in the year 2050. Africa makes a strong contribution to this statistic, and everywhere on the continent the cities are growing very rapidly. This theme focuses on six different cities across the African continent, each described in its own way. They have been selected because they represent widely differing geographies and colonial histories. Seen as a whole, through a row of pinpricks, each city tells a story of making ends meet, of impatient grasping at a flickering future, of youth culture and colonial legacy, of empowerment and state power, of art scenes and film industry. Composite narratives that bring out the paradoxes and conditions of life.

Central to a number of the cities are the stories of informal housing areas, because this is where much of the city’s life is lived. The informal neighbourhoods vary greatly from city to city, but share the feature that they have not been planned by a city architect or adopted by a city council – they have been built by the people themselves.
HEINRICH WOLFF
INSTALLATION FOR LOUISIANA

The scenography for the URBAN AFRICA-gallery creates wall space for six cities. By shaping a cell for each city, a scalloped solid form is left as residue. This form aims to subvert predetermined relationships between viewer and subject; a doorway leads to a balcony which places the viewer on display for others and itself. The gaze of the viewer becomes a confrontation with content, others and the self.
HEINRICH WOLFF
INSTALLATION FOR LOUISIANA

A4: Johannesburg

A3: Lagos

Bolts lawungata: Kinshasa
at 1600x3200mm or 3300mm
Kinshasa one store level
Proposed access to project
interiors walk, floors and caret
All exterior surfaces to have PNT01

Gallery V2

Mannequin head height to match height of person
allow for structural back span of beam for cantilever
22mm plywood ends with exposed vertical grain

Paint along entire height of wall above plinth
vertical grain timber/ plywood

Substrate to be curved plywood or plasterboard

All work to be done from figured dimensions only. All dimensions and

conjunction with details, schedules, drainage drawings, internal

drawings.
INDEPENDENCE
1 OCT 1960
FROM UNITED KINGDOM

LABOUR FORCE

70% FORMAL
30% INFORMAL

RELIGION

50% MUSLIM
40% CHRISTIAN
10% INDIGENOUS BELIEFS

POPULATION GROWTH RATE

158.4 MN 2010
179.9 MN 2015
203.9 MN 2020 (EST.)

POPULATION IN AGES

43.2% 0-14 YEARS
53.7% 15-64 YEARS
3.1% 65+ YEARS

NIGERIA
WURA-NATASHA OGUNJI / NIGERIA: BEAUTY, 2013 & WILL I STILL CARRY WATER WHEN I AM A DEAD WOMAN?, 2013

Wura-Natasha Ogunji’s performances take place on the streets of Lagos. Amidst the throng of the city she attracts attention in activistic ways; interpolating a conspicuous parenthesis or a ‘but...’ into the inevitability of the city. The focal point for both these performances is the women of the city: women who put things in order, take care of things, run businesses, toil and moil. In Beauty the women are represented as a binding force or perhaps even a kind of infrastructure in Lagos. At all events the paper work that derives from this particular performance seems to see the women as connecting points or a root network – those who keep it all together. The much more violent performance Will I Still Carry Water When I am a Dead Woman? visualizes the women’s burden for us. Ogunji gives the fate of the women a religious, stigmatic character. The burden is theirs, and they bear it like a cross. In complete anonymity and obscurity.
PIETER HUGO/SOUTH AFRICA: ABDULLAHI MOHAMMED WITH MAINASARA, 2007

The main figures in Pieter Hugo’s series The Hyena and Other Men are the so-called Gadawan Kura, hyena men from Nigeria. The men, who mainly frequent the poverty-stricken outskirts of Nigerian cities such as Abuja and Lagos, have a devoutly superstitious attitude to the life-threatening predators and work determinedly to tame them into something like domestic animals. For centuries the hyena has played a central role in mythology and folk tales across the continent, and in this way Pieter Hugo’s work reflects how tradition and renewal exist side by side in modern Africa.

c-print, courtesy: Priska Pasquer
Nigeria’s biggest city, Lagos, lies out towards the large lagoon area Makoko. Around 100,000 people live in the area, in houses built on poles. The residents move around in small boats, for there is no formal infrastructure in the area. The neighbourhood is growing rapidly, but climate change means that the sea is rising, and the residents’ houses and the local school are flooded at regular intervals.

That is why the Floating School has been developed. It is a pyramidal structure built of wood and bamboo from the local area. The form is ideal for a floating building, because of the relatively low centre of gravity, which gives it stability and balance, even in a strong wind. The building rests on a floating base made of among other things empty recycled plastic barrels. The school has three floors; the ground floor is a playground open to the lagoon. The next floor has classrooms. A stairway on the outside connects the open playground, the classrooms and a workshop on the top floor.

The school has been developed as a prototype of a floating, sustainable basic structure that can be re-used for other purposes. It can be scaled up or down and adapted to other functions such as a health clinic, market, entertainment centre or homes.
Michael MacGarry’s large drawing of Lagos in Nigeria is one of a series of three. The other two drawings show the Angolan capital Luanda and Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea. Common to these three countries are the large oil reserves to which they have access. The drawings are projections of the many African cities with crude oil reserves as they could look in the near future if the oil revenues were invested domestically.

2027 Archival inkjet print on cotton paper
2500 x 1100 mm. Edition 3
WELCOME TO
NOLLYWOOD, 2007

The Nigerian film industry, better known as Nollywood, has grown explosively in recent years and is today the world’s third-largest. It is estimated that a film is produced once a day and is then distributed digitally or sold at the huge electronics market Idumota in Lagos. The extremely fast production time and the low budget often give the Nollywood films an element of amateurism, but they are easily accessible to both the African and foreign public, and have therefore become an important part of West African culture.

Dir.: Jamie Meltzer / USA: Welcome to Nollywood, 2007
REM KOOLHAAS: LAGOS WIDE AND CLOSE – AN INTERACTIVE JOURNEY INTO AN EXPLODING CITY, 2004

With Lagos Wide & Close, the world-famous Dutch architect focuses on Nigeria’s largest, most explosively growing city. Koolhaas shows how the informal, generic city is in fact functional despite the lack of infrastructure. There is potential in the chaotic. As the title indicates, the film quite specifically offers several perspectives on life in the huge metropolis – we follow local Lagosians and experience the city from above in impressive aerial photographs.

Dir.: Bregtje van der Haak / The Netherlands: Lagos Wide And Close – An Interactive Journey Into An Exploding City, 2004
KINSHASA
DR CONGO

INDEPENDENCE
30 JUN
1960
FORM BELGIUM

RELIGION
50% ROMAN CATHOLIC
20% PROTESTANT
10% KIMBANGUIST
10% MUSLIM
10% OTHER

POPULATION GROWTH RATE
85.1 MN
2020 (EST.)
71.6 MN
2015
65.9 MN
2010

POPULATION IN AGES
48.1% 0-14 YEARS
49.2% 15-64 YEARS
2.7% 65+ YEARS

LABOUR FORCE
5.1% FORMAL
94.9% INFORMAL

DR CONGO

80
KINSHASA SYMPHONY, 2010

In the slums of Kinshasa, Central Africa’s first – and still its only – symphony orchestra has been practicing, building instruments and playing concerts since its foundation in 1994. Orchestre Symphonique Kinbanguiste consists today of 160 mainly self-taught musicians and choir singers who, in the heart of Africa’s third-largest city, perform works by great European composers from Verdi to Beethoven.

In 2014 the symphony orchestra went on an extensive tour of England, and since 2013 Armand Diangienda has been an honorary member of the Royal Philharmonic Society in recognition of his work of “bringing music to one of the most challenged societies in the world”.

Dir.: Claus Wischmann & Martin Bae / Germany: Kinshasa Symphony, 2010
KINSHASA TRAFFIC ROBOT
As the city traffic becomes denser, the cars grow in number and trust in the police dwindles, the engineering firm Women’s Tech has developed a number of traffic robots to regulate Kinshasa’s traffic chaos. The constant population growth in Kinshasa is a challenge to the city’s already overburdened infrastructure, and the 2-5 metre tall robots are to attempt to remedy this with functions such as traffic-light arms, cameras in their eyes and a voice that plays back messages to pedestrians about when it is safe to cross the road.

LAURENT-DÉSIRÉ KABILA’S MAUSOLEUM
Laurent-Désiré Kabila came to power in 1997 after a coup against the president of many years, Mobutu Sese Seko. Kabila managed to stay in power for four years before he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. Shortly after the assassination Kabila’s son, Joseph Kabila, was installed as president, a post he still holds. Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s mausoleum seems to honour his proclaimed dedication to Marxist ideology.
THE TOWER. A CONCRETE UTOPIA

Notes on a video-installation by Sammy Baloji and Filip De Boeck (2015)

Text: Filip De Boeck / Photos: Sammy Baloji

THE TOWER

The ‘Tower stands in the middle of the industrial zone of Limete, one of the municipalities of the city of Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Part skyscraper, part pyramid, part citadel, this unfinished and ragged twelve storey building strangely sits among the warehouses, industrial plants, railroad tracks and new houses under construction that constitute the built environment of Limete industriel. Towering high above this dull landscape, defying gravitational laws and urban zoning rules, this uncommon architectural proposition forms one of the city’s strangest and enigmatic landmarks. A giant question mark, it begs for a profound reflection on the nature of the city, the heritage of its colonial modernist architecture, the dystopic nature of its infrastructure, and the capacity for utopian urban dreams and lines of flight that it nonetheless continues to generate.

The proud owner and (together with his wife) the sole inhabitant of the Tower, is a middle-aged man, a medical doctor who specializes in ‘aeronautic and spatial medicine’. In 2003, ‘Docteur’ (as everybody calls him) bought a small plot of 13 m². Assisted by two architects, he set out to build a four storey building. But well before reaching that level, Doctor fired the architects and from there, without a clear plan, he became his own architect (and this is the norm rather than the exception in Kinshasa). Somewhere along the line, however, Doctor got carried away by his love for and preoccupation with the skies, and soon what had started as a modest and more regular housing construction evolved into an increasingly megalomaniac vertical proposition, reaching ever higher into the sky, and eating up ever more cement and concrete. Sacrificing his own finances, health and peace of mind to realize his ‘vision’, Doctor thus gradually lost control over the building site. The Tower took over and started to impose its own unstoppable logic, building itself to its logical conclusion, while Doctor became the Tower’s hostage, its visionary martyr. The tower itself, so Doctor hopes, will be completed by ‘posterity’ (for he is very aware of the fact that he will probably not be able to fully achieve the Tower in his own life time).

I would argue that the tower may be understood as an idiosyncratic but also programmatic, and even messianic, statement on the nature of a more ideal and livable future city. First of all, Doctor stresses the functionality of the building, even though that functional level obviously leaves much to be desired from an infrastructural point of view. There is no running water or electricity inside the building, for example, and the plumbing for the many bathrooms and toilets that are planned on every floor has simply been forgotten or omitted). But beyond the level of its material infrastructure, Mr. X envisages the – as yet unfinished – building as a city in itself, a humanistic project that transcends the city, while simultaneously recreating it within its own confines, incorporating all kinds of people and activities. The Tower sets the scene for a new vertical and autarkic urban community. On the first and second floor a number of medical cabinets have already been installed. They turn the base of the building into a hospital and a site for the healing of bodily harms. Other floors are designed to become lawyer’s offices (on the third floor), a restaurant for all the future inhabitants of the Tower (on floor six), and even an entire aviation school (on the fourth floor). Scattered throughout the labyrinthine building there will also be rooms and offices for visiting philosophers, poets, inventors and scientists. Finally, high above the ground, on the building’s windy top floor, in the company of birds and close to God, is the place for soul healing. The building’s spire invites one to pray, but also to contemplate the beauty of the natural world, of the Congo River and of Kinshasa’s many hills. Looking out over the stage of the city below, it offers the perfect setting to reflect upon human nature itself, with all of its virtues and vices, its possibilities and shortcomings.

Thus situated at opposite ends of the Tower, the healing of body and soul bracket the whole idea of the Tower itself. Between ground floor and spire, the Tower offers a continuum between corporeal and mental matter. Architecturally, these two levels are connected by means of what Doctor refers to as an “ergonomic” flight of stairs, dangerously spiraling towards the top. The main function of the Tower is thus to turn the urban residents into better, more fully integrated, human subjects. In the Doctor’s vision, therefore, the Tower will also function as a tourist site, a place to visit and retreat to, where people will be able to resource themselves before plunging back into the chaos of the surrounding city.

But the Tower does many other things as well. In Doctor’s own words, his tower is an attempt to “illuminate the hole”, to transcend the bare life and the mere level of survival that the city imposes upon its inhabitants, and to turn it into something else. It is, for example, a perfect structure for the visual observation and control of life on the ground level. The Tower is also a watchtower. It is a perfect vantage point to observe suspect movements and warn of imminent terrorist attacks in the city. And thanks to an intricate system of antennae that has not yet been put in place, the Tower, in the maker’s mind, will also operate as a control tower for air traffic: if for some reason, the infrastructure of Kinshasa’s international airport should not work, airplanes will be able to use the Tower as a beacon to make a safe landing. The Tower is also a solid safe haven, a Noah’s ark for Kinshasa’s inhabitants in case of a flood, for example, or the more unlikely event of a tsunami (less far-fetched as it seems, perhaps, for those who, like most Kinois, believe in the possibility of an apocalyptic end time). In fact, the Tower functions as an overall protective device against all forces of nature. In this way, it also ‘splits’ the winds and storms during the rainy season and thus protects neighboring homes. The fresh breeze that constantly blows through the Tower’s many rooms also
makes the Tower a welcome place to retreat from the city’s heat. In the maker’s mind, the Tower thus proposes a strong ecological and sustainable alternative when compared to most of the housing in the rest of the city. It engineers a greener way of life in the polluted environment of Kinshasa. Ideally, it will be powered by solar energy (one day Doctor hopes to cover the Tower’s surface with solar panels), and the protruding cement roofs are designed to ‘absorb’ rain water and ‘breathe’ it back into the city’s smoggy atmosphere. The rooftops themselves may be turned into gardens, where chickens and goats might be kept.

In spite of the Tower’s phantasmagoric character and the moralist and religious (messianic and apocalyptic) notions that underpin its, and unhindered by infrastructural obstacles and shortcomings, Doctor’s discourse about the Tower actually reworks many of the propositions made earlier by colonial modernist architects and urban planners. If, on a very general level, the vertical topos of the mountain, as the physical site of domination, control and subjugation, may be considered as colonialism’s basic geographic figure (after all, Stanley’s first trading post was built on top of Leopold Hill – currently Mont Ngaliema), colonial modernist architecture subsequently incorporated and translated this idea of the mountain into vertical statements. These were gradually emerging in the urban landscape of the 1940s and 1950s. For example, the Forescom Tower, located in what is now Kinshasa’s downtown district of Gombe, became one of the early landmarks of Belgian colonial modernist urban architecture. Completed in 1946, and soon to be followed by other, even more impressive high rise buildings of tropical modernist signature (see Lagae 2002), the Forescom Tower was Kinshasa’s first skyscraper and with its ten storeys one of the first of its kind in Central Africa. As such, it reportedly was a source of pride for both the colonizers and the colonial subjects alike. For the former, it represented the success of the colonial enterprise, while it allowed the latter to dream of partaking and being inserted into a more global modernity. The building was the tangible proof that Léopoldville was well under way to become the first Poto moindo, the first ‘Black Europe’. Pointing towards the sky, the Forescom Tower also pointed to the future. And because some of its architectural features made the building look like a boat shored along the Congo River, the Tower also seemed to promise to sail Léopoldville to the distant shores of other wider (and whiter) worlds beyond the horizon of the Congo River basin. The Forescom Tower thus gave form to new hopes, prospects and possibilities. It materially translated and emblematically visualized colonialist ideologies of progress and modernity. Simultaneously, it must be added, it also embodied the darker repressive side of colonialism, with its elaborate technologies of domination, control and surveillance. Here as well, the tower was also a watchtower, the built extension of the panoptical colonial Big Brother. As such, the figure of the tower forcefully reminds us of the fact that the colonial urban landscape of Kinshasa largely came about as the result of a very intrusive history of (physical and symbolical) violence and domination, marked by racial segregation, as well as by violent processes of dispossession and relocation.
THE HOLE

How livable is the legacy of colonialist modernity in the contemporary urban setting? What remains of the colonial infrastructural heritage on a material level? What kinds of social (after)lives does it still enable, and what dreams and visions of possible futures, if any, does that colonial legacy still trigger for the residents of Kinshasa today?

In postcolonial Kinshasa, much of modernity’s promises and dreams have turned into a nightmare. The city is littered with colonialism’s broken infrastructural dreams, with fragments and figments of a modernity that has become part of an irretrievable past. And rather than referring to the ideal of the vertical, Kinshasa’s inhabitants often seem to resort to the concept of ‘hole’ to describe the urban infrastructure in which they live. On a first level the notion of the hole (libulu in Lingala, Kinshasa’s lingua franca) refers to the physical holes and gaps that have come to scar the urban surface (the many potholes in the road, or the numerous erosion sites that characterize Kinshasa’s landscape). But libulu may also refer to the dark hole of the prison, for example, or the city’s shadow economy. Often, the concept of the hole is used to make ironic comments upon the state of things in Kinshasa and Congo as a whole. Take the following example: A couple of years ago, a Kinois businessman opened a dance bar next to the Forescom Tower and called it Le Grand Libulu, ‘The Big Hole’. The formula proved successful and the owner opened two more bars with the same name in more distant parts of the city. In the meantime, the name itself has been adopted by other more informal small bars and dancings throughout the city, offering a typical Kinois response to the hole: if we have to live in a hole, we can as well dance in it!

But even if the hole has emerged as a kind of meta-concept to reflect upon both the material degradation of the colonial infrastructure, and the closures and the often dismal quality of the social life that followed the material ruination of the colonial city, the question remains how the gap between colonial tower and postcolonial hole is filled in the experience of Congolese urban residents? Except dancing, what other possible answers does Kinshasa come up with in response to the challenge posed by the hole? If the city has transformed towers into holes, how can holes be ‘illuminated’ to become towers again?

REWORKING THE LEGACIES OF COLONIALIST MODERNITY

Ever since independence, the inhabitants of Congo’s urban landscapes have been turning away from former colonial models, and have redefined the spaces of colonialism on their own terms. Kinshasa’s residents appropriated the former colonial housing infrastructure, for example, reassembling and translating it in ways better suited to the local rhythms of social life. Using their own bodies as building blocks, Kinois have designed alternative architectures for their city. Through music and words, they have invented new acoustic landscapes for their city, and in doing so they have also moved away from the colonizer’s language. And there have been many moments of collective rebellion in which the mirror of...
colonialist modernity was violently smashed and destroyed. And yet, Kinshasa somehow also constantly returns to, and remains hypnotized by, the images reflected in the mirror of colonialist modernity. Often this fascination is expressed in playful ways that, because of their ludic and parodying nature, also manage to transcend a mere mimetic reprise of the colonial legacy and of former metropolitan models. Think, for example, of the *sapeurs*’ appropriation of western designer clothes, or the fact that Bandalungwa and Lemba, two municipalities in Kinshasa, are currently engaged in a dispute over the ownership of the title of ‘Paris’ and *ville lumière*, even though (or precisely because) both are heavily hit by constant power cuts and remain in the dark during many days on end.

The same continuing fascination with modernity’s propositions marks the work of Kinshasa based artists such as Kingelez Bodys Isek or Bylex. Both are known for the utopian urban visions that transpire in their artistic work, and especially in pieces such as *Ville fantôme*, ‘the Phantom City’ (by Kingelez – see De Boeck & Plissart 2004: 250-251) or the *Cité Touristique*, the ‘Tourist City’ (by Bylex) (cf. Van Synghel & De Boeck 2013). Whereas the maquettes that gave form to the colonial urban plans of the 1950s are slowly decaying (as are the neighborhoods that they gave birth to), the maquettes of these two artists revive and rework many of the modernist urbanist propositions, albeit with a specific twist. In different ways, the emancipatory and humanitarian preoccupations of colonial modernity, but also its religious overtones, its moralizing framework, its authoritarian and totalitarian nature, and its obsession with security issues and control, return incessantly in their artistic oeuvre and in the form and content of the ideal city that they propose. What is striking in these propositions, is the fact that the ideal city is not viewed as an entity to inhabit on a permanent basis, but as a place to counterbalance existing cities, a place to visit and resource oneself. The ideal city is, in a way, a...
resort. But whereas a real resort such as the South African Sun City brands itself as a ‘kingdom of pleasure’, Bylex’s Tourist City is a more reflexive resort that trains the muscles of the mind. And again, the main protagonist is the figure of the tourist, so central to the Sun City concept. In Bylex’s city, the tourist is not a pleasure seeker, but someone in search of inner growth. This inner wisdom may be acquired in the city’s central building, the Royal Dome. Part temple and part museum, the Dome is a place of contemplation and reflection. It is here that all the knowledge of the world is stored and made accessible. After his visit to the Dome, the tourist inevitably has to return to the imperfections of the real city which he calls home. Replenished with new inspiration, creativity, reflexive capacity and imagination, the tourist is ready to counter the urban dystopia on the ground and to bring the existing city back in balance again, in order to make it a better place for all.

Bylex’s utopian alternative Kinshasa strongly resonates with Doctor’s Tower vision (and in fact the Tower forms the logical material realisation of this artistic cardboard and coloured paper dream). Similarly, the Tower is in tune with a number of urban developments that are currently being built in Kinshasa in the form of satellite cities and new gated communities. Here the Cité du Fleuve is the best known and most prominent example (cf. De Boeck 2011). It is the name given to an exclusive development situated on two artificially created islands that are being reclaimed from sandbanks and swamp in the Congo River. Cité du Fleuve echoes many of the ideas behind concepts such as Stanford economist Paul Romer’s ‘charter city’, that is, a special urban reform zone which allows governments of developing countries to adopt new systems of rules and establish cities that can drive economic progress in the rest of the country. The Cité du Fleuve also replicates the segregationist colonial city model that proved so highly effective during the Belgian colonial period.

Surprisingly perhaps, the construction of the Cité du Fleuve and other similar real estate developments does not trigger a lot of conflict or criticism in Kinshasa, not even from those who are being chased out of their homes and off their fields to make way for these new developments. Clearly, for better or for worse, and in spite of former failures, the idea of a ‘revolution of modernity’ (the slogan by means of which the central government currently brands its efforts to rebuild the city and the country) has not lost its appeal. In combination with an aesthetics that links the older colonial modernist models to the shiny looks of Dubai and other new urban hotspots in the Global South, the possibility of a tabula rasa, of starting anew and building a better, cleaner and more orderly city, simply appears to be irresistible in an urban world where holes have become the main infrastructural units. In this sense, the modernist urban planning ideals are like Bylex’s city or Doctor’s Tower. They do not make for real places in real urban futures, but they allow one to break away, at least mentally if not physically, from the city’s real condition of ongoing decline, and from the worries and ruminations that its ruination constantly generates.
CITÉ DU FLEUVE

Perhaps it will never be realized, but the project is still remarkable and ambitious: a city situated on the River Congo near the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa, a brand new city cut off from the old one. Dubai is not so far away – at least one’s thoughts turn in that direction. The Cité du Fleuve is an image of a tendency spreading across Africa – new cities separate from the old ones or at least free of them. The city on the river is still only a mirage, but similar projects are being realized in several places. In Kinshasa this dream seems rather paradoxical when one sees the condition of the city – but perhaps it is more manageable to build something new.
VINCENT BOISOT/FRANCE: KINSHASA SAPEURS, 2015

Like a modern reflection of earlier European colonial powers’ attempts to ‘civilize’ the indigenous population of the Congo, the street scene in both Kinshasa and Brazzaville is typified by the so-called Sapeurs: decadently dressed men in fashionable western clothing and expensive shoes who aspire to a European dandy ideal from the last century. The word *sapeur* refers to the Sape movement (Société des Ambianceurs et Persons Élégants), which arose in the wake of the successive French and Belgian colonizations of the Congo and the use of haute couture as wages for Congolese servants. The Sape movement spread in earnest after independence in the 1960s, and today the Kinshasa sapeurs serve as a symbol of the paradoxical relationship between a tabooized but visible colonial history and the optimistic belief in an independent Congo.
LEON GAST / USA: WHEN WE WERE KINGS, 1996

*When We Were Kings* is first and foremost a film about the most famous boxing match in world history, ‘The Rumble in the Jungle’, which took place in 1974 between the legends George Foreman and the highly loquacious Mahammed Ali. The setting for the match was Kinshasa, the capital of recently independent Zaïre, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Besides being an account of the boxing match the film also gives a fine picture of the times. It shows fantastic scenes from the streets of the city and how President Mobutu used the boxing match to stage himself and his young nation.
JOHANNESBURG
SOUTH AFRICA

Mikhael Subotzky / South Africa)
& Patrick Waterhouse / England:
Doors, Ponte City, 2008-2010

LABOUR FORCE

80% FORMAL

20% INFORMAL
INDEPENDENCE
31 MAY 1910
FROM UNITED KINGDOM

RELIGION
36.6% PROTESTANT
36% OTHER CHRISTIAN
7.1% CATHOLIC
1.5% MUSLIM
2.3% OTHER
1.4% UNSPECIFIED
15.1% NONE

POPULATION GROWTH RATE
52.5 MN 2020 (EST.)
51.6 MN 2015
50.1 MN 2010

POPULATION IN AGES
29.5% 0-14 YEARS
65% 15-64 YEARS
5.5% 65+ YEARS
Ponte City dominates the Johannesburg skyline. Built for white sophisticates in the heyday of apartheid, it always held more appeal for young people and immigrants, for those on their way to somewhere else. During the South African transition in the early 1990s it became a refuge for black newcomers from the townships and rural areas. Then followed a calamitous decline, and by the turn of the century Ponte was the prime symbol of urban decay in Johannesburg, the perceived epicentre of crime, prostitution and drug dealing.

In 2007, developers evicted half the tenants and gutted the empty apartments, but their scheme to refurbish the building soon ran aground. Subotzky and Waterhouse began working at Ponte, getting to know the tenants who remained behind. Over five years, they returned repeatedly to document aspects of the block, photographing every door, every television, and the view from every window. The commentary in this project does not discount these myths but positions them in relation to the many other historical accounts of the building.
Lard Buurman/The Netherlands: Ghandi Square, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2009/2010

Lard Buurman/The Netherlands: Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2009/2010
Lu/f_hereng forms part of South Africa’s subsidised housing programme which has delivered 2.5 million houses for low-income earners since 1994. This achievement in numbers comes at a cost. Most of the resulting settlements are characterized by monotonous low density sprawl, located on cheap land on the periphery of the urban economy. This in turn exacts high transport costs to access work, education and services. Despite being rooted in this approach the Lu/f_hereng project has made some hard-won departures: A range of house types mitigate the monotony resulting from the repetition of a standard house design. In addition, the intentionally intimate relationship of houses to the street, their proportions as well as the inclusion of verandas as semi-public thresholds strongly contribute to the sense of community and safety of the settlement.

It is, however, unlikely that the original architecture of Lu/hereng will be recognisable 30 years from now. Legal ownership of land finally affords beneficiaries the security to invest in their properties and to customise their houses to suit their needs. For the Louisiana exhibition Africa the architects returned to Lu/hereng after 5 years to document the original 40m² dwellings, many of which are now being used as shops, crèches and shebeens (informal taverns). Some houses have been extended to include additional rooms for extended family or tenants. These adaptations stem from a dire need to earn a living and to accommodate household structures which consistently depart from the nuclear family norm.

Documenting the post-occupancy realities alludes to the limitations and potential of the spatial and institutional framework underpinning this housing approach. The narratives demonstrate people’s need and capacity to transcend the static nature of architecture and acknowledging these lived realities provides a strong argument for the enabling potential of an ever-evolving, mutable, architecture of the city.

Urban design carried out by 26’10 south Architects in partnership with Peter Rich Architects and Prof PG Raman
SOPHIE SHIVAMBU

After waiting 13 years for their house, Mr and Ms Shivambu along with their 2 children and 3 grandchildren moved to Lufhereng from Protea South Informal Settlement. During the day Mr Shivambu is at work as an assistant driver and Sophie runs the household as well as a tuck shop from their living room. Despite not having formal title deeds as yet, she is also busy overseeing the construction of 4 additional rooms, a garage and a bathroom in their backyard which will eventually house their children and grandchildren. Sophie’s youngest daughter, Bonani (17), is busy constructing a make-shift carwash across the road from their house in order to contribute to the construction of the rooms.

Both women are happy to be away from the “cold and unsafe” Protea South. Even though Lufhereng has a high unemployment rate they feel they now own a “proper house and a roof”.

RAMBILALI MOKWEBO

After living in a shack for 23 years, Mr Mokwebo, his 81-year old mother, his wife and 3 young children moved into their Lufhereng row-house. The house is small and cramped but it is well maintained with a hand-crafted ceiling made by Rambilali and his brother. The house is always busy as Rambilali runs a spaza (convenience) shop from his entrance area. From here he sells sweets and snacks to his customers who frequent his pool table and arcade machine. In order to shelter his customers he has constructed a lightweight roof. The ‘games room’ (one of the few recreational venues in the area) together with occasional commissions to make ceilings form his only income. According to Rambilali, too few people have jobs and thus don’t have the money to support him which would allow him to in turn better support his family.
JOE OSAE-ADDO/Ghana: Kente Clothing, 2015

Kente: the untold story.

Kente!!! A cloth that evokes an emotive response from most Ghanaians. This material is a classic product of cultural recognition: we defend it with all our will and might, we share it with the world and hope that it is not abused or disrespected.

Kente is synonymous with the Ashanti people of Ghana. Kente is a woven narrative of Ashanti history, capturing an imperial and cultural story which shaped pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. Many mythologies surround how it first came to the attention of King Osei Tutu the First, the great builder of the Ashanti Empire in the 17th Century. Kente, as folklore tells us, was first woven by the Ashanti hunters who watched Ananse the spider weave her web.

What is undeniable is that it was originally made of material that was not found in Ashantiland or the rest of Africa at the time. Its origins and heritage are linked with silk imported from foreign lands along the great Silk Road extending from Sichuan, China, all the way down to the Gold Coast of West Africa. This is clearly a material that links peoples in a common heritage, connecting artisanship across continents, maintaining the tenacity, will and dedication of a people over centuries.

Kente’s royal lineage establishes a connection between the royal kingdoms of West Africa and the specialized silk farms of the Far East and the Indian subcontinent, a connection that was carefully nurtured by the women of the Ashanti, who traded silk, and by the men of the Ashanti, who wove it into royal yarns. These strands of silk were as valuable as gold, and were traded westwards with the empire builders, creating connections across Africa. The Ashanti received many great visitors and traders laden with cargoes of Kente for royal courts, but none is as well remembered as the great Zheng He.

Folklore describes Zheng He as a great Chinese ambassador, bringing with him an armada of Chinese representatives with the goal of spreading knowledge of the greatness of the Ming Dynasty. He was one of the few ever to make the full journey along the Silk Road from the great heartlands of Mongolia, crossing India into Indonesia and the deserts of the Middle East, continuing to the shores of Cleopatra’s Egypt, loaded with caravans for the Songhai Empire of West Africa. His emissaries reached as far as Benin, Sokoto and Bayelsa, trading in Chinese goods, silk, salt and even ceramics, and amassing a great collection of goods to take home to Nanjing in China, some of which would play a major role in the formation of Asian societies.

The royal courts of the Ashanti were wary of guests who might betray their loyalty for the sake of the dreaded scourge that afflicted Africa for centuries – the slavery perpetuated by marauding Arab armies and later the Western invasions of the Dutch, Danish, Portuguese and British with the aim of building empires. The Ashanti Empire was an African empire, built by the great Asantehene Osei Tutu, the first king of the Ashanti, the great warrior who brought together the different factions of the Akan, who ruled in an unbroken line down to the Great Yaa Asantewaa, the warrior queen whose armies finally put a stop to the British menace and in the process preserved a great culture, represented here today by the wondrous Kente cloth.

The great lady Kente, on this incredible journey from China to Ashantiland, continues her journey across Africa. In Angola she advised the great kingdoms of Mbande and Ndongo. She warned of the coming of the colonialists. She nurtured freedom fighters like Augustinho Neto and others, and warned of the dangers of imperialism and modernity. She still does.

She then went to Mombasa, and on to the Cape of Good Hope. She forewarned people of The Great Trespassers and breast-fed Madiba into greatness. She visited the great kingdoms of Sokoto, Lagos and Kaduna, and they became her battleground. She preached religious tolerance and fidelity. She warned of the great menace of Boko Haram. She consulted with the great Ashanti Queen Yaa Asantewaa and fought in all her battles to liberate the Ashanti from the British, the Dutch and the Portuguese.

She gave birth to Nkrumah; predicted the Cold War. She knew her creation would suffer, from Angola to the Maghreb. Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone were all very special treasures with abundant resources, but hid a dreaded scourge. We call it Ebola now.

It has now come to pass that she takes care of her own. Her mantra is ‘We will survive.’ North West Africa, the Maghreb and the great kingdoms of the Pharaohs were her domain. Cleopatra was her daughter and confidante. She prompted Joseph in captivity to liberate the Jews. She introduced Bathsheba to the monarchs of Ethiopia, and stopped Mussolini in his tracks.

Kente, you are Mother Africa. Modernity has been unkind to you, but you persevere and thrive all the same and are the connecting tissue of our diaspora: Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kaunda, Che, King, Dubois, Makonnen, Lumumba, Nasser, Senghor and the rest have all been clothed by you, as has the Great Wall of the United Nations, as a symbol of peace.

The colours, layers and shapes of Kente design speak of the Ashanti heritage, culture and future. Today you influence great works of art from Kere to El Anatsui. Kente strikes a chord all over the world.

Courtesy of Amadu Baba
STUDIOEAS / SOUTH AFRICA: CIRCA GALLERY, 2009

Johannesburg is both a cultural centre and a focal point for new experimental architecture. Two projects demonstrate the cultural diversity of the city.

During the apartheid regime the theatre scene was a nomadic entity – any box would do for performances. With The Soweto Theatre Johannesburg gets a stage that does justice to the tradition for theatre. The theatre appears with a compact exterior made up of sculptural, organic forms, each of which represents a function in the theatre.

Circa Gallery is an alternative to the white, cubic space of the traditional museums. The building is not defined by firm lines, but had to be adapted to the narrow site on a busy corner – hence the sculptural expression and the name Circa.
ARCHITECTURE FOR A CHANGE / SOUTH AFRICA: MAMELODI POD, PRETORIA, 2013

South Africa has 2,700 unplanned slums, the so-called townships, with millions of residents living without basic facilities such as clean water and electricity. The Mamelodi Pod is a small home – prefabricated at low cost – which is easy to assemble. With its size and choice of material – zinc – it recalls the informal houses in the slums. The slum houses are mostly built with pieces of zinc, found and assembled as well as possible, and the houses stand directly on the grounds without foundations. This creates great problems during heavy rainfalls, so the Mamelodi Pod is built on poles, with insulation of walls, ceiling and floors to protect the insides from both cold and heat. With the aid of solar energy the small home is self-sufficient in electricity, and on the roof there is a rainwater tank with a capacity of a 1,000 litres of water.
INDEPENDENCE
12 DEC. 1963
FROM UNITED KINGDOM

RELIGION
82.5% CHRISTIAN
11.1% MUSLIM
2.4% NONE
1.6% TRADITIONALISTS
1.7% OTHER
0.7% UNSPECIFIED

POPULATION IN AGES
52.6 MN 2020 (EST.)
46.8 MN 2015
40.5 MN 2010

POPULATION GROWTH RATE
42.9% 0-14 YEARS
53.6% 15-64 YEARS
3.5% 65+ YEARS

LABOUR FORCE
20% FORMAL
80% INFORMAL

KENYA
DIGITAL MATATUS

Like many cities in Africa and Asia, Nairobi relies on its semi-formal buses (matatus) for transit. Yet, little public information exists about this kind of transit. The digital Matatus project captured data, developed mobile applications for passengers and planners, and designed a new transit map for Nairobi that changed how residents and government view and navigate matatus. This illustrates how we can leverage ubiquitous mobile technology to collect data for an essential urban infrastructure, give it out freely, and encourage better access to vital information needed to improve the system.

James Kariuki, Matatu driver and blogger, Nairobi, Kenya
Sarah Williams, Wenfei Xu, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Boston USA
Peter Waigano Wagacha and Dan Orwa, University of Nairobi; Nairobi, Kenya
Jackie Klopp, Columbia University; New York, USA
Adam White, Groupshot, Boston, USA
Kibera is the largest informal settlement in sub-Saharan Africa. It occupies a space that is two-thirds the size of New York City’s Central Park and consists of thirteen villages. Despite the roughly $25 million spent by more than 200 NGOs each year, Kibera has no formal trash collections system or dumping site and only one toilet per 250 people. Most families live on $1 a day and unemployment is over 50%. The government owns the land, while homes are constructed and owned by middle-income Kenyans who live outside of Kibera and then occupied and rented by low-income Kenyans. Housing density is incredibly high, with densities reaching 2,300 people per hectare, leaving little traditional open space.

Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) transforms impoverished communities by collaborating with residents to create low-cost, high-impact built environments (Productive Public Spaces) that improve their daily lives. The keywords are: Identify, participate, design/build/sustain.
Satellite towns are mushrooming everywhere in the African continent at incredible speed. New towns, new industrial areas and new research centres. *Konza Techno City* outside Nairobi, however, is still only a mirage; a political vision of a technology centre like Silicon Valley at a cost of 14 billion dollars, meant to establish Kenya as the African continent’s absolute centre for new technology.
GROUNDTRUTH INITIATIVE/USA: MAP KIBERA TRUST

Since 2009 American Ground Truth Initiative has been working on a project in progress entitled Map Kibera Trust. The aim of the project is to map the informal urban area of Kibera in Nairobi. In spite of the fact that more than 250,000 people live in Kibera (the exact number is unknown), there are no existing maps of the city and practical info has been very hard to get for the locals. By teaching local youngsters technology enabling them to search for and share information, a growing network of local data, digital maps and online news channels has been established over the past six years.
DAKAR, SENEGAL

POPULATION IN AGES
- 42.9% 0-14 YEARS
- 53.6% 15-64 YEARS
- 3.5% 65+ YEARS

POPULATION GROWTH RATE
- 16 MN (EST.) 2020
- 15 MN 2015
- 12.4 MN 2010

LABOUR FORCE
- 25% FORMAL
- 75% INFORMAL
INDEPENDENCE
4 APRIL 1960
FROM FRANCE

RELIGION
94% MUSLIM
5% CHRISTIAN
1% INDIGENOUS BELIEFS
OMAR VICTOR DIOP/SENEGAL: SERAKA (MEN WITH UMBRELLA), 2013

The young Senegalese photographer Omar Victor Diop hangs out on the fashion scene as well as in the art world in Dakar. In the series *ALT+SHIFT+EGO* the lush surface of fashion photography is coupled with a staging that is highly conscious of itself as just that. The portrait series *The Studio of Vanities* depicts leading cultural personalities from Dakar and other places in Africa, Europe and the USA. This portrait is of the artist Mame-Diarra Niang, who grew up in France, Ivory Coast and Dakar and now lives and works in Paris.

Courtesy: Galerie MAGNIN-A, Paris

THE ENDLESS SUMMER

A legendary surfer film with a 50-year history. In the film we follow two young American surfers around the world in search of a summer that never ends and the perfect wave. On their journey they pass through Dakar in Senegal, which at the time had just won its independence. No one surfed in Dakar then, so the young Americans aroused particular attention. Today the picture has changed radically, both locals and tourists in large numbers riding the waves off N’Gor Island.

Bruce Brown/USA: *The Endless Summer*, 1966
SELY RABY KANE / SENEGAL: INNER CRUISE, 2013

Selly Raby Kane is one of the leading new brands on Dakar’s burgeoning fashion scene. Since the brand was launched in 2008, the designer behind it – eponymous with the brand – has launched one wild collection after another. Selly Raby Kane’s creations fuse art and fashion with androgynous design and prints that play with both Pop Art and Surrealism coupled with references to traditional Senegalese culture and fashion.
RAW MATERIAL COMPANY/SENEGAL: DAK’ART

The first biennial Dakar Art Show in 1989 was dedicated to literary art. Due to its great success and the absence of contemporary African art shows on the continent, artists from all over the world were invited to the second biennial in 1992 dedicated to the visual arts. Since its beginning this world event has become more conceptual. The 2015 biennial, the ‘Dak’Art, Forecasting The Ordinary’, was organized by 3 commissioners. Despite its struggle to survive due to political strains, this art show attracts art connoisseurs from all over the world and helps African artists gain recognition. It also creates a massive professional network within and outside the continent borders. Together with the Photography Encounters in Bamako, Mali, it remains the only successful art show in Africa lasting till today.

What makes it special are the pervasive OFF-events that spread across the city, its suburbs and as far as Senegal’s previous capital, Saint Louis.

The Dakar biennial art show may not be flawless, but its vibrant and unique energy makes it very much alive.
100 % DAKAR – MORE THAN ART, 2014

A vibrant portrait of one of West Africa’s most lively creative arts scenes, 100% Dakar – More Than Art follows the young artists who see themselves as change agents for their generation. Featuring fashion designers, Hip Hop musicians, graffiti artists, a photographer, an art blogger, dancers and many other cultural entrepreneurs, this exuberant documentary reveals a burgeoning community who marks Dakar as a cultural hub of West Africa and stand for a passionate, collective and creative fight against all economic and political burdens insisting that ‘unity is strength’.

Dir.: Sandra Krampelhuber / Austria: 100 % Dakar – More Than Art, 2014
Lard Buurman/The Netherlands: Place Cyrnos (C.C.S.), Dakar, Senegal, 2010/2012
INDEPENDENCE

25 JUNE 1975
FROM PORTUGAL

POPULATION IN AGES

45.1% 0-14 YEARS
51.8% 15-64 YEARS
3.1% 65+ YEARS

POPULATION GROWTH RATE

29.2 MN 2020 (EST.)
27.3 MN 2015
23.4 MN 2010
RELIGION

28.4% ROMAN CATHOLIC
18.7% NONE
17.9% MUSLIM
15.5% ZIONIST CHRISTIAN
12.2% PROTESTANT
6.7% OTHER
0.6% UNSPECIFIED

LABOUR FORCE

5.1% FORMAL
94.9% INFORMAL
Maputo, like many other African cities, is characterized by its divisions between the formal and the informal areas. These divisions are manifested physically, socially and culturally.

The informal and poor neighbourhoods (bairros) often characterized by slum houses 75% of Maputo’s population of 4 million. Almost all the houses are in one storey, and the access approaches are small lanes. The roads are not asphalted and are impassable in the rainy season. Most houses have water and electricity, but there are no sewers. There are few open areas and few public institutions. Trading takes place in the street area from simple stalls or booths.

In the bairros there are three primary home types: Casas de Blocos, Casas de Madeira e Zinco and Casas de Caniço.
CASAS DE BLOCOS
are homes built of concrete blocks which are produced locally. In the colonial period the local population was not allowed to build homes in permanent materials such as bricks and concrete. Today most of the informal dwellings are these so-called casas de blocos.

CASAS DE MADEIRA E ZINCO
are houses built with a wooden skeleton clad with zinc sheets. Earlier, it was only permitted to build these houses for the part of the population that worked for the colonial authorities. Today only a few madeira e zinco houses are built.

CASAS DE CANICO
are houses built with a flimsy lath skeleton clad with reeds (caniço). In the colonial period they were a synonym for a temporary dwelling for the local population. Today caniço houses are occupied only by the extremely poor.
CASAS MELHORADAS - BETTER CHEAP HOUSING IN MAPUTO

Casas Melhoradas is a Danish-initiated housing development project meant to improve the living conditions of low-income groups in Maputo. The aim of the project is to improve living conditions in Maputo.

At present Maputo is experiencing explosive population growth, and large parts of the population live with limited access to infrastructure, and many spend several hours a day on transport. The distances between urban functions are shorter in a densely built city, which increases mobility and makes the infrastructure less expensive. The project attempts to develop new dwelling types that can make the city denser.

PHASE 1

The first Casas Melhoradas dwelling prototype was built in 2014. The concept takes its starting point a simple modular system linking small units which gradually are expanded into two-storey dense-low housing.

An alternative model was also tried out where light wooden elements were prefabricated in a local joiner’s workshop, transported to the building site and assembled. The house is an interpretation of the traditional casa de madeira e zinco with an improved indoor climate. The houses is raised above the ground to protect it from flooding.

PHASE 2

In 2015 the second prototype of the project was built. The home consists of a concrete plinth with a two-storey wooden house above it. The outdoor areas between the road and the house form a transitional zone between outside and inside, where there is room for cooking, home comforts and interaction with passers-by. The three-storey tower dwelling consisting of two home units is situated in a low-income neighbourhood that consists exclusively of one-storey homes, and thus serves as a radical example of how space and infrastructure can be used more efficiently.

The project expects to build 10-15 homes in the course of 2016.
TERRA PESADA, 2015

Terra Pesada is a documentary film about heavy metal musicians in Maputo. The musicians are part of the first generation in Maputo who have grown up in peacetime after 500 years of Portuguese colonial rule and then more than two decades of civil war. If heavy metal isn’t the first thing you associate with Africa, that isn’t because it isn’t there, but because the power failures often make it difficult to play.

Dir.: Leslie Bornstein/USA: Terra Pesada (work in progress), 2015
Moshanyana is one of the short films belonging to the project Viagem ao Centro de Capricórnio (Journey to the Centre of Capricorn), a small collection of texts and short films set in a dystopian country called Capricorn, in Southern Africa.

Nicknamed as Anthill, the capital city of Capricorn is a conglomerate of unplanned cement fragments and structures topped by a conical presidential office — The People’s Lighthouse. Capricorn’s socialist legacy is the material for the construction of a country where identity is at the centre of national planification.

Moshanyana is an ode to the hometown of the artist, Maputo, based on a series of memories and associations, and an appreciation of the sudden growth of Mozambique’s capital city.

Courtesy of the artist

ANTON KANNEMEYER /
SOUTH AFRICA:
BLACK SCREAM, 2015

As South Africa moves into its 21st year of democracy, Kannemeyer continues to explode the idea of the ‘rainbow nation’ through the incisive satire with which he first eviscerated apartheid’s officials and bureaucrats. Kannemeyer observes that “...the criticisms are increasingly direct-ed towards an inept government which is fixated on the past because it is ‘the only noble aspect of its existence left’” (*The New Yorker*, 16 December 2013).

The debates around the trauma and legacies of colonialism in Africa are another thread in Kannemeyer’s imagery. His works are often in a genre of extreme satire which can simplistically be described as ‘politically incorrect’, a term Kannemeyer regards as reductive. Transgression of our strong beliefs and the sacred stereotypes of race, sex and politics are unavoidable in order for satire to be both critical and playful about themes that often abound in contradictions that we choose not to see.

Courtesy of the artist

RUI TENREIRO /
MOZAMBIQUE:
MOSHANYANA, 2013

*Moshanyana* is one of the short films belonging to the project *Viagem ao Centro de Capricórnio* (Journey to the Centre of Capricorn), a small collection of texts and short films set in a dystopian country called Capricorn, in Southern Africa.

Nicknamed as *Anthill*, the capital city of Capricorn is a conglomerate of unplanned cement fragments and structures topped by a conical presidential office — *The People’s Lighthouse*. Capricorn’s socialist legacy is the material for the construction of a country where identity is at the centre of national planification.

*Moshanyana* is an ode to the hometown of the artist, Maputo, based on a series of memories and associations, and an appreciation of the sudden growth of Mozambique’s capital city.

Courtesy of the artist
ARCHITECTURAL MECCA

Maputo has a rich architectural heritage, still visible throughout the city, from different periods. One example is the iron house presumed to have been designed by Gustave Eiffel in 1892. Especially significant is the Art Deco-inspired architecture which flourished from the 1920s on, with some masterpieces still intact across the city. During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s a remarkable number of modernist buildings were constructed in Lourenço Marques, as Maputo was called during the period of colonial rule. Pancho Guedes, João José Tinoco and Luis de Vasconcelos all designed many buildings that were erected quickly, changing the architectural landscape of the city. Most of these pioneers were further inspired by traditional African arts, and many buildings were decorated on either the exterior or the interior with ornaments that borrowed cultural signs and elements from the native rural hinterland. Recent years have seen a revival of the city, and construction activities are now widespread with many, new buildings going up either on vacant land or as replacements of structures in a poor state of maintenance. This process goes hand in hand with an economic boom that makes only limited allowances for the architectural heritage, and a number of valuable modernist buildings have suffered demolitions – for example, the international airport is now being replaced by a new Chinese-designed and -built airport. Most of these new buildings are put up in an ‘international style’ with limited, if any, reference to the modernism that shaped Maputo. Although an international style is dominant, local architects such as José Forjaz still contribute to the strong architectural tradition in the city.

Pume Bylex belongs to a group of artists who construct their own individual vision of reality and the world. Much like Frédéric Bruly Bouabré from the Ivory Coast, Georges Adeagbo from Benin and South African Jackson Hlungwani (not to mention others outside Africa), Pume Bylex presents intriguing forms that can be called ‘artistic’, which he integrates into an explicit thesis, moral stance and vision of the world.

Courtesy of REVUE NORIE, Paris

La Mouche (vue de dessus), 1999
Dessin à l’encre et crayon: 21 x 29,7 cm

3 Tenues: Es-Cart – Bec d’Oiseau – Baïcel, 1997
Technique mixte, 46 x 59 x 6,75 cm

Chaussure Grain de Moutarde, 2011
27 x 35 x 17,5 cm
For most of the Enlightenment era, Africa was the invisible underpinning of modernisation and western cultural expansionism. This has not been a voluntary role but was ensured through violence, cultural repression and erasure. A crude manifestation of this enduring bloody trail of history is the fact that Africa accounts for only 2.5% of global economic output even though 15% of the global population lives on the continent. Another statistic speaks volumes: In 2009, Africa’s gross domestic expenditure on research and development (R&D) per capita was U$11.8 (PPP$) compared to the world average of U$187, and a Developed Country average of U$756.6. R&D is a telling indicator because economic competitiveness and productivity in an information technology era depends on continuous R&D investments and learning.

It is projected that by 2060 Africa’s demographic endowment will be impossible to ignore because one in every four people on the planet (of nine billion) will live in Africa, in addition to the substantial African presence in other world regions. Undoubtedly, by 2060, a very large proportion of European inhabitants will be a veritable mélange of African, Asian and Arab populations and cultures, to compensate for the ageing population in the North and to ensure economic vitality in an era of new, predominantly Asian, centralities. America will also be a nation of minorities with a radically different cultural median in comparison with today’s realities. Emerging African cities provide an early indicator of what these future worlds might feel like, which is why the provocation presented by the Africa exhibition is such a timous intervention.

I draw attention in this essay to the unique condition, trajectories and possibilities of African cities in order to situate the content of the Africa exhibition in a running discourse that proliferates across the continent. By demonstrating the stakes of the debates with which we are engaged, the implications of the exhibition will hopefully become clearer for the future of Africa; indeed, its cities are not just a matter for Africans but a vital concern for the world.

**URBANISATION IN AFRICA**

A broad spectrum of scholars, artists and activists make a compelling case that the global economic system is terminally broken. Resource-intensive, extractive capitalism is a dead-end. It generates a variety of profound systemic crises that produce run-away effects we cannot as yet name, let alone understand or manage. In the cultivated language of the global political system of the United Nations, we speak of a system that should not be allowed to exceed our planetary boundaries while every single metric tells the self-same sys-
tem that we are failing to adhere, as we continue
to store faith in a global governance architecture
out of sync with the scale and complexity of the
challenges.4 However, the global economic sys-

system is not only problematic because of its envi-

ronmental impacts. It is also problematic due to
the unlimited capacity of the system to produce
and tolerate vast social injustices and routinised
violence in the form of poverty, hunger, insecuri-

ity, precluded access to education and wellbeing
and the constant threat of cultural and/or bodily
erasure. Overseeing and underwriting the inter-

linked collapse of natural, cultural and economic
systems is a corrosive political one that increas-

ingly exists for its own sake, floating away from
ordinary citizens in a soundbite-obsessed bubble
devoid of meaning.

In response to these unsettling trends, there
has been an enthralling emergence of citizen
power and claim-making in all corners of the
world, pushing the boundaries of so-called
normal and rational politics to relish in the pos-
sibility of being unreasonable, being contrarian,
being utopian, being hopeful, and remaining
faithful to an unshakable belief in the human
spirit and desire for freedom and becoming.5 To
be sure, these movements and cultural spurts
are often strategically incoherent and tactically
immature, but they reflect a vital appetite for
freedom and invention. It is important, however,
to keep in mind that the politics of the day is dif-
ficult to fathom because the stakes are not simply
a question of citizenship or immediacy but rather
how to construct a new horizon for the economic
and cultural in a world of diminishing resources,
growing populations and vastly unequal access to
power and wealth.

The nature and prospects of the African city
could be considered against this larger existential
backdrop. Putting it differently, as Africa moves
from being predominantly rural to becoming
an intensely urban society, it is doing so while
the world is aflame, in desperate search for what
comes after extractive capitalism and its und-
tertow: chauvinistic modernism. Following the
epistemic cue of Ashraf Jamal, there is only one
way to engage the African city: inhabit its trunc-
cated futures on its own terms and resist moralising,
sentimentality or the modernist impulse to
improve things.6 On the contrary, one has to grow
a soft heart, ice-filled veins and crocodile skin to
boot in order to stare the African city in the face,
and despite oneself, take it at face value, at least for
some time, before the imbrica-
tion can shift to another level ...

As a gesture in this direc-
tion, I want to lay down some
key statistical markers that
provide a sense of the size and
shape of the issues, cognisant
that one can never really know
what is actually the true state
of affairs.7 Due to space con-
straints, and the broader aim
of this polemic, a number of styl-
ised “facts” and features will
have to do. Africa’s unfolding
urbanisation is historically and
spatially unique, which points
to the importance of generating
interpretative frameworks that
can do justice to the complexity
of these dynamics.8

Firstly, sub-Saharan
Africa’s 62% slum prevalence
is far higher than any other
world region, including South-
ern Asia. It is safe to assume
that as urban areas continue
to grow at a considerable pace,
the absolute number of people
living precariously is likely to
increase over the next few de-
cades making an already brutal
situation even worse. However,
more importantly, amid large-
scale deficits in formal service
delivery, a rich and multivalent
system of compensation pulses
to support everyday lives and
livelihoods. Thus, city-building
is predominantly an organic
and non-state affair, hinting at
vast systems of social organisa-
tion, exchange, oversight, regu-
lation, violence, reciprocity and
continuous recalibration.9

Secondly, slum conditions
 hang hand-in-hand with predom-
inantly informal economic sys-
tems. Most African economies
are lopsided. Due to colonial
determinations, compounded
by an asymmetrical global
trading regime, most African
economies have remained
stuck in a commodity-driven
export model, rendering them
vulnerable to the vagaries
of global markets and con-
tinuously devoid of investment
capital to transition to more
diversified economic activi-
ties. Thus, as the labour force
expands, the formal economy
is simply not able to grow fast
enough to generate sufficient
employment opportunities
for the rich to absorb a rapidly growing
youthful population brimming
with globalised consumerist
aspirations.

Thirdly, due to small tax
bases that stem from slight
economies, most African cit-
ties have by and large failed
to invest in critical urban
infrastructures for most of
the post-colonial era, in turn
coupled with inadequate
maintenance. This effectively
creates a crisis of provision and
affordability. Since two-thirds
of urban Africans fall below
the $4 per day poverty line,
there is no viable economic
basis to address these deficits
at scale. The only (financially)
viable infrastructure markets
are among the middle classes
and business sectors, instan-
tiating an investment regime
that worsens spatial and social
inequalities. More specifically:
 almost all new infrastructure
investments in African cities
go into residential and com-
mercial stock for the middle
class, premised on a car-based
mobility system. Unsurpris-
ingly there are now a number
of speculative bubbles around
the concept of new (smart)
cities and towns tethered to
prodigious highway construc-
tion,10 exacerbating terrible
traffic congestion and mobility
inefficiencies. Considering the
perpetuation of urban sprawl,
combined with rapid urbanisation in peri-urban zones, such inefficiencies seem likely to worsen as urbanisation continues apace.

Fourthly, the combination of urban neglect and inappropriate elite investments accelerates the distorted spatial form of most African cities that derive their fundamental structure from colonial planning and regulation. This produces urban landscapes of inefficient sprawl, stark urban divisions and very poor quality public space. This urban form has a particularly debilitating impact on the budgets of poor urban majorities who have to expend up to 40% of their incomes on transport, stifling prospects of social and economic mobility.

Finally, beyond these socio-economic and related infrastructural factors, most African cities are also saddled with ineffective and unresponsive governments. Sometimes this is due to the lack of devotion of financial resources and legal competencies to lower levels of government; other times, it is due to deeply entrenched rent-seeking behaviour and patronage. Importantly, African democracies are being built and tested in cities. Opposition political parties find a footing and springboard in the neglected slums of cities, creating a perverse political incentive for the establishment to further ignore and bypass slum areas. In other words, nascent multiparty democracy has as yet no necessary or obvious positive spin-offs for popular neighbourhoods in many African cities. This fact points to another theoretical quandary and paucity of debate.

The instinctive and understandable response to these observations is a combination of moral outrage and political depression. However, it is absolutely critical to resist such sentiments. Despite these glaring faultlines of injustice and exclusion, the truth is that we actually know very little about the fine grain of everyday life in the African city. Urban dwellers are nothing if not resilient. Somehow, across diverse urban settings, people are able to find room to hustle, invest, hedge, negotiate, contract, support, extract, deal, consolidate, expand and continuously recalibrate their positions in relation to scarce resources and opportunities. This implies a capacity to read and play complex and ever-shifting environments, capacities which are yet to be mined for understanding, insight and innovation. The intersection of the built environment, contemporary art and popular culture provides a crucial nexus as the ‘Africa’ exhibition implies.

### Making Up Urbanisms as We Go Along..."11

I refract in this section emergent urbanisms in Africa through four naming concepts as a bridge between urban studies and contemporary art. My hope is that these made-up designations will provoke new ways of thinking and seeing that can in turn engender novel aesthetic responses that could push urban studies around the instrumentalist bend.

It is possible to evoke the dilemmas and possibilities of African urban futures around four M words: makeshift, made-up, mindless and malleable. Makeshift urbanism denotes what the literature terms “everyday urbanism”. This includes the routine practices, social relations, social bonds and anxieties that constitute daily survival, sociality and aspiration by urban majorities. In particular, it invokes the urban majorities whose lives are overdetermined by informality – where they live, how they put food on the table, access services and move around. Asef Bayat presciently refers to these practices and dispositions as the “encroachment of the ordinary”.12 Since these practices accompany the lives and aspirations of the majority of the population, it arguably constitutes the primary form of city-building in Africa and as such demands most of our intellectual and aesthetic attention.13

On the other end of the spectrum is a growing phenomenon of made-up urbanism. This conveys the decontextualized, elite-oriented investments in enclave living, sometimes with impeccable green building credentials and increasingly draped in smart city armatures. As African cities become more and more attractive landing pads for speculative international capital, there is a growing appetite for these “next generation” real estate developments in evidence from Kinshasa, to Lagos, Dur es Salaam, Johannesburg, Luanda, among an ever-growing list.14 Even though these glamour projects are getting a lot of media and scholarly attention, they still represent a small fraction of the total built environment investment across African cities. However, their power lies in colonising the imagination of urban leaders and policy makers. There is a desperate need to peel back the layers of seductive gloss to reveal the true urban cost of these fantasies, while using their symbolic importance as an entry point to tell different stories about other possible futures. This requires the energies of speculative design and art to do their work of deconstruction, satire and reinscription. It is important to elide the temptation to simply critique these made-up schemes for the folly that they are on the surface. Instead, what they demand is a creative engagement that plays along in order to make room for much more interesting and resonant possibilities that can, over time, divert the wasteful investments of made-up cities towards more interesting ways of building, movement and living together.

The dominant action for most cities can be found in mindless urbanism. This includes the routine investments and management systems...
to keep the existing city ticking over. It is the predominant preoccupation of utilities and local authorities tasked with providing and maintaining services and operate on a deeply entrenched institutional edifice of laws, policies, regulations, and standards that operates in the background, rendered almost invisible. In this sense it is mindless in reproducing the de facto city, or what Maarten Hajer calls the default model of city making.

In a context where elites are increasingly favouring speculative projects of a made-up urbanism genre, one could argue that it is being incorporated into the default setting of routine urban management. This combination presents the most toxic prospect for African cities. However, instead of progressive urbanists running for the hills, this confluence of thought, investment and imagination should be redefined as a wonderful opportunity for thoughtful, critical and playful engagement.

The final naming concept is malleable urbanism. This denotes the aesthetic and political practice to obsessively search for an alternative paradigm or horizon line for African cities, which can only arise from a deliberate articulation of makeshift, made-up and mindless urbanisms with the intent of subverting the latter two categories in the interests of the first. These co-existing and overlapping urbanisms that constitute the unruly African city demands an agonistic rubbing together in order to generate enough frisson to give birth to newly imagined alternatives. The discourses of urban management, governance and urban order will never deliver us to this space of agonistic creativity. It demands an artful and design-based invocation of new possibilities. I now conclude this brief reflection by presenting a conceptual terrain where this kind of experimentation can be staged.

**SPECULATING POSSIBLE URBANISMS**

African cities demand speculative epistemic adventures. In Figure 1, four potential scenarios are sketched to capture the possible directions of urban development across African cities. The Status quo scenario reflects a mindless continuation of the predominant trends that characterise contemporary urbanisation, as discussed above. It reflects an absence of alternative discourses with enough savvy and heft to shift current realities. Disconcertingly, it is entirely feasible in this scenario that political elites adopt the mantras of global urban development declarations such as the rights-based Habitat Agenda adopted in Istanbul in 1996, and more or less continue business as usual.

The Green status quo scenario reflects the recent tendency to create an enabling environment for international investors who wish to bypass the messy, murky, makeshift African city by building new towns and cities on peripheral greenfield sites. These can offer high-tech and environmentally sensitive (architecture and engineering) environments for the staff of multinational corporations and multilateral agencies to operate, live and work. In this scenario, the political elites can present a progressive and green face to the world without doing much to address the deeper systems of exclusion and inequality that mark the default city. In an era in which architects are powerful protagonists of green utopias, it is doubly important that the design and artistic disciplines speak back to expose the hubris and opportunism of elite environmentalism.

Scenario three, the Smart African city, captures the agenda of genuine urban reformers, especially visionary mayors and governors, to combine effective slum upgrading policies with ambitious smart city mega projects. These can unlock international investment to potentially leapfrog from limited and poor infrastructure networks into a completely different socio-technical regime. It is too soon to know whether proliferating smart city solutions can truly deal with the twin imperatives of inclusive development and affordable services, which is a non-negotiable in all African cities. The enduring problem with the “poverty”-conscious versions of the smart city solutions business is that it cannot address the structural problems of large-scale poverty, irregular incomes, small municipal tax bases, rent-seeking politics and intricately woven informal systems of service delivery that would have to be accommodated in one form or another. This is not to suggest that technology-driven agendas cannot resolve this dilemma but as yet there is simply no evidence that the mindset and orientation of the smart city seers can come to terms with the real, makeshift African city on its own terms.

Scenario four, the Adaptive city, is where the speculative action is. It is the meeting ground where political activists, dreamers, designers, artists, misfits and outliers can engage to critique, explore, experiment, invoke, incite, make, and conjure new possibilities. The design challenge is gargantuan. The imaginative leap is vast. The cultural ask, radical. Yet, in paying attention to the inner workings and resonances of the makeshift city, important clues can be distilled about how the adaptive city could be made to work in an era of ubiquitous technology, mediation, consumerism, spiritualism, atomisation (amid meshworks), localisation and inter-operability. The hard-won intelligence that underpins makeshift urbanism must be the starting point for figuring out how to develop urban services that can reach everyone, yet remain affordable, engender citizenship and
generosity, while also fuelling a rapacious capacity for innovation and economic expansion. The truth is, for adaptive urbanism to get a foothold, we will need thousands of experiments and articulations within and across cities.

By paying attention to the emergent intersections of architecture, contemporary art and identity, the *Africa* exhibition provides at least one staging ground for this kind of speculative labour. Since Africa has no choice but to jump into the future, the experiments in adaptive urbanism that come to pass will reflect the disposition needed globally as cities and nations everywhere come to terms with the implications of a tempestuous, multitudinous and hybrid urban world.

This essay is based on support provided by the National Research Foundation and Mistras Urban Futures. Kim Gurney provided invaluable editorial support.
Sindiso Khumalo is a textile designer born in Botswana and raised in Durban, South Africa. This current piece of work is a collaboration between Khumalo and the London design practice Opendesk. It is a children’s table and stool, designed to function as a gender-free, multifunctional design object. It can be a children’s stool by day and a side table when the child is no longer using it. The print is called the ‘Billie’ print, named after the jazz singer Billie Holiday. It draws its references from the Ndebele printed walls that can be seen in the northern provinces of South Africa.

Formica laminated plywood
In collaboration with Open Desk
Across Africa south of the Sahara the tree plays a special role for the understanding of space. It is nature’s very simple way of creating shade and thus a place where one can seek shelter from the sun. The tree can be called a spatial archetype. Beneath and around the tree social life takes place, and this too is where the links between the visible and the invisible worlds are maintained. The two worlds are regarded as equal, and this view has also left its mark on the architecture in different regions. The theme unfolds a range of actions and events that forge connections between the two worlds, and which demonstrate the will to make spaces for co-existence with the deceased ancestors as well as with other people – neighbours, friends, enemies. This theme also shows examples of how modern architecture interprets original forms and building techniques.
In the vast barren landscapes of the southern Kalahari, Sociable Weaver Birds assume ownership of the telephone poles that cut across their habitat, as well as other manmade structures. Their burgeoning nests are at once inertly statuesque and teeming with life, combining nests of many birds. The nests resemble a pile of hay with entrance holes placed underneath in order to deter nest invaders. The twigs and grass collected to build these nests combine to give strangely recognizable personalities to the otherwise inanimate poles. In often extreme climate circumstances, shifting from intense heat during the day to cold nights, the birds are protected by their sophisticated engineering skills.

Courtesy of the artist
Peter Rich Architects / South Africa

MAPUNGUBWE INTERPRETATION CENTRE, LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA, 2010

The centre is built close to the archaeological site that is the focus area for the centre. To prevent the creation of a visual link with any one tribe rather than another, the architecture does not refer to a local building custom, but strives for complete integration in the landscape. The masonry vaults are therefore not directly typical of the area, but represent an ancient technique known from North Africa. A series of vaulted spaces are organized with a point of origin in a number of triangles which create the route through the spaces at the ground plan. The triangle has a specific symbolic value in the Venda culture that has left its mark on the area. Among other things, triangles carved in stone have been found in the area. The vaults imitate caves in the landscape which also have a meaning for the Venda people. The caves were used as homes as well as for storage and ceremonies. The vaults, which are covered with sandstone from the area, have been built on the rock faces, without excavation or other changes in the landscape.
NEW ARTIST RESIDENCY, SINTHIAN, SENEGAL 2015

The building has been constructed with local materials by local craftsmen with their knowledge of building in bamboo, brick and thatch. Traditional craft techniques and the formal idiom characteristic of the original architecture in this region of Senegal are reinterpreted here. The collection of rainwater in the roof construction is a tradition in among other places the Casamance region in Senegal. The traditional *impluvium houses* consist of a circular central building where rainwater is collected in large pots through a hole in the roof. Around these lies a ring of small circular houses.

In this project the traditional thatch has been twisted and drawn to form a more sculptural covering of two very open spaces, It is possible to collect rainwater amounting to 40% of the residents’ water consumption.
Impluvium Houses, Casamance, Senegal
Architecture & Vision / Italy

WARKA WATER, ETHIOPIA, 2014

In the highlands of Ethiopia people are living without access to running water and with several hours to the nearest ponds, which are often contaminated. Warka Water is a water collector created by biomimicry – an imitation of nature’s own way of collecting water: such as for instance beetles’ shells, lotus flowers, spider webs.

The name originates from the Warka-tree, a huge fig tree which often functions as an important gathering place of the rural societies in Ethiopia. Warka Water is both a water tank and a gathering place.

Warka Water is 10 metres high and the load structure is made of bamboo with a web of ropes made of fibres from the banana tree. An inner web of bio-plastic harvesting dew, fog and rain-water collects up to a 100 litres per day. A canopy provides shade imitating the top of the Warka-tree under which the community is gathering.
KEY DETAILS OF WARKA WATER 3.2

Daily water collection: 13 to 26 gallons annual average
Water tank storage: 800 gallons
Construction: 4 days, 6 people (by hand, no electrical power machinery required)
Assembly: 3 hours, 4 people.
Weight: 132 pounds
Materials: Bamboo, hemp, metal pins, bio-plastic
Dimensions: Height 31ft - Footprint Ø 12 ft
Surface Area: Mesh 323 sq ft, Collector: 87 sq ft, Canopy 936 sq ft
Cost: ~ $1,000 (production in Ethiopia)
Maintenance: easy to be maintained, cleaned and repaired)
The hospital is built up with a variety of domes; some are quite simple, others are more complex in terms of construction technique. The dome is not a form normally associated with the region’s dry desert climate, where flat roofs and tents are most common.

The aim has been to bring a new construction technique to the area that could use available materials and whose form could be repeated with variations. The bricks have been made on the spot by local craftsmen, who have also learned the construction techniques for the various domes.

The ground plan for the hospital has clear associations with the traditional circular hut and the organization of villages in circular patterns that typifies many regions in sub-Saharan Africa. Enclaves and passages, however, form a more ramified system, since the domes are placed internally in relation to the various wards of the hospital which require isolation.

The great majority of spaces are naturally ventilated. Only a few are hermetically sealed for hygienic reasons and have air-conditioning.
THE RED PEPPER HOUSE, LAMU, KENYA, 2009

The hotel in Lamu has a special relationship with the local building custom through its interpretation of the traditional *makuti* roof. *Makuti* is bunches of leaves from coconut palms woven together and is typically seen along the Kenyan coast. The leaves are used when they have withered and fallen from the palms, and no real harvesting is necessary. In this way the locals do not deplete the palm stocks and do not damage the natural ecosystem of the palms. The layout plan has been conceived on the basis of a wish to preserve all the trees in the dense forest. Narrow and broad spaces therefore alternate as a result of the natural clearings. The spaces arise as a result of the covering, and there are walls in just a few places. The construction is done manually by local artisans with local materials such as wood and corals.
MAKING SPACE

Being close to other human beings is often a precondition for establishing a viable social existence. Feelings of closeness and intimacy seem to arise simply through physical proximity; social bonds are created between people living close to one another. Indeed, although kinship connotes a relationship based on blood and is therefore a biological given, it is something that people work with to such an extent that physical promixity becomes expressed in kinship terms: my neighbor is my brother; my landlord is my father, my boss is my mother.

In both urban and rural environments across sub-Saharan Africa, communities are built around the need for physical proximity. And still, intimacy is not unproblematic. Intimate relations are seen as essential but, at the same time, it is also those who are closest to you who pose the greatest threats to one’s very existence. This might pertain to relatives, neighbors, friends, state officials or even deceased ancestors still affecting the lives of the living. They are all crucial to one’s social existence but might, equally, be potentially harmful when seeking to appropriate your belongings or simply by attempting to hurt you out of envy or vengeance.

Thus the crucial question is how to make physical spaces that accommodate the presence of others, who are crucial to one’s social existence but to whom one needs to maintain a functional distance. When physical proximity essentially equals peril, the challenge that people face is how to allow for distance and nearness to exist simultaneously. To make space designates the process of creating a physical, social and spiritual room that will accommodate the coexistence of contrasting and often opposing forces in world.

SEPARATION

CLEARINGS

The clearing of land does not merely serve to prepare the soil for habitational or agricultural use; it also establishes a crucial distinction by which social life is organised. Unknown dangers lurk in the wilderness. In order to create a relatively safe space, land therefore has to be cleared and kept tidy. By clearing land, the cultivated is thus separated from the uncultivated, the inside from the outside and the visible from the invisible.

FENCES

In both rural and urban areas, fences mark the outer and inner boundaries of a community that is made up of a number of households. The fence both divides and unites. It divides between village insiders and outsiders, who are sometimes enemies, and it unites the village residents internally as a collective. Village fences often trace concave lines with circular huts within. By contrast, fences in urban areas mark straight lines with rectangular houses within.
COEXISTENCE

LOGGINGS
In the forests of south-east Africa, Chinese logging companies are cutting down much-coveted hardwood to be exported to Asia and Europe. Logging teams usually consist of local labourers and a few Chinese superiors, who live together in highly remote areas for extended periods of time. Still, despite the close physical proximity, verbal communication is often reduced to an absolute minimum. Very few Chinese superiors speak English or any African language and local laborers rarely understand Chinese.

SETTLEMENT
In many rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, a settlement is also a cosmological universe organised around lineage-based principles. Traditionally, settlements were often physically organized as concentric circles around a centre where the cattle were enclosed within a fence. With the increasing presence of foreigners, local housing strategies have changed and with that also the structuring of settlements, such as the introduction of rectangular buildings.
COMMEMORATIONS

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, death does not indicate the final termination of a human being’s existence, but merely a leap from the visible to the invisible dimensions of life. Through commemorative ceremonies and divinatory rituals, relations between the living and the dead are reproduced. Living family members may ask favours from their deceased ancestors who, in return, may ask descendants to fulfil certain obligatory tasks. By so doing, deceased ancestors continue to affect and oftentimes even guide the lives of their living descendants.

HOUSES

While many urbanites in sub-Saharan Africa feel a sense of belonging to places outside of the city (e.g. their natal home), a house is the place where they live. It fulfils the need for permanent shelter, privacy and intimacy. In many lineage-based societies, kinship is made not merely on the basis of descent but also out of ties to land, locality and houses that endure through time. And, still, many houses are never completed. As economic and personal conditions change, building a house might become a process that goes on for as long as people live in them.
Irrespective of scale and scope, conflict resolution is an on-going process, which rarely has a final closure. Through conflicts and conflict resolution, a society’s social norms as well as its inconsistencies and tensions are brought to the fore. While affording a platform for reducing collective anxieties and strife, conflict resolution might therefore expose hidden tensions and allow disputes to flare up with increased force and intensity.

Public squares are open spaces where members of a society meet outside the domain of their private homes. In sub-Saharan African communities based on face-to-face encounters, squares function as outdoor village halls, where disputes are resolved and decisions concerning the collective are made. In urban areas, squares also serve as a platform for publicly commenting on and criticizing incumbent power holders. In public square political messages can be communicated to a wide and often global audience.
CONNECTIONS

REBURIALS

The civil war in Northern Uganda (1986-2006) displaced most of the population from their home villages into massive camps. Given the intimate connection between a family’s ancestral land, the ancestor graves and the family’s social identity, the displacement was devastating. At the end of the war, people were faced with the huge task of reburying family members in the home villages and thereby restore the connection between deceased ancestors, living descendants and the land that they consider as their home.

PATHWAYS

Through any natural or built environment populated by humans, there are pathways by which people move. Across the African continent, societies are structured by the ongoing movement of people caused either by the search of new opportunities elsewhere or the attempt to escape untenable social, environmental or political conditions. Or simply by the many everyday movements between different localities in order to secure a viable subsistence.
The architecture that came with colonialism—square houses with stone walls and red-tiled roofs, or corrugated iron roofs—tended to assume that a life was lived within the house, the internal space. The external space, the well-trimmed hedges enclosing green lawns, was more decoration than lived space. Of course there was beer-drinking on the verandah, or occasional tea parties in the yard, but in the main the front and back yards were to be seen, admired but not to be trodden upon.

This is what they called ‘the modern house’, supposedly more hygienic, because it had glass windows, and many of them, in contrast to the pre-colonial huts that were often mud-walled, grass-thatched, with tiny windows if any. Colonial spokesmen often talked as if they came to deliver Africa from the hut: grass-thatched, windowless, and full of smoke.

As I have described in my memoir, *Dreams in a Time of War*, I grew up in a large family. There were four huts, four granaries, in a semi-circle enclosing a big yard. The huts were adequately spaced. Cattle enclosures were outside the area occupied by the huts, the granaries and the big yard. What I remember of my childhood is a life hardly ever lived inside the huts. Of course, in the evenings we would gather in one of the huts of any of our mothers, for evenings of storytelling. But otherwise, except for bedtime, real life was lived in the communal big yard.

Every morning, we children would stream out from our different huts to play in the common yard. Of course the men and women and the older kids would already have left to till the land or graze cattle and goats. But when they returned, we would all gather in the yard in different groups and activities. At weekends girls from the neighborhood would visit, and the courtyard would become a vast hair salon with pairs or trios of girls doing each other’s hair, often competing to see what different hair sculptures they could make.

The yard was also often used as a gathering place for elders, either just drinking and deliberating, or else settling family and inter-family disputes.

African architecture, in other words, involved space. Plenty of space. Space defined it in every way. The houses had breathing space between them. Trees and other plants would often surround the entire household, thus ensuring continuous fresh air. The polluted air of the modern city with the tight back-to-back or side-to-side houses of the crowded modern city was the architecture that came with colonial modernity.

Some years ago when I designed my house at Gitogothi Limuru, Kenya, I tried to recreate or at least imitate that sense of space. I wanted the yard to be an integral part of the entire structure, part of the entire living space. I used stone and imitation tiles, not mud and grass, but the shapes were inspired by the roundevals of the traditional Gikuyu architecture. I could not do more with it because I had to leave the country, forced into exile by the political climate thirty-five years ago; but I hope to return and continue experimenting with African architecture, to create a modernity inspired by and rooted in African traditions.
Kéré Architecture / Burkina Faso

LOUISIANA CANOPY, 2015
KÉRÉ ARCHITECTURE / BURKINA FASO: LOUISIANA CANOPY

Taking cues from traditional architectural forms and practices from Francis Kéré’s home village in rural West Africa, this architectural installation aims to highlight the importance of shading and sheltering as a form of protection from over-exposure to the sun as well as an inherent space-making device for community gathering. The design makes use of two major elements that are characteristic of Francis Kéré’s work: an overhanging ceiling component and an open communal gathering space underneath.

The entire installation is made of debarked willow branches and logs originating from the Nordic context in which the installation is built. The bundled aesthetic of the design references the peculiar growth structure of an iconic tree that is indigenous to various parts of Africa, the great Baobab. Common in African as well as Nordic mythologies, the powerful symbol of the great tree is used as a bridge between two seemingly contrasting cultures. The articulated ceiling structure is dramatized by a programmed daylighting system that mimics the arc and movement of the sun throughout the day. The result is a slightly shifting shadow which indicates a loose boundary on the floor of the gallery. Just like the canopy of a great tree, the installation provides the most basic form of shelter from the elements while remaining open and accessible. The wooden terrain below the canopy provides informal seating where visitors can gather, reflect, and encounter each other in an intimate setting. The installation highlights the powerful ability of architecture to embody cultural narratives, traditions, and aspirations.
FRANCIS KÉRÉ:

There is a special place in my home village of Gando, where the elders gather to discuss important matters. The seating place of the village elders is a small gathering place made of wood and plant fibers.

From an architectural perspective, it appears almost insignificant. It is completely open with no walls or doors. The thatch roof creates a shadow on the ground which makes up the boundary between inside and outside. As children, my friends and I were allowed to enter and play inside except for when the elders gathered to discuss important village matters. When this happens, the nature of the space completely changes and the children understand that they are no longer allowed inside. When the elders gather, the entire village becomes aware of what is happening because it is completely open for everyone to see.

Suddenly the space becomes very significant and everyone begins to gather around to see what is happening. In this way, the event has the magic power to expand this little place to include the whole community.

When we were young, my friends and I gathered around this place with a sense of wonder, respect, joy and excitement. This image is powerful because it reconnects me to all of those feelings and traditions. The natural materials and simple design of the structure tells the story of our unique way of living. We learned to live with the natural cycles of nature, working with what is available to make our food and houses. This knowledge must be passed down from the elders to the children for the survival of the community.

The seating place of the elders connects my people to our past but also to our future. I carry this place with me even when I am far away from Gando and it resonates in my architecture. The seating place of the village elders is like the heart of the village, the spirit of the people. It reminds me of the Baobab, the ancient tree that is able to survive in the most difficult conditions. The strong foundation of the tree allows the branches to grow outward, extending into the limitless space of the desert.
Plan of Typical Settlement
Burkina Faso

- main entry
- individual
- private courtyard
- multi-family
- shared courtyard
- single-family

**Reflection**
- private / introspective

**Encounter**
- semi-private
- intimate conversation

**Story-telling**
- semi-public
- social conversation

**Gathering**
- public
- social gathering
I am African.

I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. I am privileged to say how the dramatic shapes of the Drakensberg, the soil-coloured waters of the Lekoa, Igqili no Thukela and the sands of the Kgalagadi, have all been sets on the rural stage on which we act out the foolish deeds of the theatre of our day.

There are times when I wonder whether I should concede equal citizenship of our country to the leopard and the lion, the elephant and the springbok, the hyena, the black mamba and the pestilential mosquito, as these creatures share our stage.

I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Catchwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshoe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom.

My mind and my knowledge of myself are formed by the victories that are the jewels in our African crown, the victories we earned from Isandhlwana to Khartoum, as Ethiopians and as the Ashanti of Ghana, as the Berbers of the desert.

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that – I am an African.

I am of a nation that will not allow fear of death, torture, imprisonment, exile or persecution to result in the perpetuation of injustice. My nation does not expel fellow Africans or conditionally exclude people from this land.

All of this I know and know to be true because I am African.

Mokena Makeka,
Founder of Makeka design lab.
Architect, Africanist.

Courtesy of Makeka Design Lab
There are forty-nine nations in sub-Saharan Africa. Rwanda is one of them, and although it is one of the smallest countries in the continent, its recent history has made it better known than its larger neighbours. The genocide of some 800,000 people in 1994 remains vivid in people’s memories. Few people are aware, however, of what happened later in Rwanda. Just twenty years after the tragedy, Hutus, Tutsis and Twas once more live side by side. On their identity cards they are today identified solely as ‘Rwandan’.

There was an annual growth of 8% from 2001 to 2012 in the country, with a determined focus on building roads and schools, strengthening tourism, increasing exports of coffee and tea, and not least creating reconciliation among the people. Here we see the arctecture studio ASA’s work with education projects and teaching in the new Rwanda.
RWANDAN ARCHIVE: STIMULATING SOCIAL CHANGE, 2011-2014
An installation by the co-founders of ASA studio, architects Nerea Amorós Elorduy -PhD candidate at the Bartlett/UCL, London – and Tomà Berlanda -Professor and Director at the School of Architecture and Planning at UCT, Cape Town

The installation is the result of their four year (2011-2014) professional, scholarly and educational architecture project in Rwanda, and wishes to introduce visitors to the particular conditions of the country, its rural settlements and communities, and the role that architecture can play in the building of society.

By materially collating the experience and techniques of building over twenty Early Childhood education facilities with the firm ASA (short for Active Social Architecture) they co-founded and led until November 2014, what is on show is their archive, a visual and textual record and resource.
Students at work at the Department of Architecture, Kigali Institute of Science and Technology

Student drawings and model for workshop on Rwandan settlement patterns, 2011

Third year student models for student housing (2011) and primary school (2012) project in the outskirts of Kigali.
Interior view of ECD centre in Kigeme refugee camp. 2014

Roof view of Nyamasheke ECD site under construction, showing the central connecting multipurpose space. 2014
Africa is making its way forward and is reconstructing and extending its cities at a great speed. This building activity takes place in a cloud of dust and clamour, blurring the image of what the city will eventually look like. The construction process is so fast and of such an expanse that you cannot but take a distance and wait until the frenzy is over. Yet, in order to try to understand what we will see when the dust has eventually settled it may be worthwhile to capture what image is in the mind of the conceivers of this new African city. What is the ideology behind all this building activity, and, consequently, what ideology is being built? Is the architecture of the new city representing an African interpretation of free-for-all neo-liberalism? And, the other way around, what is the ideology of the architecture itself, what is perceived as ‘the true architecture’ that should be at the foundation of the modernization of Africa in an African way? What, for want of a better notion, will be the African architectural answer that will respond to the continent’s aspirations to modernity?!

In order to find sensible answers to above questions, it may be helpful to know where we come from. Building activity in Africa is not new, and the continent has passed through other stages of landslide development which created new cities and architectures. What ideologies were constructed during these periods and what memories did they leave behind to which we can refer in creating prophecies for the future?

The process of unravelling the past of Africa’s built future reveals that the common academic memory of Africa’s architectural history is eschewed and showing serious lacunae. By filling these lacunae, a richer and multiple-layered understanding of the current architectural situation of Africa will come to the surface.

**ROMANTIC MODERNIST ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY**

The common and widespread academic African architectural memory is predominantly a Romantic Modernist construct. The ‘Romantic Modernists’, a term coined by the Dutch architectural historian Willem Denslagen, rewrote the architectural history to rid it from the eclecticist ballast of the late 19th century in order to create a clean slate for a new start of honest and pure modern architecture. In this operation, the architectural history had to be purged of redundancy and the architectural development of the preceding centuries was simplified into a linearly sequence of steps, from Greek and Roman rationality, via Renaissance, the encyclopaedic Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution into a ‘freed’ modernism of cleanliness, democracy and rationality.

Next to this history of architecture with capital A, there always was and is vernacular building. Vernacular buildings are constructed by empirical builders without the intervention of architects. Vernacular or ethnic building did hardly appear in the Romantic Modernist’s writings.
It was seen as an interesting cultural expression of past and primitive times, but irrelevant for the architecture of today and tomorrow.

In Africa, during the European ‘exploration’ of the continent, first by the adventurers and soon followed by the cultural anthropologists, vernacular architecture became subject of extensive recording and research, and remained so until the second half of the 20th century. Through this research, authentic African culture was defined. Piece by piece, tribe by tribe, Africa was reconstructed as it would have been before the advent of European modernity. This creation of authenticity is a quintessential part of the Romantic Modernist construct, and it managed to establish the perceived image of a primitive but Arcadian African, a continent in balance with nature and cosmos, a notion that has persisted up to today.

Authenticity however, is a misleading notion, as it assumes a fixed moment in time, which cannot be defined, as everything is constantly changing. In African architecture, fixing authenticity in time is possibly even more complicated as in Europe because of the fact that architecture was intentionally ephemeral.

It was against this backdrop of ‘mis-en-scène’ African Arcadia that the European imperialists built up their colonies. Modern engineering and later modernist architecture became the building tools for the creation of the colonial state. Africa soon became prime playing ground for modernist architects as the continent did not have to be freed of the neo-gothic, neo-renaissance or eclectic styles as was the case in Europe, and the young European architects did not have to fight heritage institutions or conservative clients as was the case in their home countries.

This simplified memory consisting of pure and shining modernism against the backdrop of the exotic African vernacular, continued its dominance until well after independence of the African nations. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the last parts of African Arcadia are retreading into the remotest corners of the savannah and the fantastic collection of modernist architecture of the 1930s to the 1970s is being engulfed by the booming African metropolis.

The current interest in Africa’s modernist architecture through documentation, study, publication and exposition5 is of great importance for the creation of awareness on the great beauty and value of this heritage. A welcome side-effect of this enhanced academic interest is that, through this re-exploration of the African continent by scholars from all over the world, new strands of modern memories are being discovered. The 20th century modernization of Africa’s architectural landscape appears to be far from an exclusive north-south influx. Freed Brazilian slaves brought a tropical modern architecture on their way back to Africa as early as the late 19th century, and a tropical art-deco style of reinforced concrete typologies developed in India appeared in Africa in the 1930s. More recently, during the Cold War years, Polish, East-German, Russian,
Yugoslav, Chinese, North Korean and Cuban architects and engineers introduced socialist modernity into Africa next to the architects from Western Europe, Japan, North America and Israel.

Possibly, Africa can claim to be the home of the most varied and cosmopolitan development of modern architecture in the world. As Nnamdi Elleh states, modernity and modern architecture in Africa is a composite of multiple stories brought in from the East, the West and the North.⁶

Yet this is not where Elleh’s interpretation of the African architectural history ends. It may well be that the history of African architecture of the modern period is strongly influenced from all the quarters of the compass, but the African reaction to these influences was far from absent, and over time, it created through a continued process of influence, adaptation, appropriation and reaction, its own strong memories. The fact that these have hardly been recorded stands cause of the lacunae in the common memory of the history of African architecture.

EARLY AFRICAN ROYAL MODERNITY

The origins of modern architecture are shrouded in the fogs of time. Depending on the applied definition of modernity, they may be found around 1920 with the emergence of the Modern Movement in Architecture in the Global North, in the 19th century with the architectural expression of the Industrial Revolution, in the late 18th century with the rationalized and encyclopaedic architecture of Enlightenment, in the Renaissance with the emergence of individualized architectural expression, or as far back as in Pharaonic times with the African genius Imhotep being the first world star architect.

For the sake of clarity, in this current search for an answer to the question of ‘where we come from’, the emergence of modernity is assumed sometime in the early 19th century, with the emergence of industrialized building components and the up-scaling and global spreading of academic architectural production.

By the mid to late 19th century, an increasing number of Africans went to Europe for trade visits and for academic studies. These Africans originated from the upper class of the society, and were often from royal descent. Coming back to Africa, these African princes, sultans, queens and princesses not only brought with them university degrees and European table manners, but also ideas about architecture.

During the second half of the 19th century a wide range of villas and palaces built by African Royalty and elite thus saw the light. These buildings, to be found over the continent, share a strong departure from traditional residential architecture in terms of technology, typology and architectural appearance.

The Ashantene of Kumasi erected a new palace before 1874, a neo-gothic mansion worthy of a Horace Walpole. Unfortunately, this building was destroyed in 1874 during a British punitive raid. Menelik II, the emperor of Ethiopia built his palace complex in Ad-
dis Ababa as a maze of steel, timber and glass pavilions interlinked with bridges in the late 1880s. The royal Rova palace complex, in Antananarivo was modernized from the early years of the 19th century onwards and the queen of Madagascar added an airy steel and glass belvedere to the complex in the 1890s.

Nigerian noblemen and princes dotted the country with their modern country villas and urban palaces over the last decades of the 19th century and the king of Cameroon, Auguste Manga Ndumbe constructed his towering residence in Douala in 1905. Ndumbe's palace would become known as the Pagoda, as it strongly reminiscences oriental architectural influences. Possibly, back in London during his university years, Ndumbe became befriended with Asian students or teacher?

Sultan Bargash's new ceremonial palace on Zanzibar, constructed in the early 1880s, was baptized the House of Wonders, and for good reason. With its four stories of cast iron columns and reinforced concrete beams it towered over Stone Town, and was brightly lit by hundreds of electric light bulbs at night.

Closer observation of these palaces unveils that, although strikingly modern, these buildings contain important elements of traditional typologies. Menelik's palace reverts back to the traditional compound with a number of double-storied circular Tukuls, and so does the Antananarivo pavilion incorporate the traditional timber building typology of the Rova palaces.

Bargash's House of Wonders can be dissected into a clever combination of the traditional, introvert Omani desert palace, the Indian breezy bungalow and the traditional Swahili house with the barazas and umbrella roofs of Zanzibar.

This early emergence of Royal African architectural modernity proved to be short lived. By the turn of the century, the whole of Africa, with the noteworthy exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, was conquered and colonized by the European imperialists. In this scramble for Africa, African royalty was banished, killed or subdued. The same fate befell their palaces; they were destroyed or appropriated by the colonizers and converted into administration buildings or residences for the new masters. African originated modernity and modern architecture fitted uneasily in the justification of the colonization of the continent, which was based on the badly needed civilization of the African continent. Africa was the dark continent, full of misery caused by deceases slavery and other primitive behaviour, and needed to be saved and modernized. Henceforth, African modernity had thus to be better forgotten.

A typical case in this context is what fate befell the Pagoda in Douala. The royal family resisted German imperial intrusion, but lost their independence and their prince, who was hung for insubordination by the new rulers of the country. The Pagoda was converted into a German administration building, and after the First World War, when Cameroon was placed under the protection of the French, it became the colonial forestry office. In the 1980s, the Pagoda proudly re-appears on the front cover of the book by Wolfgang Lauber on colonial German Architecture in Cameroon, but it can be seriously questioned if the Pagoda should qualify as a German colonial building.

The development of African originated modern architecture was thus frustrated around the turn of the 19th century, to make place for the introduction of a Eurocentric modernity. Instead of a continent that was modernizing itself, an image of Africa as the exotic but primitive continent was created that acted as backdrop for the necessary modernization to European template, thus establishing a construed Romantic Modernist memory. The modernization process was taken into hand by engineers, architects and urban planners of exclusively European origin.

However, the African originated modernization process that so promisingly commenced with the great palaces of the late 19th century, did not come to a standstill. The development of African modernity actually increased in momentum and spread wide and far by the turn of the century. Yet this time in an undercover fashion, in a way that has fashionably become known as ‘informal’ architecture and urbanism.

In the organization of the new colonial state, the Africans were, by and large, separated from the colonial settlers. The settlers planned and built themselves modern settlements on the most attractive locations, not accessible for the African population who were thus deprived from the benefits of the ‘formalized’ modernity, with its neatly laid out streets, infrastructure and breezy architecture.

The Africans lived in informal settlements, next to the European towns, which quickly expanded and soon overtook the formal towns in terms of size. These informal settlements started off in traditional vernacular building typologies and technologies, but soon commenced to modernize themselves. Traditional vernacular building in rural materials such as earth and thatch made room for modern industrial materials such as galvanized iron roof sheets and cement building blocks. Traditional typologies and organic forms, compound-based housing and loose types of rural fabric were replaced by

**UNDERCOVER AFRICAN MODERNITY**

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modern rectangular one-family homes aligned along urban streets and alleys.

This modernization process took place and takes place up to today almost unnoticed, but has been of an impact on African architecture and the African city that is at least as important as the formal Eurocentric modernist development of African architecture and the African city. What makes this modernization even more important is the efficiency and standardization of the building production process that resulted in a near-continent wide homogeneous building market. The gi-roof sheets have the same size and gauge all over Africa, and so do the cement blocks. Construction timber elements, doors, windows, steel gates and grills, even precast decorative elements such as banisters, ventilation screen blocks, complete Ionic or Corinthian columns and pilasters, all these are standardized and produced in small and specialised workshops along the roadside, from Tanzania to Senegal and from Ethiopia to Angola.

Initially, the African town houses were simple and straightforward, meant as temporary shelter. After all, the move to the city was thought to be temporary, intended to make money for a comfortable old day to be spent on better pastures, back in the village. Many Africans built their retirement home, more often than not large family mansions, in the home village or the suburb. These mansions, that are mushrooming over the continent, have little in common with the traditional vernacular.

Yet, the African does eventually become an urbanite as well, and commences to see the urban life not as temporary anymore. This shift from a rural to an urban future for enjoyment and retirement enhances private investments leading to densification and a new town culture, in which the small town houses are converted into mixed-use multiple story buildings, eventually creating a modern vertical city, which aspires to become the African metropolis.

In this process, the work of the Congolese artist Kingelez assumes a central position of inspiration. Kingelez produced models of the African metropolis, the ‘Ville Fantôme’, the city that not yet is but will be, in a formal expression that appeals to the aspirations to African modernity.

Most of the above processes on the modernization of the town house, the suburban villa and the multi-storied town building evade formal regulation, education or structure. There is
rarely an academic designer involved. The building permit, if at all required, is more a matter of network and money than of professional agency and the builder may well be the craftsman from around the corner.

Kingelez’ image of the ‘Ville Fantôme’ is however also carried on by many other artists, architectural students and architects. They now create an expressionist typical African modernity in architecture that is unmistakably of the same inspiration as Kingelez’ work, informally emerged but now formalized in the ‘surmodernité’ of Pierre Goudiaby Atépa and his epigones, as Danièle Diwouta-Kotto has christened it.8

RE-SURFACING AFRICAN MODERNITY

For the sake of the argument, the above image of African originated memories on architectural modernity has been outlined in rough brushstrokes. Of course, there are many overlaps between the different modernization processes, blurred boundaries between them, and exceptions to the rules.

However, it can be safely stated that, during the first half of the 20th century, there were no African-born architects active, with the exception of South Africa, and there was no writing on informal architecture8 which confirms the split between the European-originated and the African-originated memories of modern architecture in Africa.

Since the 1950s, a new academic African modernity commenced to surface. The first generation of academically trained African-born architects came to stage and some Africanized architects of European descent joined their search into a renewed modernist architecture for Africa. However, the works of this first generation of African originated architects was still firmly embedded in the European modernist narrative, as told by Udo Kultermann and a few others.10

After the Portuguese born architect Pancho Guedes, active in Mozambique and South Africa from the 1950s to the 1980s, it is the Nigerian autodidact Demas Nwoko who took a fresh position in designing and writing resurfaced academic African modern architecture into being. Nwoko states that the nature of technology is such that it is not the preserve of any race or time, and, according to Giles Omezi, “(...) Demas Nwoko sought to resolve in his architecture, a crisis at the heart of contemporary Africa; the nature of its modernity. He seems to have understood, that the process of modernity is not the sole property of Eurocentric thought and actions.”11 This is the first time that an African architect and scholar expresses self-consciousness in writing on challenging the Romantic Modernist memory, and it is to be hoped that it is only the first step towards a new historiography of modern architecture that takes the African perspective as starting point.

This new historiography, coupled with the self-conscious work of a now emerging new generation of African architects, with already famous names as Francis Kéré, Kunlé Adejemi and Heinrich Wolff, will, in weaving together the multiple strands of African modernity, provide the answer as to what ideology the modern Africa is built.

NOTES
1  Modernity here is understood as expression of the (aspirations to) a modern life, in typology, technology, materials and aesthetics.
3  Modernism in this context refers to the Modern Movement in Architecture that originated in the 1920s and created its own socially-oriented ideology and language, rejecting the notion of style and decoration.
9  Not from a cultural perspective that is.
ADA UMEOFIA/NIGERIA: REVOLUTIONIZING THE INFORMAL MARKET, 2015

The unplanned markets are an important focus of everyday life in the Nigerian slums. Vendors build up their own temporary, unstable stalls, and the markets are therefore typified by chaotic conditions that affect the trade negatively. V-stall is a modular system that makes it possible to build stalls with the most necessary functions: storage, seating, shelter. Stable stalls that can be expanded in various ways can create a better environment for both vendor and buyer.
The vision of a great many projects that have seen the light of day on the African continent in recent years is to create a framework for new communities. With a variety of design approaches architects are trying to strengthen the sense of togetherness, local traditions and traditionally-inspired types of construction. It is therefore common to several of the projects that local residents are drawn into the process of designing as well as building them, and that the new projects are so flexible and open in their structure that space is created for a multitude of people and interests.

This multifunctionality continues a spatial tradition that is characteristic of both the original African village and the slums of the modern city, where for example a school can function as a church on Sundays; but combinations such as a market place coupled with a university are also examples of how the capacity to absorb the new or foreign still exists and continues to take new forms. The success criterion for these projects is therefore not first and foremost the beautiful space, but also direct open-endedness and usefulness.
1 day in October in 2002 I bought land and made 1 model to build the MAKARANTA, 1 school for 150 children. Today the school has about 500 children aged 4-20 years (but nobody knows their birthdays or -years).

The students sit on top of the school, which forms 1 human sculpture.

/moving/ reflecting/pushing/taking/trusting/letting take/leaving
The Invisible Borders Trans-African Project is a platform that gathers African artists to reflect on the question of borders and their implications in 21st-century Africa. Since 2009, the envisaged utopia has involved trans-African exchanges. With a metaphor borrowed in part from the Trans-African Highway, it builds on the limitations of pan-Africanism and the failures of nationalism. As a result, it becomes possible to situate the project as Trans-African by proposing the generative power of movement as an antithesis to the limitations of borders both imagined and real. Insofar as nationalism builds on the cartographic project of colonialism, the project has sought to propose nonlinearity and fluidity – a state of perpetual flux – as a condition of trans-Africanism. The Trans-African Road Trip annually brings together artists from different countries in Africa to make road trips across borders while creating works inspired by their experiences.
ALEXANDRA INTERPRETATION CENTRE,
JOHANNESBURG,
SOUTH AFRICA, 2000

The Interpretation Centre celebrates Nelson Mandela in the township that was his first home in Johannesburg, when he moved to the city from the Eastern Cape in the 1940s.

The new Interpretation Centre is a three-floor structure for mixed use, conceived as a bridge spanning the lively, noisy streets of Alexandra. The programme includes an exhibition space, a jazz archive for the rich musical history born here, a library, training facilities, shops and restaurants. Through the design the building also generates two urban squares, places that can be taken over as the residents wish, envisaged for both organized events like film shows and the informality of street life. On a sunny day you might find someone getting a haircut or having a birthday party, or both, in the same place.

Respect for the immediate surroundings and people of Alexandra played a major role in the construction of this project. The centre takes over elements from the context through the collage-like qualities of the facade, the juxtapositions of spaces and the labyrinth-like circulation. In parallel with this, a large part of the budget is focused on the impact on residents through initiatives that develop training and skills, the building-up of a heritage team, and widespread retail opportunities. The Interpretation Centre is a platform where the people of Alexandra can address new opportunities while cherishing their own culture.
The University of Cape Town approached the architects to design a new ‘Innovation Hub’ for the Graduate School of Business (GSB) in a portion of an old industrial shed on the V&A Waterfront.

South African cities are becoming increasingly segregated and compartmentalized. In the case of this project, the V&A and the GSB were asked to consider that the urban counterpart of a ‘market-place economy’, as opposed to a ‘mall economy’, would require not only a conglomeration of urban actors, but also a spatial structure that can grow and that allows others to participate in it.

‘The Innovation Hub’ is a suspended structure that covers the market with a 50m x 50m gridded steel slab. It is proposed that the stalls in the market should be packed away every night to allow for other activities such as car and fashion shows, farmers’ markets, art exhibitions or even churches to operate under it. Each of the coffers in the grid has adjustable illumination which helps the space to attract diverse activities. An indoor event space and a space for temporary events outside the shed add further diversity to the relations with the activities of the street.

Two spaces at right angles to the street on the ground floor are intended to establish a non-commercial urbanity. These spaces run right across the width of the plan. On one side of the street there is generous tiered seating along a stairway leading to a lookout point, and on the other side there is a garden which can be used for spillover from the event space as well as a place for bicycles and benches.
BUILT BY USERS
The school library forms the transition between an existing school and its upcoming extension. The library is the only unit built with inspiration from the original architecture of the place, and it therefore differs from the existing school building in its organic form. In this way the new building can house both the traditional tribal style of schooling, where the older pupils teach the younger children, as well as more modern educational methods.

The characteristic lighting of the space has been created by embedding earthenware jars produced by the local women in the roof construction so they create a number of circular holes. The holes ensure natural ventilation, and an overlying semi-transparent roof provides shelter from rain and strong sunlight. The facade is in eucalyptus wood, which is usually only used for fuel.

The clay pots are normally produced for storage of fruit, which the women sell at the market, but since new storage options have also come to Gando, the pots are no longer as important in that respect. The architect gives the pots a new function and at the same time adds testimony to an original culture to the building. Both the clay-pot roof and the facade are elegant new interpretations of the materials and crafts that characterize Gando – a textbook example of new site-specific architecture.
A new library is the first step in the plan to build a school for deaf children who, in a culture based on oral tradition, are often excluded from communities.

The library takes its point of departure in the principle of open structures; a modular system that enables everyone to design simple, inexpensive buildings that can be varied in relation to the specific place. With the wish to involve local residents, BC Architects were asked to design the library on the open structures principle.

In order to build sustainably in both economic and environmental respects, all facets of the project have been dealt with using local materials, construction skills and manpower. The house is built of bricks made with traditional Burundian methods with the earth available at the site, and the large hammock ceiling is woven of sisal using traditional methods. This general closeness to the site and its culture is a tendency that typifies many recent architectural projects on the African continent – that is, user involvement at all levels: the ideas phase, the design process and not least the construction with the aid of local forces and resources. Experience shows that user involvement creates a stronger relationship with the project and thus ensures its sustainability.
BC Architects & Studies/Belgium:
Library of Muyinga, Burundi, 2012
Luyanda Mpahlwa
Design Space Africa / South Africa

10 X 10 SANDBAG HOUSES,
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 2009

After the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 the government took the initiative to build 300,000 new houses a year for the poor – and predominantly black – population in the townships.

Local architects were commissioned to design 10 houses of 40 m². 10 x 10 Sandbag Houses is two-story houses made of sandbags carried by a wooden frame. Sand is not only an inexpensive material, but also an outstanding insulator, which can be built without the use of machines. The future residents filled the sand bags themselves, and installed them in the wooden frame. User involvement was crucial for a successful process, since many residents tend to be skeptical of new construction methods.
Emilio Caravatti Architetto / Italy

COMMUNITY SCHOOL, DJININDJEBOULEGOU, MALI, 2007

The need to build two classrooms for a community school for the use of four villages still lacking education facilities guided the project towards simple composition and construction methods. In a process of updating the typological and structural adaptation, a hybrid experimental system was adopted together with arches of packed-earth bricks with inclined courses and inverted T beams to create the open bays necessary in a classroom.

The architectural project, enhanced by the involvement of the population, sought solutions to the obvious local necessities. As a result the complex is perceived and experienced as an asset belonging to the community.
Langa is the oldest township in Cape Town and for many years has been plagued by a high crime rate and a large number of drug abusers. When a new school was to be built, there was at the same time a wish for a place that could house several functions: an assembly hall, meeting places, and spaces for exhibiting arts and crafts. The greatest need, however, was for a secure rallying-point. Interest in the new centre was great, and 450 residents from Langa met at the ideas and design workshop that laid the basis for the programming and final form of the project. The solution was an open-plan space allowing for many functions – including unforeseen ones.

The centre is not large, and the funding for the project is limited. To create more room the two main buildings are kept separate such that a courtyard space arises that can be used in various ways. The centre is painted in bright colours that give the place a striking visual identity, and has become a new landmark and social midpoint for the citizens of Langa.
This centre in the township of Lainsburg is the result of several meetings with the residents, who have both chosen the location of the centre and defined a number of important reference points to the stories the centre was to tell: the local fauna, a flood that struck the township in 1981, the windmill as a symbol of the region, the famous imprint of a large water scorpion in a 260 million year old fossil found in the area, an old railway. As an example, the restaurant at the place takes the form of a railway carriage. The red colour of the building refers to the flood, which was described by the residents as ‘an angry red bull’ that raged through the town. The windmill-like tower functioned exclusively as a landmark.
The Youth Centre was built to improve conditions for local youth and create job opportunities in an area with a high rate of unemployment. Local materials and building techniques were implemented in the design, and community involvement was essential to its construction, which took place over a period of ten weeks without access to electricity or running water.

The walls were built using blocks of compressed sand and a small amount of cement. The blocks were hand-pressed using a local machine with sand shovelled from a nearby ditch.

Windows are positioned low on the walls in deep frames, so they can be used to sit in. The roof extends to include a second floor outside the walls of the multi-purpose room, which functions as an extension of the library/computer room, and is accessible from an outdoor ladder.
José Forjaz Arquitectos / Mozambique

MULTI-PURPOSE PAVILION EPM, MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE, 2010

With this pavilion the architect has carried on the tradition of using one and the same space for different functions. On the floor a variety of game courts are lined out, and this makes it first and foremost a outdoor sports hall. But with its enormous roof the primary function of the pavilion is to provide shade and thus create a place to be. There are no outside walls and the whole construction is visible. In its own way the space merges with the surroundings as an interpretation of the simplest African ‘space’ – that is, the tree.
WOMEN’S OPPORTUNITY CENTRE, KAYONZA, RWANDA, 2013

The Women’s Centre, located outside Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, was built for survivors of the civil war of 1990-94. The centre was constructed with inspiration from the original royal place, which is in southern Rwanda, and consists of a central hut from which smaller units radiate in a snail-shell pattern. The old palace is a woven, thatched circular hut, a building custom that has almost disappeared from the region. The Women’s Centre interprets the circular hut with perforated bricks that provide the same opportunities for shade and natural ventilation.

Innermost in the circle of units lie the classrooms, then the communal localities and a market place. Like a small village the centre thus forms the basis for the reconstruction of small farming units. The women are trained in animal husbandry, the growing of vegetables, and the production and sale of their own goods, strengthening the social infrastructure and cultural heritage.

In addition there are guest residences that enable sponsors to visit the place, which also give the women the opportunity to create a wider – even a global – network.

The project has been built with materials from the site, and the future users themselves made the bricks for the construction. Each year the centre helps 300 women.
Set in one of the poorest suburbs of Ouagadougou, this Centre provides health-care and educational services and builds awareness of women’s rights. The building consists mainly of two separate but closely-related blocks raised on a platform to encourage natural ventilation and protect the interiors from dust, mud and humidity. The Centre provides health care, training and education, as well as a gathering-place for the community, somewhere to share ideas and hold celebrations.
NÁSTIO MOSQUITO / ANGOLA: FROZEN WAR, 2014

Because when people move, shit (not the faeces, bullshit nor excrement kind of shit) happens...

Courtesy of the artist
The widespread African system where women organize themselves in groups with the number of members ranging from tens to hundreds, is also found in Senegal. The idea and the spatial programme of the centre were born in cooperation with local women’s groups. An active, strong women’s group attempts to make the everyday life of its members easier amidst poverty, and to guarantee them a reasonable degree of ‘social security’.

In accordance with West African custom, the building surrounds an internal courtyard; the line between private and public is clear but flexible. The simplicity of the street facades adapts the building to its surroundings; the corner facing a road-crossing forms a small public square where the facilities reserved for commerce are located.
SPIRITUAL PLACES
Koffi & Diabaté Architectes / Ivory Coast

THE ASSINIE-MAFIA CHURCH, ASSINIE-MAFIA, IVORY COAST, 2008

The church is the first part of a larger urban expansion project on which the architects are working. A new ‘green’ neighbourhood is to be built at the coastal town of Assinie-Mafia. The church functions as the natural gathering-place for the new area.

The church rises from the ground as a gigantic pitched roof with a tall, pointed elevation. The roof construction is in dark wood, and the bearing rafters end in small, visible concrete piers. There are no inner or outer walls in the large rectangular church interior, so light and air both penetrate the space directly. The design of the church is an attempt to bring a new architectural style to the area, adapted to the coastal climate.
The project takes its point of departure in an existing chapel that had become too small for the congregation in Bobo-Dioulasso. As a result of the political situation and the civil war in the neighbouring country Ivory Coast, access to materials is greatly limited. The chapel is therefore built in materials that were available in the surroundings – red clay that has been moulded into bricks. The perforated walls function as climate screens which also create a play of shadows on the floor by the altar.
José Forjaz Arquitectos / Mozambique

MÃE AFRICA CHAPEL, MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE, 2004

This chapel, built for an order of the Catholic Church, is designed to accommodate a congregation of 50; it also functions as a religious centre for the adjacent theology college.

The chapel is defined by three volumes, the lowest of which houses the entrance hall and sacristy. This leads to the double-height space of the congregation area, which looks on to the highest volume, where the altar is located. The protruding clerestory of this volume signifies the altar to the outside and draws light from above on to the wall behind it.
EDUCATION
The Tanouan Ibi School is built of bricks made of clay from the soil at the spot. As with many other new site-specific buildings this means that the construction of the school has been both economically and environmentally sustainable. Material transportation costs have been cut out and with the use of clay from the surroundings in a way it becomes an element of the local ecosystem. The use of the local materials makes the building resistant to both the strong sunlight and the heavy rainfall.

Visually the school is an extension of the traditional Dogon architecture, which is characterized by becoming almost one with the landscape. The atmosphere of the building is created by the small details such as the ‘concertinas’ that form the vaulting of the external gallery or the water spouts on the roof. The water spouts are local hand-made earthenware pipes that ensure natural ventilation and daylight indoors and can be closed off during heavy rain fall.

The school follows the local tradition of multi-use spaces and thus functions both as a school for children and an evening school for women. The gallery with benches serves as a shady place where the elderly of the village can sit.
NEW JERUSALEM CHILDREN’S HOME, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 2011

28 containers have been re-used here to expand an orphanage with new teaching spaces and more rooms. The old orphanage was a traditional brick building. The aim of the new construction was to make it more sustainable. The containers project vertical and horizontally in and out among one another and are connected by stairways and interior openings. The basic rectangular structure is broken up by round windows, organic decorations in iron and colourful floor mosaics. As shelter from the cold and heat ceilings, walls and floors are insulated in several places with among other materials wood, and the orphanage is raised on footings to ensure the passage of air.
They told us stories
Of men
Tenacious, Shrewd
Courageous, Flawed
They said: look at Sankara
Boyish, Fine
And yet
Defender, Deliverer
They asked us to: learn from Lumumba
First, vilified
Then, dignified
Fearsome challenger of Imperialists
They wanted us to: remember Biko
Write what we like
Rise up to spite
We were cautioned
Shushed, then exhorted
To never forget:
Hani
Cabral
Olympio
On street corners, verandahs
Our feet bare, flat, sweaty; cloaked in dust
Eyes turning upwards, then downwards, then sideways
Thin fingers scratching roundish heads
They beseeched us to:
Remember the Architects
Whose revolutionary blood
Flows in the Limpopo
The Zambezi
The Congo
On brown nights
Miles south of the Sahara
They taught us and retold us:
You are Architects
You will, someday
Raze dungeons
Build citadels
We listened, we nodded
We promised we would remember
What Africa is
What it always must be
To Us,
To Those Who Love Us
A land of Fallen and Rising Heroes
INKWENKWEZI SECONDARY SCHOOL, WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA, 2007

The school complex is the first secondary school in a township where 80% of the residents have had less than ten years of schooling. The building therefore had to present a good alternative to the street. The school consists of a sequence of white-plastered buildings circling and sheltering two inner courtyards. The area has suffered much from violence and vandalism, and the entranceway to the school faces a quiet cul-de-sac where the children can arrive in safety.

The school is mainly distributed over two floors, but in several places a triangular sculptural form protrudes from the building and reveals where the library and sports hall are situated, for example. The name of the school, Inkwenkwezi, means Morning Star, and a large yellow star therefore graces the front.
With architecture inspired by traditional Mali building customs, a place has been created for orphans which is both their home and their school, where they are taught market gardening and fish farming. The orphanage is far from power and water supplies, and is self-supplying for example through the waste-water system and the fish farm, which collect the daily rainfall of c. 4 m3.

As is the tradition in West Africa, all spaces are organized around an open courtyard which provides natural ventilation. The construction with materials from the surroundings with effective thermal properties ensures passive cooling at daytime temperatures of up to 50°C.
UMUBANO PRIMARY SCHOOL, KIGALI, RWANDA, 2010

The UK charity A Partner In Education (APIE), as part of its mission to boost education in Africa, committed to building a new school campus in Kigali to replace dilapidated existing facilities. The design of the building layout and circulation draws direct inspiration from the neighbourhood and the region; because of the hilly landscape, people travel across switchbacks on terraced agricultural land – and the school’s traversing walkways and outdoor classrooms mirror this context. Local materials such as brick and papyrus reeds were used in the construction to cut down on transportation costs and to spur the region’s economy by encouraging local markets. MASS Design Group collaborated with local craftsmen to incorporate local expertise in the process.
ATO MALINDA / KENYA: PATENT SPACE, 2015

This is an interpretative drawing of Malinda’s friend Neo who sometimes identifies as ‘transgender’. Designated female at birth, Neo prefers the pronoun ‘they’. They are an academic at a research institution in Nairobi, researching African literature. Neo is pictured here with their breasts bound and with the head of a cockerel. ‘Cockerel’ is the name given to their family in their vernacular language, Kikamba. The building pictured is the space Neo feels comfortable in, their queer space.

Ink on paper, collage, plastic. 42 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artist
ARCHITECTURE AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERNITY IN AFRICA

By Nnamdi Elleh

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This exhibition at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark is timely. It runs over the summer of 2015, but in broader terms it takes place at a time of transition for the socio-political practices of the continent, and it presents one crucial challenge: How should we read and understand the plethora of architectural forms developing in different rural and urban areas of the continent? Using a few visual examples, this essay takes a position that considers local, regional, national, continental and global capitalist experiences in order to address this question.

The objects and the social spaces represented in this Danish-sponsored Historic Africa Show form a kaleidoscopic ensemble of images illustrating the rapid changes taking place among the modernisms, modern lives and modernities of the continent as part of the international economy. In addition, the exhibition explores and conveys to the viewer visual representations of the modes of social relations among people, corporations, organizations, and governments with varying agendas in different countries around the continent. We are talking of, thus, an observation of ways of life in the transitioning African communities, neighbourhoods, villages, cities and countries. The position of this paper will be summed up briefly in the three points below.

First, the exhibition shows what Jürgen Habermas rightly describes as “Modernity: An Unfinished Project”. The evidence supporting Habermas’ thesis is overwhelming, and it demonstrates two dominant kinds of global architectural productions: the productions of the well-to-do middle classes and the productions of the ‘underprivileged classes’ with little or no contribution from architects. We need only examine the images from the ghettos, bidonvilles, slums or townships in Dakar, Lagos, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Maputo or Johannesburg featured in this show to comprehend how millions of people still live: without running water, electricity, paved streets, appropriate sanitation facilities, drainage, schools and hospitals, to understand what Habermas meant by “unfinished”. Moreover, historians of modernism have told us that there was a gradual progress from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century in the development of modern architecture. This reading of African modernisms conflicts with Robert Venturi et al.’s Learning from Las Vegas, and Complexity and Contradictions. It also conflicts with Charles Jenck’s Language of Postmodernism and Heinrich Klotz’s Postmodern Architecture as well as with the conceptual work of Jean-François Lyotard. In this respect we are by no means overlooking the aesthetic developments from the late nineteenth century through to the end of World War II, when modernism swept the world. Keeping the aesthetic appreciations of the early twentieth century in mind, this exhibition shows how Africa is still on the march towards the basic goals of modernity.

Let us expand on one example that grounds the material of this exhibition in the rise of early modernity in the eighteenth century. When the end of apartheid in South Africa ushered in a democratically elected government in an evolving multi-racial society that the late President
Mandela described as the Rainbow Society, several memorials were built to heal the societies and communities of the country. It took the strength and leadership of President F. W. de Klerk of the National Party and Nelson Mandela of the African National Congress to negotiate a peaceful transfer of government in South Africa and the end of apartheid. Both were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their contributions. In this respect Habermas opens up another space of discourse that we should not overlook: The monuments built after the end of apartheid in 1994 provide social spaces, in what Habermas describes as “the public sphere” – places where citizens can come together to discuss issues that affect their lives through the legal and legislative processes. These democratically inspired spaces are still evolving in South Africa and around the continent, and we can cite a few examples: Louis Ferreira da Silva Architects’ Northern Cape Provincial Legislature Building, Kimberley, completed in 2003; Noero Wolff Architects’ Red Location Museum of Struggle, Port Elizabeth, completed in 2006; The Constitutional Court and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg; and the Freedom Park in Pretoria, also in South Africa. The gesture that led to the peaceful transfer of power and the end of apartheid in 1994 recalls what happened recently between President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and the former dictator, now President-elect of Nigeria, General Muhamadu Buhari.

On the first of April 2015, General Muhamadu Buhari, the former Military Head of State in Nigeria, who ruled the country with dictatorial powers from December 1983 to August 1985, was elected President of the country in his fourth presidential bid. The incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan, and the President-Elect, Buhari, were in a fiercely competitive race for months amidst the attacks of the violent sect Boko Haram in the northeastern states of the country, and around the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The outbreak of all-out violent strife along ethnic, geographical, political and religious lines was a possibility; no opposition party has ever defeated an incumbent in the country’s political history. Worse, power transitions in the country from 1960 on, when Nigeria became independent, had mostly taken the form of coups d’état. In addition, the violence that broke out after the 2011 election, in which Buhari lost to Jonathan, was still on everyone’s mind. The citizens of the country and stakeholders around the world heaved sighs of relief when Jonathan graciously accepted defeat and phoned the leader of the opposition to congratulate him on his victory. Both leaders set a welcome precedent for political transition in the country.

Besides, when Buhari had seized power in a coup d’état at the end of 1983, he had unilaterally cancelled the continuation of construction in Abuja, the city where he will now preside as the leader of the country. It is plausible to suggest that Jonathan and Buhari are imparting to the citizens of Nigeria the nebulous concepts of democratic culture that countries like the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France and many European countries began to learn from the late eighteenth century on. This latest political development suggests that Abuja is a ‘public sphere’ that was developed gradually by the tripartite agency of capitalism, colonialism and the evolutionary democracy-inspired modernity projects of the eighteenth century. How, we might ask?

When the firm of Wallace McHarg Roberts and Todd (now WRT) of Philadelphia in the USA was commissioned in 1976 to prepare the master plan for the Nigerian Federal Capital City and Federal Capital Territory (FCC and FCT) at a centralized location in Abuja, the leader of the team, Thomas Todd, looked for philosophical and design inspiration in the master plan for Washington D.C. prepared by Major Pierre (Peter) Charles L’Enfant in 1791. Todd knew that L’Enfant’s Washington was influenced by Versailles. The cynosure of the plan is Capitol Hill, the Mall, with the Washington Monument at the center, the White House at right angles to the Mall, and the Lincoln Memorial at the termination of the Mall. Federal museums and ministries flanked both sides of the Mall, and it is one of the most recognizable democratic spaces in the world. We are all aware that hybrids of this urban design model with expansive national malls spread around the world in Vienna, Moscow, Beijing, and later, in the twentieth century, in Canberra, New Delhi, Chandigarh, Islamabad – and Abuja, Nigeria. Abuja was designed (for 3 million inhabitants) at six times the scale on which Brasilia (pop. 500,000) was planned. Moreover, we cannot overlook how, following independence from the European colonial masters in the middle of the twentieth century, the search for democracy inspired the establishment of Dodoma, Tanzania; Lilongwe, Malawi; and Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire.

Despite the fact that the Mall in Washington had undergone several revisions, it nevertheless retained its democracy-inspired philosophical and ideological symbolism. In Nigeria, Todd and his team believed that the idealized urban form of Washington D.C. would transfer to the Nigerian people the United States’ model of democracy, which is guided by checks and balances in the division of powers among the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. Historians ground the social transformations of the late eighteenth century in the American and French...
The Central Area Plan

- Central Parkway
- Ministries
- National Conference Center
- Transitway
- Supreme Court
- Municipal Administrative Center
- Ministries
- Golf Course
- Official Residences
- National Assembly, Legislative and Executive Offices and Official Residences
- National Arboratum
- National Monument
- Aso Hills
- Central Market
- Central Hospital
- Transportation Center
- Transitway
- National Sports Center
- Transitway
- Parkway from Airport
- Presidential Residence and Gardens
- National Museum
- National Square
- Ministries
- Central Business District
- Main Shopping Street
- Embassies
- Park
- Ministries
- Mall
- Transitway
- National Theater
- Central Parkway
Revolutions of 1776 and 1789 respectively, and both experiences are described as ‘the birth of the Modern World’. Although the development of Abuja began in 1976 and 1977, the origins of the democratic intentions that matured in the election held on 1 April 2015, in which Jonathan and Buhari were the main contestants, can be traced back to the 18th century revolutions. 5

Secondly, I see contemporary Africa’s modernisms, modern life and modernity as 21st-century ‘late Enlightenment’ projects grounded in the ‘Triple Heritage’ of architectural and historical experiences – the Indigenous, European, and Islamic-inspired cultural heritage found all over the continent. While the Indigenous strand of the Triple Heritage is varied and encompasses works from North Africa in Egypt through the medieval states of Western Sudan and all the way to Zimbabwe, we can take the era of the Roman occupation of Carthage in North Africa from about 146 BCE as the beginning of the ancient European contributions. The construction of Fort Elmina by the Portuguese in 1482 in what is present-day Ghana can be seen as the beginning of the ‘modern strand’ of European contributions to Africa’s Triple Heritage architectural culture. The conquest of Egypt in 641 AD by proselytizers of the Islamic religion from the Arabian Peninsula completed the ‘Triple Heritage’ culture when that politico-religious movement spread through North, East, West, Central and Southern Africa. 6

However, this composite ancient heritage of the continent’s architectural cultures has been fragmented, partly by the forces of colonialism, partly by the agency of the post-colonial elite and nationalist aspirations, and above all by contemporary global capitalism. Although focusing on global cultural productions, Anthony King’s Bungalow, Manfredo Tafuri’s Architecture and Utopia and Robert Home’s Of Planting and Planning are texts that explore how the forces mentioned here disseminated building traditions that were once unique to certain geographical zones in various parts of the world. The buildings are fragments of global cultural commodities, just like shoes, cars, food, and fashion, although we do not like to think of our houses as capitalist products. The physical and the social spaces shown in this exhibition are the arenas for fulfilling individual and collective aspirations in the modern and contemporary ‘life-world’ of African countries. The projects for fulfilling the needs of the life-world embrace the past, the present and the future, all at the same time. Bodys Isek Kingelez’s Project for Kinshasa for the Third Millennium, 1997, is one of the best examples. Other examples of projects in this category are the Library in Alexandria, Egypt, by Snøhetta Architects; Hope City Pram-pram, Accra, Ghana, by Open Building Research Architects; and the planned Cité du Fleuve projects for the expansion of Kinshasa.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the ‘global village’ factor. Every community in Africa is experiencing push-and-pull forces in the maintenance of the community, while simultaneously embracing the gains of the ‘global village’. One example is how communities that were once remote are now connected to the international cellphone networks. This was not the case a little over a decade ago, his means that ‘objects’ and ‘social spaces’ produced in the modernization schemes problematize slogans like ‘Belonging’ and test the scope of broad concepts like ‘Coexistence’, ‘Urban Africa’, ‘Building Futures’, and ‘New Communities’ in the post-Cold War and Post-9/11 neo-liberal capitalist economy. Francis Kéré’s community-inspired projects in Gando, Burkina Faso; Sharon Davis’ Women’s Center in Kanyoza, Rwanda; Emilio and Matteo’s village school in Djinindjebougou, Mali and Peter Rich’s vernacular modernisms are examples of structures and social spaces that are embracing local, national, and internationally-inspired trends in construction and identity. It would be a misreading to see them as entirely local. In fact, the students studying in the schools could be surfing the
web to learn about trends in global knowledge and construction processes.

Architectural structures and social spaces in contemporary Africa are commodities in global capitalist exchanges of the same kind as we are experiencing in various other parts of the world. How so? If we study the plethora of objects and social spaces presented in the exhibition critically, we will see that they are dissolved, capitalist, global ‘objects’ and ‘spaces’ from all over the continent and from the world at large. These objects and social spaces thus nullify binary concepts like ‘originality’ and ‘imitation’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, ‘creativity’ and ‘mimicry’, as well as ‘kitsch’ or pastiche versus ‘innovative design’ in current trends and technological developments. This reading of the works, projects and images in the exhibition interrogates the larger concepts of post-modernism, and there will be an opportunity to expand on it in the future.

References:


With the series *Project Diaspora* Omar Victor Diop turns the focus on identity and the understanding of history in an often neglected diaspora context. The series takes its point of departure in Diop’s own experiences of alienation during a study stay in Spain, and against that background the work satirically stages a complex relationship between Africa and Europe. As the main figure in the work series we find the artist himself in four parodies of existing Baroque portraits of both diaspora Africans and Europeans whose lives in various ways were impacted by the imperialistic (cultural) exchanges between Europe and Africa.

Courtesy of Galerie Magnin-A, Paris
It happens that a building ends its days in another way than intended. Take the large Grande Hotel Beira in Mozambique. It was built in 1955 for the colonial jet set, but was closed down just eight years after it had opened. Today a different clientele has taken over the use of the building. The distance between how a building is conceived and how it is used can be an image of the distance between a political project and a social reality. It is possible to find both contemporary and historical precedents of this. Architecture has always played a central role when it comes to shaping the future. After independence in the various African countries architecture came to play a determining role – spectacular buildings and monuments for the new leaders were erected all over the continent. The construction projects can be said to represent the political utopias in the respective countries – as anticipations of something that was not yet within reach. The future plays a major role today too. Buildings are created not only with the practical functions of the future in mind, but also to get a little closer to the future as a phenomenon – a building may potentially act out a leap in time. In contemporary art you see many artists across the continent engaging in these imagined futures, so many that a term has been invented to describe this tendency: afrofuturism.
ANTON KANNEMEYER/SOUTH AFRICA: ALPHABET OF DEMOCRACY, 2005-2008

With satire as his instrument, the (white) South African Anton Kannemeyer has turned the focus on racism in Africa. Since 1992, when he launched the comic book publication *Bitterkomix* with his colleague Conrad Botes, Kannemeyer has been an acerbic critic of South African society. In *Alphabet of Democracy*, too, the comic-strip idiom stages its criticism comically – and controversially. The project has been in progress since 2005, and the idea is that enough letters are to be made to form a whole alphabet whose critique of the system and racism points far beyond the borders of South Africa.

*Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson Cape Town & Johannesburg*
GRANDE HOTEL, 2011

Since the Grande Hotel was completed in 1954, it has stood as a monumental symbol of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique. Yet this Art Deco hotel, once the biggest in Africa, never attracted the upper-class clientele it was intended for, and closed as early as 1963. Today, after independence and civil war, the dilapidated hotel is occupied by about 2500 Mozambiqueans who systematically strip the building of everything of value – from crystal chandeliers to floorboards. What remains is a concrete ruin now in danger of collapsing – a ‘white elephant’ – the name given to a building that had never been accepted by the local population – in a modern Mozambique that is attempting to break free of its long colonial history.

Dir.: Lotte Stoops / The Netherlands: Grande Hotel, 2011
The film was shot in Kilamba Kiaxi, a new city built outside Luanda, Angola. The city was built by Chinese construction company CITIC and financed by Hong Kong-based China International Fund. The new city is to be home to more than 210,000 people, and is the single largest investment project by China in Africa. The film’s narrative follows a young municipal worker who lives by night in the old city centre of Luanda and works by day as a groundskeeper at the new city of Kilamba Kiaxi far away.

We see him on his morning commute and daily routine sweeping the new city streets. He daydreams and stares at the new buildings. Unable to contain his curiosity, he sneaks into an apartment block, and in turn breaks into an unoccupied apartment. He watches Australian cricket on television. Following the lunch hour siren he climbs to the roof of the building and quietly disappears.

HD video on BluRay (boxset)
19 minutes 10 seconds
Colour, stereo, 25 fps
J. D. ‘OKHAI OJEIKERE / NIGERIA

J.D. Okhai Ojeikere, who died recently, was one of the most prominent artists in Nigeria. In particular his extensive photographing of what he called one-day sculptures – women’s hairdos or headgear – made him famous. Ojeikere began his photographic activities in the 1950s, and when Nigeria became independent in 1960, he became interested in filming the life and atmosphere of the young nation. “Just after independence, we were full of ideas and energy. We were going to conquer the world.” The hairstyles here express beauty, individuality and optimism in the then young, independent Nigeria. Ojeikere continued taking the photographs for over forty years and thus created an alternative, beautiful narrative of Nigeria’s development after independence.
Since the beginning of the 1980s the Congolese artist Bodys Isek Kingelez has worked with striking city models which have later become his hallmark. His so-called ‘extreme models’ are built of cardboard, plastic, silver foil and other readily available materials and reflect utopian ideas of the African metropolis. This model, whose title means ‘Project for the Kinshasa of the third millennium’, is an extraordinarily detailed portrait of the capital of the future.

Bois, carton-plume, papier, métal, matériaux divers, 332 x 100 cm, Courtesy: Collection Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris
AFRONAUTS

Inspired by true events, Afronauts tells an alternative history of the 1960s Space Race. It’s the night of July 16th 1969 and, as America prepares to send Apollo 11 to the moon, a group of exiles in the Zambian desert are rushing to launch their rocket first. They train by rolling their astronaut, 17-year-old Matha Mwamba, down hills in barrels to simulate weightlessness. As the clock counts down to blast off, as the Bantu-7 Rocket looks more and more lopsided, Matha must decide if she’s willing to die to keep her family’s myths alive. Afronauts follows the scientific zeitgeist from the perspective of those who do not have access to it.

Dir.: Frances Bodomo / Ghana: Afronauts, 2014

PUMZI

Pumzi, which is Kenya’s first science fiction film ever, takes place in a dystopian future 35 years after a third world war, the ‘Water War’, which has resulted in a worldwide ecological crisis. East African survivors are kept isolated in underground settlements, but Pumzi – a young woman – is in possession of a sprouting seed and works untiringly to free herself from isolation and bring the seed to the devastated surface of the Earth. The film – inspired by science fiction classics from the 1950ies – is questioning the ruthless exploitation of (African) natural ressources in an apocalyptic way.

Dir.: Wanuri Kahiu / Kenya: Pumzi, 2009

JONAH

Jonah is a short by Kibwe Tavares. It is set in Zanzibar and looks at the effects tourism can have on a country from an economic and environmental perspective. By utilising a narrative of friendship between Mbwana and his best friend Juma, these themes are explored. Mbwana and Juma are men with big dreams. Dreams that become a reality when they photograph ‘the world’s biggest jumping fish’ leaping out of the sea. Their tiny town soon blossoms into a tourist hot-spot as a result. But for Mbwana, the reality isn’t what he dreamed – when he meets the fish again, both of them forgotten, ruined and old, he decides only one of them can survive. The town becomes a money making, ‘wildly opportunistic’ beach town, which has abandoned its original fishing roots.

Kibwe Tavares, Factory Fifteen Productions (UK): Jonah, 2013
ARCHITECTURE OF INDEPENDENCE

During the late 50s and the early 60s most countries of sub-Saharan Africa gained their independence. Architecture became one of the principal means with which the young nations expressed their national identity. New buildings were constructed, often featuring heroic and daring designs. A coinciding period of economic boom made elaborate construction methods possible while the tropical climate allowed for an architecture that blended the inside and outside.

At the same time, this architecture also shows the difficulties and contradictions that the countries experienced in their independence process: in most cases, the architects were not local, but came from foreign countries, even from the former colonial powers. Could the formation of a new national identity through architecture therefore be described as a projection from the outside? Or does the international dimension rather represent the aspirations of the countries aiming for a cosmopolitan culture? The documentation of these buildings allows us to see architecture at a nexus of design and politics.
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE
Public Works Department / Ghana
Accra, Ghana, 1961
KICC (KENYATTA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE)
Karl Henrik Nøstvi/Norway
Nairobi, Kenya, 1966-73

HOTEL IVOIRE
Heinz Fenchel, Thomas Leitersdorf/Israel
& William Pereria/USA
Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 1963-70
ENGLiiGBO is an installation of a two-channel oral rendition of an Igbo Folk-tale *How The Tortoise Got His Bumpy Shell* in Igbo and English languages. During the course of engaging the installation, the spectator will thus encounter the tale simultaneously in their language, assuming English’s place as the dominant lingua franca, and in a language is which is presumably ‘Other’ (Igbo). The two languages will be ‘sounded’ in differing modes which move back and forth, or between, established modes of multiple speech-making and listening: dialogue, conversation, and occasionally, competition and interruption, as the audio progresses in time. The work intends to narrate the folktale through a strategy of polyphony, which is the arrangement/presentation of voices of equal importance. Central to the tactics of polyphony is the effect of generating a ‘back and forth’ effect. The key idea is that this sound installation will create a drifting, thoughtful experience for the spectator, stemming from the sometimes tense, sometimes relaxed, effects of this back-and-forth flow between the two languages and emotions they stir.

Courtesy of the artist
The South Korean artist Che Onejoon contributed to the Korean pavilion at the Architectural Biennale in Venice in 2014 with a large installation dealing with the neighbouring state of North Korea. The main item of Onejoon’s contribution was this film triptych, which at the time was not yet finished. The film is a kind of shadow portrait of North Korea. Since filming is not permitted in North Korea, Che Onejoon has now been travelling for three years to sub-Saharan Africa to film monuments and buildings made by North Korean firms in Africa. The film, shown here for the first time in its final form, is a depiction of military alliances, cultural diplomacy, social realist art and not least of political utopias. The Korean pavilion in Venice was incidentally awarded the Golden Lion that year.

HD 3channel video, approx 38min
Courtesy of the artist
All power comes from the people: This message is the foundation of modern, representative democracy. Since the 18th century, it has been globally accepted, as a utopian dream, as a promise, and often enough as an empty phrase.

Parliaments are both instruments and monuments of this idea: inside they are places of ritualized debate; on the outside, they represent the power of nations. For the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2014 information on 196 national parliament buildings worldwide was collected by a team of researchers and students at TU Wien together with data on the economies and political systems of the respective states. Each parliament was built as an abstract model in the scale of 1:500. This subset presents 49 African parliaments ordered by location.

Synthetic material, 1:500
49 models, various dimensions
SELLY RABY KANE/SENEGAL: ALIEN CARTOON, 2012

Since 2010 the brand builds a reputation through its Fashion Performances. From street fashion shows to unusual venues, SRK swims counter current, building bridges between different forms of art and fashion. New icon of the underground Dakar, Selly Raby Kane lends her style to numerous icons such as: Flaviana Matata (former Miss Universe), Cristina de Middel, Nai Palm (Hiatus Kaiyote) Poundo Gomis (Editor of Okay Africa), the Nubians, Daara-J Family...

Her latest collection Alien Cartoon was presented last May at Dakar’s old Train Station which was transformed for the occasion into an invaded alien city, surreal and unlikely in the heart of Dakar. It was enough to fuel the buzz around this UFO of Dakar’s Fashion scene.

Courtesy of the artist
Picking a present for an old friend can be difficult. The perfect gift has the right size (not too small, but not too extravagant either), is highly personal, and should leave a lasting impression. If you really want to impress, it should also be something that took a big effort on your part.

Keeping these rules in mind is difficult enough when your old friend is, in fact, a human. Imagine the hassle you’d go through when picking a present for an entire continent! Yet this was exactly what Chinese leaders did. To show the depth of their countries’ friendship for Africa, they came up with what they considered a truly special gift: a new headquarters for the African Union.

It took them no more than three years to finish construction of the striking, 200 million US dollar new assembly house in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. When it opened its doors on 26 December 2011, it was Addis’ tallest building, making it a landmark icon that is visible from virtually every angle of the city. It was a Chinese effort in every detail: commissioned by the Chinese ministry of Commerce, designed by the Tongji Urban Planning & Design Institute in Shanghai and constructed by the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) with some 1,100 on-site workers, roughly half of whom were Chinese. Most of the construction materials came from back home as well.

In front of the building the Chinese donated a five-metre high Tai Hu Shi, a stone to “symbolise the friendship between Africa and China”. As a finishing touch, the elevators in African Union’s new headquarters greet all passengers with a friendly voice. “Thank you for riding Shanghai Mitsubishi Elevator”.

**EXPORTING THE CHINESE MODEL**

The African Union building is exemplary of China’s “stadium diplomacy”, handing out buildings and sport stadiums to strengthen ties with African governments. These landmarks do not only symbolise the strong and fast rise of urban Africa, but also make a clear statement: China is more than willing to play a role in shaping
the African future.

The signs are visible in important infrastructure developments all over Africa, such as the Thika Super Highway in Kenya or the new light rail system in Lagos, Nigeria. Just like Addis Ababa, many fast-growing cities in Africa got a new skyline Made in China. Or, as a Rwandan architect told us: “Every building of more than five stories, was designed by a Chinese architecture firm, financed by a Chinese bank, built by a Chinese contractor, with Chinese concrete, Chinese outlets, window frames and fire extinguishers, decorated with Chinese carpets and curtains. And everything was put together by Chinese construction workers.”

Until not so long ago, mass housing developments in Africa were almost synonymous with slums. But the impressive economic growth of the past decade has created a sizable middle class that does no longer accept substandard living standards for their families. The first modern housing developments start to appear. And of course, China’s contractors are trying to get a piece of the pie. The “Great Wall Apartments” on the “Beijing Road” in Nairobi are exemplary of the walled compounds you can find in almost every Chinese city. China’s most impressive urban achievement in Africa to date is Kilamba Kiaxi, a new suburb just outside of the Angolan capital Luanda for more than 500,000 people. Financed, designed and built by a consortium of Chinese state owned companies.

Not everyone is cheering China’s efforts. When she was still US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton warned Africa for “a new form of colonialism”. Without wanting to get into an unproductive moral discussion, it is interesting to know whether Africa’s cities are indeed developing “the Chinese way”. In other words, does China export (parts of) its highly successful growth model to quickly urbanizing Africa?

To answer this question, let’s take a look at one of China’s most comprehensive methods for urban development: the Special Economic Zone (SEZ), a specific geographical area that is closed off from the rest of the country and that has more liberal economic laws and preferential policies that aim to attract investors and create jobs.

Although SEZs have had de facto existence since the 18th century – Gibraltar in 1704, for example, and Singapore in 1819 – it was China that led the way in applying the model as a strategy for urban development. The first four Chinese zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen were instrumental in attracting foreign investment. Logically, they were conveniently located on the coast, close to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. All three places boast a wealthy Chinese diaspora, who could be attracted by preferential tax rates and the possibilities for cheap labour in the Mainland.

Like no other city, Shenzhen represents the flagship for China’s rise from a poor, agricultural country to its current “factory for the world” status. In three decades since the start of the Shenzhen SEZ in 1979, the fisherman’s town has transformed into a bustling megacity of 15 million inhabitants at the centre of the Pearl River Delta. The success of Shenzhen has prompted policy makers to develop over a hundred economic zones of different types all over China.

And now, they feel, it’s time for the SEZ to travel to Africa.

**CHINESE CITIES IN AFRICA**

During a 45-minute drive over a six-lane expressway from the centre of Lagos to the outskirts, we pass an eclectic mix of buildings, including the Church of God Mission, the Newcastle Hotel, The Peninsula, a shop with “affordable cars”, two Mercedes dealerships, Maldini Marbles, a MegaChicken, a Chinese restaurant and a Children’s Plaza toy store. Next to the road are massive billboards from Amstel beer (“Toast to Africa’s best”) and a local congregation (“Jesus loves you – Give Him a call on Valentine’s Day”). Below the slogans, we see informal markets and shops selling everything construction materials, from wood to plumbing tools. This is a place full of energy, which is so typical for the many cities in transition we have seen in China. The main difference being the utter chaos of it all.

Finally, we arrive at the entrance of the Lekki Free Trade Zone. It is a large gate, flanked by two guards wearing AK-47s. On the right is a silver-coloured office building, in front, the flags of Nigeria and China flutter in the wind. Inside is a row of empty desks with signs like “Immigration” and “Customs”, and clocks displaying the current time in London, Lagos and Beijing. This is not unlike a border post.

“The Lekki Free Zone is a new offshore city,” explains Wole Adegoke, the charismatic marketing manager of the Lekki Free Zone Development Company. “It is outside the domain of Nigerian customs. It is a tax-free, duty-free zone where foreign companies can set up shop.”

The zone, located some 60 kilometres from Lagos, is planned to become a safe, green and spacious satellite city away from the chaos and dangers of Nigeria’s biggest commercial centre. Measuring 3,000 hectares, the first phase of the Free Zone will harbour factories, oil processing plants and other industries, as well as residential areas for approximately 120,000 people, along with accompanying hospitals, schools, parks and churches. The zone is conveniently placed next to the future Lagos international airport and, once finished, will have its own deep-sea port.

When the first phase is successful, another 13,500 hectares of
African soil. “Rather than being initiators of this process, African governments are the recipients,” writes Martyn Davies, director of the China Africa Network. “China is carving out designated SEZs across the continent. These zones are positioned to become Africa’s new economic growth nodes.”

In the case of Lekki, it is the China Civil Engineering Corporation which initiated the project. The Chinese developers hold a 60% majority stake in the Lekki Free Zone Development Company (LFZDC), which has a 50-year lease on the site. The other 40% is in the hands of the Lagos State government.

The Lekki Free Trade Zone might one day be the centre for a prosperous “Made in Africa” industry. At least, that is the hope. Plans to export this particular part of China’s development model have existed for some years. The strategic rationale behind the idea is that overseas SEZs would offer “safe havens” for Chinese companies. By moving production abroad, these companies would be less susceptible to protectionist trade policies against products “made in China”. Furthermore, the model could help underdeveloped countries mirror China’s own economic successes. To that end, in 2006 the Chinese government announced plans to establish around 50 overseas trade and cooperation zones. Three to five of those would be located in Africa. There are currently zones in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Mauritius.

It is important to understand the implications of such a move. These African SEZs represent a Chinese development plan, initiated by the Chinese government, executed by Chinese companies and planned by Chinese urbanists – but on
halls that house the first factories. So far, though, there are no visible signs of the hotly-anticipated economic boom. “There,” says Doherty, directing our gaze. “That piece of land was just sold to a Ukrainian company that makes mayonnaise.”

He turns up the volume on the radio, the pop star’s lilting voice breaching the zone’s current, temporary calm. “Girl I want to make you sweat...” As we continue in the four-wheel drive over unpaved roads bordered with palm trees, Doherty shouts over the music, “It feels like a safari! Now I’ll take you to the lagoon. You’ll definitely go: Wow!”

The master plan for the first phase of the Lekki Free Zone is a heavy, solid A3-sized tome, prepared by the Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute. The design has all the hallmarks of a typical Chinese urban extension plan, with a symmetrical central axis, an exhibition centre, large plots with sizable setbacks, and at its heart, a man-made lake. The reference pictures for future buildings are all Chinese. Significantly, the Lekki Free Zone is completely fenced-off from the rest of Nigeria, meaning residents will live in a gated, privatised city. Workers of the factories inside the zone won’t have that option. For them, designated workers’ accommodation will be erected just outside the gates.

**A NEW CHANCE**

In October 2013, the developers of the Lekki Zone took a flight to the world’s top financial centre in search of potential investors. One Wednesday afternoon in the UK capital,
nowadays! If you start a hospital in the zone, with internationally-educated Nigerian doctors from Europe or the USA, I guarantee that you will start making money.”

But will it work? That seems to be the main question that everyone disagrees on. “Please, excuse the mess,” apologises Dr. Dele Balogun as we enter his admittedly cluttered office. Surrounded by chairs, a fridge, small television and shelves that are groaning under the weight of books and magazines, the University of Lagos economist explains the fundamental problem with Nigeria’s economy of today: almost everything is imported. “Just take a look at me. My suit, my watch, my glasses, my wedding ring, my shoes – they are all imported. If you count it all together, I paid maybe 100,000 naira [Nigerian currency] for it, of which 80% goes to foreign producers. That means that our need for foreign currency is immense.”

Balogun has strong doubts as to whether the Lekki Free Zone will bring Nigeria the foreign currency he says is needed. “The zone is aimed at selling products on the local market. That means that it will create appendices of foreign companies. That’s no use to us. We need to turn the system inside out, start producing local products for export.”

This is especially true for refined oil. Although Nigeria is one of the world’s major oil-producing countries, it is also the largest importer of refined petroleum. “We should be focussing on domestic refinery capacities instead of giving these concessions to foreign refining companies. At the moment, we prosecute our local refiners as illegal, and we close them down. Instead, we should put them in the Free Zone and give them a chance to do what they do!”

Fundamentally, says Balogun, the Lekki SEZ is very different from the Shenzhen SEZ. “China started as a socialist planned economy that evolved into state capitalism. Nigeria already has a hedonistic consumer market. You can find the latest model of every product here.”

Laughing, he continues, “Do you know what the first products made in Shenzhen were? Toys! For children! In a country with a one-child policy! Those toys were clearly not meant to be bought in China! They were meant for export. China was saving money, developing their economy and the government kept consumption low. That is totally different from what we are doing in Nigeria.”

Not everyone agrees with him. “People are moving to cities, and these people need jobs. They need to be elevated out of informality. They have aspirations. The Free Trade Zone can help a lot,” explains Reinaldo Fiorito, partner at management consultancy firm McKinsey in Lagos, and a supporter of the Lekki zone.

According to Fiorito, bankers, manufacturers, government officials and consultants all expect much from the Lekki project. For backers of the project like him, even if the zone does not immediately bring the millions in foreign investment and the thousands of new manufacturing jobs hoped for, Lekki still represents a new and improved urban model on
Nigerian soil. “Currently, the situation in Lagos is a nightmare for business. There are power cuts all the time and traffic is hell. It is time for big and bold solutions. Lekki might be just that.”

TWIN CITIES

As with many developments, it is too soon to tell what the Lekki Zone will bring to Nigeria. That said, early 2014 the project won the support of none other than Africa’s richest man, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, owner of the Dangote Group. He recently announced a whopping US$9 billion investment in the Lekki Free Trade Zone to develop Dangote Refineries and Petrochemical Company. The move will call on the services of some 8,000 engineers, he claims, as well as create new jobs. “I can assure you that this is going to be the biggest free trade zone on the African continent,” Dangote declared at the plan’s unveiling. “And I know that the people will begin to show their appreciation.” His plans would mean that the Nigerians could finally refine oil themselves, in their own country.

If all goes according to plan, the Lekki Free Trade Zone will be a completely gated, privatized city, run by the joint venture. You can only enter the city when you live there. Your car will have a tag that identifies you when you go through one of the 11 gates. Inside there will be companies and upper class people. And this is not the only way Lekki is demarcated: in fact the zone will be outside Nigerian customs.

Consequently, Lekki is planned to become a sort of non-Lagos, having all things Lagos lacks: an accurate transport system, a proper drainage, solid spatial regulations, a constant power supply and a reliable police force. At the same time, Lekki will also miss all elements that make Lagos so exciting: the dynamic environment, the complete mix of people and functions and the unexpected encounters.

In that sense, the Lekki SEZ is an idea that is both utopian and distopian; it considers the existing city as a failure, and creates a new one next to it. In that sense, one could consider the Lekki Free Zone a true export product: that of the Chinese urban model. The phenomena of the twin city is a something we have seen all over China, most prominently in Shanghai, where the new, spacious and modern Pudong district was created face to face with the colonial Bund and the chaotic Chinese city behind it.

MADE IN ETHIOPIA

To see how it all could play out, you only have to take a two hour drive from the African Union Building in Addis Ababa to the underdeveloped countryside outside the Ethiopian capital. Suddenly, a large gate appears, with above it, in both English and Chinese characters, “Eastern Industry Zone”. We are greeted by the manager of the Hua Jian Shoe Factory, the first company to set up shop. He takes us inside, for an impressive tour. We see massive halls where hundreds of local villagers are working in a modern and clean shoe factory. Along the walls and under the ceilings are red banners with typical Chinese slogans to stimulate workers to do their best. “Late arrival is delay”, says one. But also: “Early arrival is waste”. And: “Those who don’t work hard today, will have a hard time looking for a job tomorrow.”

The workers are Ethiopians. The management is Chinese. The shoes are for Mark Fisher Footwear, an American company. There is a guy from a Brazilian company that does the quality checks. And after the shoes are being packed into cardboard boxes, we learn, they are being shipped to stores all over Europe.

Now this is quite something.

This might not be a new form of colonialism.

This could just very well be the next leap in globalisation.
The scene is a street in the town of Ficksburg. It is a town on the South African border with Lesotho. It is well known for its cherry festival, but today it is really famous for the service delivery protest in which the teacher Andries Tatane was killed by police.

What interests me is the beauty of the architecture of this period, which was so beautifully rendered that it has stood the test of time; as well as the connotations of colonialism and apartheid that are present in each brick. Most importantly, it is about how the buildings are being used post-apartheid in a democratic South Africa.

H 38 cm x W 52 cm, silk on silk,
Courtesy of the artist and Thierry Vergon
DIRIYE OSMAN / SOMALIA: TO BE YOUNG, GAY AND AFRICAN, 2014

When I first came out to my family, most of them stopped talking to me. My father, who I was very close to, stopped speaking to me for two years before picking up the phone late one night to let me know that my being gay was not only an amoral form of psychic and sexual corruption but also an act of perverse, Western mimicry.

I was not only going against my Islamic upbringing but my African heritage as well. I was born in Somalia, and I spent my formative years living in Nairobi, Kenya, before moving to London. Somalia and Kenya may have many sociological and cultural divisions but both states stand firm on one soil when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. Any form of sexual difference is considered not only repugnant, but also devious precisely because sexual difference in Somalia and Kenya, as in most African states, is a narrative best kept to oneself.

If you want to spin this story in public and share your experiences as an LGBT person, you had best buckle up and brace yourself for physical abuse, ceaseless harassment, imprisonment or death. Things are considerably more lenient in Kenya than Somalia amongst the cultural elite, but both nations still have a long way to go when it comes to ensuring basic rights for their respective LGBT communities.

When I came out to my family I did not flinch. I spoke my truth and stood my ground knowing that I would be punished in some way for having the audacity to assert my identity. What upset my family the most was the fact that I was proud of being gay. They could not configure the possibility that after years of silence, timidity and self-doubt I had finally cultivated courage and the kind of confidence that comes with a hard-won sense of comfort in one’s own skin.

I come from a community that has been emotionally and psychologically traumatized by decades of civil war mass migration and dislocation; a community that has through sheer collective willpower and survivalist instinct managed to rally together to form the tightest, most close-knit networks, with family life as the nucleus. In order to fully belong you must live up to absurd standards of virtue, honour and piety. The reality is that no one manages this, but the trick is to try or act like you’re trying.

There are multiple degrees of scorn poured on any form of transgression: a girl without a headscarf is a harlot-in-training, and a teenager with a rebellious streak is ripe for daqan celis – a return to a grim part of Somalia for some much-needed ‘re-education’.

All these taboos become miniscule in comparison to homosexuality. The fact that I wanted to write about my experiences as a young, gay Somali did more than grate on my family’s nerves. They were incensed enough to threaten me with violence, but I was smart enough to know that as a citizen of the UK there are laws that protect my rights as a gay man.

This is a position of privilege, but it’s only a position of privilege because I fully understand and exercise these hard-won rights. I arrived at this point of self-acceptance by doing what came best to me, what generations of the Somali community have always done in order to sustain themselves when crisis kicked in. I told stories. I told stories of what it meant to be young and endure struggle. I told stories of what it meant to fall in love with another man and for that love to be reciprocated in the face of rejection and familial disapproval. I told these stories repeatedly and I wrote them down by drawing on the gorgeous history and culture of the Somali people. It’s a natural human impulse to denounce the traditions of those who have rejected you, but I refused to do that. I wrote these stories down and compiled them into a collection of short fiction called “Fairytales For Lost Children”.

These stories follow young, gay Somalis on the cultural and social periphery of both their adopted homelands in Nairobi and London as well as their motherland, Somalia. These characters experience a wide spectrum of dilemmas, whether mental illness, civil war, immigration or complicated family histories. But they still hold on to their sense of humanity and optimism without the need for apology or victimhood.

When I published this book last year I received e-mails from young LGBT men and women from Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda telling me how much the stories meant to them, and how they felt a sense of solace knowing that I was telling these narratives without shame or fear. Shame and fear are the most potent weapons in the homophobic’s arsenal. If one rejects the notion that one has to be ashamed of being gay or lesbian, then half the battle is won.

With each e-mail that I received I would not only encourage and motivate these young men and women as best as I could, but I would also tell them to go out into the world and form meaningful friendships and support networks where they could be themselves without fear of judgement. At a time when LGBT youth across the world are losing their lives to homophobic stigma it’s important to remind them that they and their lives have value.

As for me, I’m wise enough to know that struggle will always happen. That’s just the general texture of a life-pattern. But I keep moving forward in the knowledge that I’m simply a voice in a chorus of voices united in the belief that equality on all fronts is not a privilege but a basic human right that we must continuously fight for and defend.

As for my young fellow LGBT Africans, I will say this again and again because it bears repeating.

It’s a beautiful thing to be young, gay and African.

Courtesy of the artist
In Kenya, people invent ingenious architecture using common construction materials with means largely overlooked by the architectural profession. Inherent in this collective resourcefulness is a profound intelligence, which inspires and motivates *Louisiana Hamlet*. *Louisiana Hamlet* is an integrated building system, traversing across continents, in its dual role as a school in Kibera, Nairobi, and exhibition pavilion at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark. Shipped from Denmark to Kenya at the end of the exhibition, the project utilizes generic construction scaffolding components to produce a novel mobile architecture. Like its predecessor, the *Konokono Center* in Turkana, Kenya, the project foregrounds creative reapplications of building conventions to create a dynamic space for collectivity – one which prioritizes an intelligent use of simple means.
THE SETTLEMENT

Traditionally, rural settlements in sub-Saharan Africa were organized as concentric circles around a centre where the cattle were enclosed within a fence. The great importance of the circle derived primarily from the analogical association with the moon, which was in many places perceived as the dominant feminine being. Given the association of the circle with the moon’s feminine cycle, it had a crucial influence on fertility and so it was in the circular hut that human beings were created. The hut was thus perceived as a creator and protector.

In pre-colonial times, most houses in rural areas were made using non-durable materials such as reed, clay and wooden stakes. With increased urbanization, however, building materials have radically changed. In the mid-20th Century, many urban habitations were made of precarious materials such as cardboard, zinc and pieces of wood.

During the nineteenth century, rural communities hitherto living relatively isolated were gradually forced to engage with the advancing colonial powers. New aesthetic norms and housing materials challenged and partially replaced previous approaches. The rectangular form of the house was brought to urban areas by Arab merchants and Islamic religious movements. Still, it was the colonial penetration, which made Africans imitating the houses ‘belonging to the whites’ in an attempt to convert material constructions into improved social positions and prestige.

Morten Nielsen
David Claerbout, Oil workers (from the Shell company of Nigeria) returning home from work, caught in torrential rain, 2013
Single channel video projection, HD animation, colour, silent, endless
Courtesy of the artist and Johnen Galerie, Berlin
and dissemination renders any qualifier superfluous. Such is the case with Africa – and the same is the case, in these times when racism arrays itself in both old and new garments, with its condemned soul, *le Nègre*.

But in reality – in terms of what interests us in this context – that is not the issue. Africa is above all a project that concerns the whole planet, and the history of Africa can hardly be separated from the history of the world, just as there is hardly any world history that is not also the history of the Africans or their descendants.

And this does not apply solely to the past. Imperialism still has a future; but a different geography of the world is in the making. Like it or not, there no longer exists a center to which we can opposed a periphery. To become a protagonist in the birth of this new world history, planetary but decentred, Africa needs to rewrite itself.

It needs to fundamentally reinterpret its complex heritage, inasmuch as Africa’s heritage cannot be separated from the heritage that the world, viewed in its entirety, carries with it. For this to happen, we must start with a simple idea, that of *worlds in motion*. For unless we allow for this concept, it will be impossible to understand Africa as a geo-aesthetic category, and even more so to understand it as a philosophical project.

**WORLDS IN MOTION**

Since the emergence of the modern world we have cherished a collective dream of mastering ourselves and nature. To achieve this we had to learn to understand ourselves, to understand nature and to understand the world. Since the end of the seventeenth century the idea has been cultivated that to understand ourselves, nature and the world, it would be necessary to unify the domains of knowledge and develop a science of order, calculation and measurement. In turn, that made it possible to reduce natural and social processes to mathematical formulae – to *mathematize* them.

Once algebra had become the means by which nature was to be modelled, this became a project that fundamentally consisted of making the earth ‘flat’ – that is, homogenizing all its objects, making them interchangeable and manipulable at will. This flattening of the world was to be the dominant tendency for several centuries in modern scientific knowledge.

To varying degrees and with varying results,
this tendency was accompanied by the other high
cultural process typical of modern times, the
understanding of the spatial units of the world in
the perspective of capitalism. Since the sixteenth
century the western hemisphere has acted as the
prime mover in the constitution of these spatial
relationships. For our purposes, this has notably
been the case with the colonial empires so typical
of the nineteenth century. But it is also true of the
mercantilist system of slavery, which on the basis
of the ‘triangular trade’ restructured the whole
Atlantic area from the sixteenth century on.

Two emblematic figures were indispensable
to the rise of capitalism – first the shadowy
figure of the black slave (from the inception of
the mercantilist period, which we will call ‘the
first capitalism’); then the ‘solar figure’ of the
worker, and by extension the proletariat (since
the advent of industrialism, whose birth we must
situate between 1750 and 1820). Originally ‘le
Nègre’ is a person of African descent, marked
by an appearance – the colour of his epidermis –
determined by the sun. The history of this
figure is closely associated with the expansion of
capitalism from the fifteenth century on, and with
its corollary, the Transatlantic trade. But it is not
limited to this.

As I have shown in my Critique de la raison
nègre, we have since witnessed a tendency
towards the universalization of the conditions
formerly reserved for le Nègre. Are these
conditions not in fact characterized by the
reduction of a human being to a thing, an object,
a commodity that can be sold, bought or owned?
The circumstances in which we live today are
typified by the reduction of human beings to
interchangeable mass products that make us a
commodity or an abstract code.

The dynamic behind this universalization is
everthing else limited to new versions of racism
which see no need to refer to biology to legitimate
themselves. In most instances, it is sufficient
for example to encourage the persecution
of foreigners, to claim that ‘civilizations’ are
incompatible; that we do not belong to the same
humanity; that cultures are incommensurable; or
that any God that is not our own is a false god. In
the current crisis of the West, this kind of racism
goes hand in hand with nationalism; at a time,
nevertheless, when neoliberal globalization is
emptying nationhood – in fact democracy – of
any true content and relocating the centres of
decision-making far away.

To account for this gene-
ral universalization of the
conditions yesterday re-
served to the black slave, we
must also consider recent
devlopments in genetics and
biotechnology. On the one
hand these advances confirm
the idea that the concept of
race is devoid of meaning. But
paradoxically, far from giving
new impulses to the idea of
a world without races – they
have given a new impetus to
the old project of classification
and differentiation that
was so characteristic of the
preceding centuries. Crucial
to this, however, is the process
leading to a kind of capitalism
of acceleration which, while
following an extreme logic
in raw material extraction,
financialization and abstraction
on the one hand, is sinking
deeper into debt even though its
goal is self-sufficiency.

THE BLACKENING OF
THE WORLD

With the declassing of
Europe we are thus witnessing
a disjunctive unification of the
world within the framework
of a fragmented capitalism
without borders. This process
goes hand in hand with the
reinvention of difference, a
re-Balkanization of that same
world, and its partitioning
along a multitude of dividing-
lines internal to societies and
states, but also vertically, in
the sense that they form new
rungs on the global ladder of
domination.

While most of the
population of the world is
forced to bow to the logic of
the market and submit to the
grip of the capitalist economy,
the production of racialized
subjects continues unabated.

Racism – even in its most
elementary and primitive
form – is not only a thing of
the past. It is unfortunately also a
part of our future. That said,
the Black of today is not solely
a person of African origin
characterized by his physical
appearances – let us call this
figure le Nègre de surface;
today “the fundamental
Black” (le Nègre de fond) is
a subcategory of humanity
that has become superfluous,
almost a residue no one needs
– and is apparently doomed to
destruction.

This Nègre de fond appears
at a time when capitalism is
more than ever assuming forms
that recall an animistic religion.
The human being of flesh and
blood of former times is being
replaced by the new, fluid,
digital human being, infiltrated
throughout by synthetic organs
and prostheses. This new
species is manifested in the
no-
man’s-land between the human
and all sorts of software.

The accelerated
development of techniques
for the massive exploitation
of natural resources is still
engaged in the old project of
mathematizing the world.
Ultimately this project itself
has one single goal, the
management of the living. In
this technetronic age of ours,
calculative reason is being
pushed towards its point of
maximum abstraction. We are
to a greater and greater extent
being written down into codes.

In a world increasingly
based on the belief that
everything, including the
living, can be manufactured,
that existence is capital to be
managed, and that salvation
is to be found in pleasure
and play, the individual is no
longer a singular being endowed with originality. He or she is a particle in a system, a bit of information to be incorporated in a code that can be connected with other codes according to a heightened logic of abstraction. When one no longer encounters others except in a spectral sphere, self-reification (becoming a thing) is the best way of capitalizing on the self.

The digital universe, like the world of the computer screen, is an astral universe typified by fluid transitions, glows and irradiations. But it is also the universe of the mega-calculations, another regime of the intellect that can be characterized as anthropo-mechanical. We are in other words an epochal redefining of the human. We are moving away from the grand division into mankind, animal and machine that has been so crucial to the discourse of modernity. The human being of today will in future be linked directly and closely to animal and machine, to an assemblage of artificial intelligences, duplications and triplications that will underpin the extensive digitalization of our life.

In these conditions, many are asking who are today’s slave masters. The paradox is that today’s masters no longer need slaves. The slaves have become too great a burden, and their masters seek above all to be rid of them. The great paradox of the 21st century is thus the emergence of a class of masters without slaves. This reversal is logical after all, since the new capitalism, although animistic in form, is mostly spectral in content.

Certainly, human beings as much as natural resources continue to be squeezed to feed profits. But the raw materials of the economy are no longer territories and natural resources. True, these still play a role, but they no longer constitute the primary matter of capital. Increasingly the latter is to be found in the world of processors, in biological and artificial organisms, in the world of human brains and automated computations, of work with more and more miniaturized data and objects.

The masters have understood this, and as I have said will attempt to divest themselves of their slaves, the idea being that with no slaves there can be no revolt. It is thought that to stifle potential insurrections at their roots, it is enough to release the mimetic potential of the subalterns. As long as the subalterns expend their energies trying to mimic the masters that they will never become, no revolt will be possible.

**CAPITALISM AS A NEW KIND OF ANIMISM**

The challenge is thus to ask how we can release the capacity of the subjugated for revolt in the specific conditions of our time. For what will it actually mean to create oneself, to pursue one’s own destiny or even to fashion oneself, now that humankind is simply one force among many others endowed with cognitive powers that will perhaps soon exceed our own? What all along we understood to be the human is about to be shattered beyond recognition, a mere fragment amidst a jumble of artificial, organic, synthetic, indeed even geological forces.

Looking beyond Africa, the challenge is in short to establish how, in current conditions, we can develop a way of thinking that will help to strengthen democratic politics on the global scale; a mode of thinking that can embrace complementarities rather than differences. We are in fact living through a strange period in the history of humanity. One of the paradoxes of contemporary capitalism is that it simultaneously creates and negates time.

This two-edged process in which time is both created and exploded has a devastating effects on our ability to ‘create memory’, which basically means to create spaces together for collective decision-making and to experience a truly democratic life. In lieu of memory we have multiplied our capacity to tell stories – all kinds of stories. But more and more, these are obsessive stories with the aim of preventing us from becoming conscious of our condition.

Of what does this new condition consist? We no longer actively seek, through our praxis, the death of the master. We no longer believe that the master is mortal. And inasmuch as (s)he is no longer mortal, we are left with only one possible illusion – that we ourselves can join the ranks of the masters. This is the only longing that remains – the master desire of our times. We live out this longing on our screens, the new historical stage. The screen not only attempts to cancel out the distance between fiction and reality, it has become the generator of reality. It has become one of the conditions of life in this century.

More or less everywhere, including in the old nations that lay claim to a long democratic history, democracy is in crisis. To a much greater extent than before, democracy has enormous difficulty granting memory and speech their full value as the foundation of a human world which we can share, and which the public sphere should safeguard.

I emphasize speech and language not only because of their revelatory power and their symbolic function, but especially because of their materiality. In every authentic democratic regime there is a materiality of speech, because basically we have nothing but speech and language with which to name ourselves, to name and act upon the world.

As things are now, the constant flood of events that batters our consciousness is no
longer inscribed in our memory as history. The fact is that events are only inscribed in memory as history as a result of specific instances of work, physical or social, and thereby symbolic. But democracy no longer undertakes to furnish us with this type of work in the present technological, economic and political conditions of our civilization.

This crisis in the relationship between democracy and memory is further aggravated by the dual imperative imposed on our lives – to *mathematize the world* and to *instrumentalize* – and under this imperative we are expected to believe that as human beings we are in fact digital bits, not concrete beings; that the world is fundamentally an aggregate of situation-determined problems to be solved; and that the solution to these situation-determined problems is to be found among the specialists in experimental economics and game theory, whom we should furthermore permit to make decisions on our behalf.

So in the end what can we say about the confluence of capitalism and animism? As the anthropologist Philippe Descola notes, animism was defined at the end of the nineteenth century as a primitive belief. It was thought that primitive peoples ascribed an almost mystical energy and power to inanimate objects. They believed that non-human entities, natural as well as supernatural, such as animals, plants or objects, possessed souls and intentions comparable to those of human beings. These non-human entities were endowed with a spirit with which humans could make contact and even forge close bonds. This made primitive peoples different from us. For unlike them we were aware of the difference between ourselves and the animals and objects. What separated us from the animals and plants was that we were subjects and thus had an inner life, were capable of self-representation and possessed an independent will.

Three drives have animated capitalism since its emergence. The first is the impulse constantly to manufacture ‘races’ and ‘species’. The second is to transform everything into commodities. The third is the urge to monopolize the manufacturing of happiness and of the living as such. With varying success, the civilizing process has consisted of maintaining a certain number of fundamental partitions. Under neoliberalism these dikes are being breached one by one.

It is no longer obvious that the human is so very different from things or animals. It is no longer certain that the manufacturing of species and subspecies within humanity is taboo. The abolition of taboos and the more or less total emancipation of all impulses, plus their transformation into materials in an endless process of accumulation and abstraction, are fundamental features of our age. This development, with several other tendencies of a similar nature, demonstrates splendidly how the fusion of capitalism and animism is becoming a reality.

The same fusion is evident in the proliferation of all conceivable types of fiction, including the fiction of ‘neuro-economic man’ – a strategically thinking, cold, calculating individual who internalizes the norms of the market and regulates his behaviour as in an experimental economic game, instrumentalizing himself and others to optimize his share dividends, and whose emotional skills are genetically predetermined. This fiction has arisen in the intersection of the economic disciplines and the neurosciences, and it kills off the tragic subject of psychoanalysis and political philosophy: the divided subject which is in conflict with itself and others, but nevertheless is the master of its own destiny.

**THE AFRICA TO COME**

How are we to conceive the Africa to come in this context of the re-coding of all the fields of our existence by econometrics and neuroscience?

By resolutely backing out of the impasse into which we have been locked by the developmental paradigm that has colonized our imaginations over the past fifty years. By developing, with a point of departure in Africa itself, a true world-thinking.

The new historical hypothesis will henceforth consist of understanding Africa on the basis of its potential or factual ability to become not only its own centre, its own force, but also a place where in a sense it is the future of the planet itself that is being played out.

It is no longer about looking elsewhere for answers to the questions posed here, and vice versa. Nor is it about confusing terrains, taking detours through other modes of thinking, finally to acknowledge how much the Western archive is a product of a particular history. This we already know. What is not quite so obvious is that it is not exclusively so. The Western archive does not belong to the West alone.

It is thus fundamentally about taking on board all the contradictions of our history-with-others-in-the-world and resolving them as responsibly as possible. This is our right, but we must exercise it in total freedom and, where necessary, with detachment. In the course of this process, which involves translation, conflict and even misunderstandings, we shall encounter issues that resolve themselves. And when they do, a certain transparency will arise that will authorize a number of shared demands – demands for a possible universality. It is precisely this possibility of flexibility and an encounter between different understandings that a thought-world needs.
The West has in the past developed a kind of world-thinking, beginning with the so-called age of discoveries, when it broke down its boundaries and travelled to America, Africa, the South China Seas, India. But the West has not been willing to face the fact that there are several other, parallel histories, narratives of the world that did not necessarily begin with Adam and Eve, continue with the ancient Greeks and so on. Even when Europe has been confronted with this reality, it has not been willing to acknowledge it, but has preferred to close its eyes in a kind of metaphysical denial that is Europe’s specialty. And then Europe invented anthropology – an explanatory model based on the assumption that people without history exist; people who do not distinguish between nature and culture, nor even between nature and society; people who live in a ‘state of nature’.

After decolonization Europe has closed in upon itself and has gradually lost the ability to develop a type of thinking commensurate with the planet at large. Today this type of thinking comes to a very great extent from the global South.

**PLANETARY THINKING AS THINKING ABOUT BEING IN MOTION**

To develop this planetary thinking, we cannot not inhabit Europe’s historical legacy, which after all also includes a part of ourselves. Moreover, we are in several respects co-authors of that history. We must take this tradition upon us – at all events it is not alien to us, and we are not aliens in it. We must in other words inhabit more than one world at a time, and we must do so in a constant alternation that enables us to formulate a thinking about being in motion.

The question of being forms the basis of European philosophy. When it is said that “the Word was made flesh”, is this not also about the verb ‘to be’? The question of being and identity is first and foremost – at any rate among the Greeks – an ontological question. In ancient African tradition the starting point for philosophical inquiry is not the question of being, but that of relationality, of motion, of continuous, endless transformation.

Continuous transformation requires the person concerned constantly to be on the alert and aware of circumstances which are themselves constantly changing. And in this flow of constant changes the human must as closely as possible follow the propensities of things. Always being on the alert to detect the potential or the resources inherent in a situation, is considerably more important than the question of ‘being’ as such. What one is and what one becomes is a result of our ability to exploit the potentials of a situation. Any action is momentary and provisional. The measure of the efficacy of an action lies in its capacity to participate in the silent, almost metamorphic and compositional transformation of things and of life. In short a rather remarkable element of plasticity is involved, which has nothing to do with passivity, and which gives rise to paradoxical situations of transformation without rupture, transformation in continuity.

To bring to light the enormous possibilities that the current age offers the African continent, we must make an important change in our historical hypothesis.

The continent is well on its way to becoming the centre of gravity for a new cycle of global migration. Chinese newcomers are settling not only in the great megalopolises of the continent, but also in more isolated towns, while at the same time African trading colonies are being established in many of the Asiatic megapolises: Dubai, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Guangdong and Shanghai are taking over old European and American cities as the preferred destinations of new African migrants. Tens of thousands of students are going to China, while other new powerful nations like Brazil, India and Turkey follow closely behind. An extraordinary vernacularization of forms and styles is in progress, and it is well on the way to transforming the great African cities into global capitals of an imagination at once baroque, creolized and hybridized.

But it is necessary to go even further. Boundaries inherited from the colonial era must be abolished. We must move further towards the transnationalization of society, of intellectual, cultural and artistic life. It is necessary to commit ourselves to ambitious spatial and infrastructural projects that cross national boundaries. It is necessary to promote the mobility of goods and brains and encourage the formation of an Afropolitan public sphere. In short we must open up to the world if we really want to give the Africa-World that is being born a chance.

In the meantime much of the strength of African contemporary art lies in its power of dematerialization, its ability to occupy the sensible world with the aim of transforming it into an idea and an event. Art in Africa has been, by force of circumstances, a high-risk zone. It rests on the assumption that it is worth making the attempt, but the infinite can be captured neither in a form nor in the finite. At the core of African contemporary art is the very African idea of art itself as an attempt to capture the energies of the infinite, a kind of trapping of the infinite in sensible form, but a form that consists of an endless doing, undoing and re-doing.

Under current conditions, it is as if there are no longer any images one can isolate and
capture. There is no longer anything that can be subjected to interpretation. All that is left is selection. The artwork no longer has power as a form-giving or life-giving force. Among us the issue of identity has been resolved, if only at the theoretical level. Certainly, the disputes continue, but today no serious voices would deny that we are the products of different overlapping genealogies; or that there are no origins except in the encounter with other living beings and entities. Africa is first and foremost a body formed of a vast diaspora, and thus a body in motion. Africa only exists by virtue of a split.

The time has thus come to take on the African worlds of images, their formal properties and of course their effects. African artworks have above all always been objects in motion. More fundamentally, it is an urgent task to consider contemporary African art as a form of thinking. This thinking has its styles, and we need to identify and study them formally. If we assume that modern art takes its point of departure in a crisis of the understanding of the image, it is possible that current Afro-diasporic creativity will resolve this crisis. There is a good chance that the art of the 21st century will be ‘African’.

**CONCLUSION**

The only way it makes sense to talk about Africa is as an assemblage of spaces that arise out of motion. Africa is first and foremost multiplicity – and therefore relations. Social and cultural polytheism has always been our signature. Social and economic life has always been governed by the two fundamental principles of composition and conversion. Life itself consists of knowing how to put together composite, disparate and ultimately incompatible elements; and then establishing equivalences among them – transforming some into others.

On the other hand, there has never been any ‘Africa’ except on its travels. Thus being African in the current and coming world means being in constant motion and knowing, in the given conditions, how to reactivate the resources of multiplicity, motion and circulation. That is, to participate, with full entitlement, in the great movement of breaking down the fences around the world. As for the rest, Africa’s time will come. Perhaps not in our lifetime. But it will come. The role of writing, art and cultural creativity is to prepare for its coming.
This catalogue is published on the occasion of the exhibition
AFRICA – Architecture, Culture, Identity

Curators Kjeld Kjeldsen and Mathias Ussing Seeberg
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What do we actually know about Africa? In western culture, Africa has become synonymous with a potpourri of exotic ingredients and associated anxieties: sun, rhythm, intuition, bodily liberation, grand landscapes, wild animals – and on the other hand disease, crime, war, failed states, shantytowns, famine, a flood of refugees.

This book – published in connection with the AFRICA exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art – attempts to challenge the stereotypes. It speaks in both short and extended form of new architecture and urban development projects from various parts of Africa south of the Sahara, and artworks from the same region appear in independent contributions to the overall experience.

All the projects point towards a discussion of the future – or in current terms, in face of the post-generated ‘global’. only stands in the way of our feeling for the true developments in this enormous continent: the book – and the exhibition – make up the third and last instalment of Louisiana’s series on regional architectures and their interactions with culture and the formation of identity.

Generously illustrated, AFRICA includes essays by among others the curators of the exhibition, Kjeld Kjeldsen and Mathias Ussing Seeberg, expert consultant Morten Nielsen, and Achille Mbembe, Edgar Pieterse, Antoni Scholtens Folkers, Daan Roggeveen & Michiel Hulshof, Filip de Boeck, and Nnamdi Elleh.