

Colonial Erasure – Post-colonial Recovery: Identity/Alterity in Faustin Linyekula's Choreographies

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»Who am I? Leopold II, Lumumba, Mobutu?«

(LINYEKULA, LECTURE TALK, WALKERS ARTS CENTRE, LONG ISLAND, N.Y., SEPT. 2011)

»What have you done to us, Blaise Cendrars?«

(BLACK DANCER IN »LA CRÉATION DU MONDE 1923-2012«, DÜSSELDORF, JUNE 2013)

»Who am I? Who are we? What are we in this white world?«

(CÉSAIRE, »NÈGRE JE SUIS NÈGRE JE RESTERAI. ENTRETIENS AVEC FRANÇOISE VERGÈS«, 2005: 23)

Fig. 1: Red Monkey, in original 1923 production and reconstructions in 2000, 2003 and 2012.



Source: Pen and ink drawing by Millicent Hodson, 2000: Animation of original costume sketch by Fernand Léger. Costume reconstruction by Kenneth Archer, 2000.

Provocations¹

The three citations preceding this essay were most recently turned almost upside-down by two provocative adages, provocative because they try to put the chimera of racism as true ›monstrosity‹ to rest. The first one was written by Bachir Diagne as last sentence in his treatise on ›négritude‹ in 2010 (revised 2014) for the ›Encyclopedia of Philosophy‹ of Stanford University, where he states: ›one does not have to be black to become ›nègre‹‹ (2014: 17).

The other statement is one of the messages by Achille Mbembe's recasting of the impact and importance of African cultures for a globalized world, when he admonishes in particular ›Western‹ readers that we would all become ›nègre‹ in a short time, if we let the capitalist and digitalized financial markets continue in their rampage, resulting in an exponentially increasing inequality in the distribution of wealth, nègre standing in for any subaltern or exploited group, for mentally or bodily dependent, for a ›colonialized‹ subject, almost – one may infer – like an ›enslaved‹ subject of former times (Mbembe 2014).

Questions of moral choice

These are new tonalities for the concept of ›nègre‹ and of central importance to understand the seminal shift that has taken place since ›l'art nègre‹ was en vogue in the Paris of the 1920's and of the performances by Faustin Linyekula, in particular his pastiche or citation of the ballet ›La Création du Monde‹ of 1923, as presented in Düsseldorf in 2013 as ›La Création du Monde 1923-2010‹.² This performance seems to highlight the

¹ At the outset I would like to express my gratitude for the generosity of Millicent Hodson for providing permission to reproduce her designs for the re-created ballet from her collection of photographs. I would also like to thank her for having stirred further investigations after conversations during the dance congress at Düsseldorf in 2013.

² The reconstructed ballet, in the version of Linyekula's pastiche, premiered with the troupe CCN Ballet de Lorraine of Nancy in Brussels in 2012 and toured the European dance circuit. Archer and Hodson were engaged with the reconstruc-

provocative messages of Diagne and Mbembe, by having a single black dancer confront and being confronted by two dozen white dancers, when uttering the second quote preceding this essay as an anguished cry, thereby compelling people in the audience to pursue other questions, such as:

»Who is this person, Cendrars? - What has Cendrars done to ›them?«;

and possibly:

»What have ›we« done to the black dancer standing in for ›Africans?«;

and lastly:

»What did the choreography of the pastiche of the original ballet leads us to suspect about the intentions of the original ballet and its creators?«

The provocative statements by Diagne and Mbembe point into the same direction as does Linyekula's choreographic pastiche: making the ascriptions and designation of identity and/or alterity a question of moral choice, addressing us to make a decision about our attitudes toward our own history of dichotomizing people according to criteria of a racialized hierarchy of values. These requests for a moral choice had me recollect an earlier discussion. In the famous dialogue, the ›Rap on Race‹ between Margaret Mead and James Baldwin in 1970, Mead at one point said that people should not try to trace their biological descent, but rather look for ›ancestors‹ as mental and spiritual guides through their own choice (Mead and Baldwin 1971).

These comments may also be understood as an ›enabling‹ offer to include people who, during the time of Parisian ›negrophilie‹ in the 1920's, were doubtlessly genuinely inspired, enrapt by the vigour of body movements of jazzy dancing in night-clubs, and did not flinch from admitting their excitement, feeling contagiously infected and exhilarated, like Simone de Bouveoir recollecting: »On s'exultait sur la splendide animalité des noirs« (1960, ›La force de l'âge‹). Here, another facet of the designations – those of contagion, animality, instinct, or ecstasy -, normally applied in derogatory manner, take on a very different significance: that of the individual and personal immersion into performative participation, pointing to the diversity of contradictory legitimization strategies in horizons of reception.

tion since 2000, when the Ballet du Grand Theatre, Geneva, performed their version initially. See Archer and Hodson 2012.

Implicit erasure

The following treatise will be addressing a great variety of issues covering the period of a century of debates on Europe's colonial heritage, particularly in the field of artistic expression, as re-evaluated in post-colonial times by scholars and practitioners from both sides of the former political division of the globe into colonizing and colonized regions. I am taking the second citation preceding the essay as an initial point, because the disconsolate and anguished cry of the only black dancer cogently seems to encapsulate the implications that for Linyekula became the motivation behind a re-staging. The shouted question, addressed to the author of the scripted mythical narrative of the ballet of 1923, Blaise Cendrars, indicates that the original performance in Paris was in fact a veritable erasure of the original voices of that African heritage that the creators of the ballet pretended to reproduce. The two dozen white dancers' bending helplessly over the crouched and crumpled figure of the dancer (Djodjo Kazadi) indicates their helplessness, but also for the spectators that the ›searching‹ and ›self-inquiry‹ are now the necessary next step for all of us, the dancers and the spectators. Linyekula obviously put an enormous amount of time into the effort to ›deconstruct‹ the representational ›fake‹ behind the ballet's façade of having become as much of an icon of European, specifically Parisian, modernism as did the painting of Picasso of ›Les Femmes d'Alger‹ of 1907. While Linyekula has not spoken about the details of his own research into the background of the ballet's first performance, I am in the following trying to re-trace some of the clues that may have motivated his choice for presenting the original ballet in its reconstructed version as a pastiche or citation.³ Most important is therefore not the restoration of what has been erased – the original African voices –, but the uncovering and disclosing of the method, of how the erasure has been manufactured; this requires an unravelling of undisclosed agendas behind the production of an African world as European fantasy: the prevailing mentality of colonialist and racist tendencies, as they appear in the movement of ›negrophilie‹ sweeping Paris in the 1920's. In other words, I am not trying to retell the stories about the concrete brutalities of the colonial order of that time – a

³ Linyekula himself pointed to the scholarly source that put him on his way: it was the discovery in 2006 of the work of Sylvie Chalaye, published 1998.

background which is also hidden in the production, as the shout of the dancer indicates –, but rather to single out aspects and contexts of art productions of that period showing the incongruities hidden behind the various concepts applied to modernism, then and afterwards in meta-narratives of various disciplines.⁴

Refractions

The connecting of the pastiche of *Linyekula* in 2013 back to the ballet's original production covers almost a century of the politics of cultural productions, their endless concatenations making it almost impossible to fathom them in all their ramifications, their resonances and braidedness, the discourses and practices being addressed by different disciplines with often divergent orientations.

The essay should therefore be understood as an example of producing ›refractions‹, as introduced by Bakhtin in his emphasis on ›heteroglossia‹ as an encompassing practice of speaking and writing. I take my clue from a Japanese poem and an everyday experience of throwing a stone into tranquil water. The Japanese haiku by Bassho of 1681/6 puts it into a sonar tonality, replacing the stone by the more poetic reference to a frog: »The old pond, a frog jumping in, Kerplunk« (in the translation by Alan Ginsberg). For Bakhtin the ›meaning‹ of any art production consists in the many ›refractions‹ – we may call them interferences, inferences or intersections – permeating the writing and reading of texts, including, among other factors, authors, figures, historical and other contexts, and, last but not least, the interphase between authors and readers (Bakhtin 1981: 260 ff.). The latter interphase is of particular importance for performative genres, from ritual to theatre and dance, but also applicable to installations and exhibitions. Performative genres have the specific potential of transforming the different agents involved, as various disciplines, dealing with the concept of performativity, have suggested (for ritual see Tambiah 1979; for theatrical and

⁴ For a re-telling of those atrocities through the reports by Irish envoy of the British Foreign Office, Roger Casement, about the Congo of 1905, and about the Amazon rubber plantations in 1911, the novel ›The Dream of the Celt‹ by nobel laureate Peruvian Mario Vargas-Llosa of 2010, is the most harrowing, yet historically accurate.

other performances see Fischer-Lichte 2008; see also Köpping 1997, 2002 and 2013).

The particularly puzzling but also metaphorically useful features of refractions appear clearly in the common experience of observing frogs or stones and their impact on the surface of a silent pond. Refractions are the visual impression that the water's surface shows seemingly endless horizontal repetitions as reverberations, of apparently patterned structures, eddying into imperceptibility, and/or into overlappings from recursive refractions from any obstacle or boundary –, making it impossible for the human eye to discern whether a ›pattern‹ or ›figuration‹ of a hidden geometrical ›natural law‹ is revealed, our minds at least suggesting the repetition of ever smaller but circularly expanding replications of the *Mandelbrot* phenomenon of fractal mathematics and physics.

Since not all of these refractions can possibly be pursued, I offer the essay as a prismatic highlighting of specific chains of connotation, triggered in the first instance by the experience of Linyekula's pastiche of ›La Création du Monde‹, in further recursive circlings adding the experiences of other performances by the choreographer and insights from conversations with him in Berlin in 2015, swerving back and forth between the contexts of the avant-garde of Paris in the 1920's and allusions hinted at by Linyekula's various choreographies, relating these in turn to productions and treatises by other recent African artists and scholars concerned with the colonial/post-colonial confusions, incongruities, as well as impasses or paradoxies unresolvable by historical or narrative logic. While there would be a way out of those conundrums through the immediacy of the performative impact and resulting affective ›understanding‹, the venues to the performative styles of the 1920's have mostly disappeared, in particular those of dance history remaining largely a literally ephemeral and often evanescent field.

Jarring inconsistencies of modernism: primitive vigour, insanity, and mechanicism

The three citations are pointing to the heart of what may be at stake when discussing the reasons for a re-staging of a legendary European ballet taken as icon or beacon for the origins of European modernism. What is at stake and at risk, are the concatenations of the artistic production and their multi-

ple entanglements with the regimes of colonialism and their legitimation through various racial and evolutionary theories that in turn were impacting on popular perceptions through media and finding expression again in the pursuit of entertainment catering to spectacularizations of ›colonial exotica‹. The pastiche of Linyekula and his other choreographies do point to paradoxies and contradictions in the project of European modernism, as mirrored and projected by artistic media. The contradictions are embedded in the close association of tendencies and terms like ›primitivism‹ as well as ›natural‹, ›instinctual‹ and the further extension from ›vigour‹ and ›excitability‹ to forms of ›insanity‹, as well as in the constant shifting from valorization to debasement, making ›regeneration‹ and ›degeneracy‹ collapse within a single product, event or performance. In addition to the uncanny alliance between concepts of modernism and primitivism, between desirable rejuvenation of a traditional canon of conventions and artistic productions, perceived to have been worn out, and the danger of contagion through mimetically performing ›the primitive‹, we find a close connexion between ›primitivism‹ and the mimetic appropriation of elements of the mechanical age, of the ›robotic‹ qualities of ›humans of the future‹.

There seems to surface an apparent inchoateness, when the ›primitive‹ is not only equated with the ›insane‹ but also with the ›robotic‹, implying for all the qualities designated – primitiveness-insanity-mechanistic – a loss of agency. With those conceptualizations we are understandably on very slippery ground, as agency and the loss of it were originally indeed markers for differentiations between rational and civilized societies and those that were caught in ›animistic‹, ›totemistic‹ or ›fetishistic‹ mental worlds of utter submission to phantasmatic projections of minds dependent on irrational instincts. We had indeed to wait for a turn in academic discourses toward the notion about a ›new materialism‹, to realize that ›human agency‹ was a confining and restrictive conceptual tool (one of the earliest and path-breaking works was the anthropological theory proposed by Alfred Gell, aptly titled ›Art and Agency‹, see Gell 1998).⁵

⁵ Whether this in turn will lead to a re-evaluation of notions about ›magic‹ as proposed by Sir James Frazer at the turn of the 20th century, becomes a debatable issue. Notions of ›contagion‹ ›infection‹, and the danger of ›contamination‹ have in the meantime undergone a twofold revamping: on the scholarly side, Mary Douglas (1966) alerted us to the richness of such concepts and their accruing at-

titudes to understand myths and rituals, in a context of what the religious scholar Rudolf Otto had called »contrasting harmonies« in the first decade of the 20th century (Otto 1917/1923). The other revamping of such concepts, showing the ambiguity of their usage, arrived as soon as Western politics began to speak of military interventions as »cleansing« operations, while targeted groups were in turn declaring Western culture as »contaminating«. The issue of the use of this concept is of paramount importance to understand cultural and political agendas reaching back into the origins of racism itself: contamination was one of the key notions of the 19th century debate on the superiority of races, played out in France not only between a Latin and Celtic heritage, or used as argument for antisemitism; it became the rallying point for all forms of apartheid or segregation regimes (using always pseudo-scientific evidence); in addition it was uttered by pundits and sensationalist news in 1921 when Maran received as first black writer the Prix Goncourt; it became the rallying of »traditional« bourgeois papers in France when labelling the rise of »negrophilie« among intellectual and artists, speaking of »negrification« of French culture (one of the reasons why the founders of the movement around Césaire did not use »négrité«, but »négritude«); it was connected since the late 19th century with the fear of contagion by insane people's bodily outbursts, as much as the contagion from »dance manias«, both domains being marshalled into anxieties about »primitives« or »savages«. The turning of the new generation of writers and philosophers – after those who celebrated »négritude« like Césaire, in particular from the Caribbean region, like Glissant (2003) to embrace »creolite« as their home, is therefore quite significant, given the history of the concept of »racial purity« ruling European politics for so long. The universalizing the term »nègre« as new ascription to all those of mankind who are in subaltern positions, as used by Mbembe in 2014, is slightly different from the context in which Diagne applies his adage: Diagne tries to exonerate Senghor from having used all kinds of eclectic sources (from Bergson to Sartre and Frobenius); that, Diagne posits, puts all those sources in the category of »nègre«. In many ways, these two authors are raising a huge intellectual – as well as moral – challenge, and full of pitfalls, one might add, in particular for the endeavour of disclosing »racist« agendas, since the ascription of »racialization« (Gilroy's term) has been widely applied also to early ethnographers like Frobenius, as well as to Sartre, Picasso and all the authors who speak of »l'âme nègre« (see below). To do justice to these intricacies of postcolonial theorizing, while necessary, is beyond the scope of this essay. For a detailed critical as-

Racism behind primitivist imagery: ›savage‹ and ›natural‹ mankind

All three citations point to the conundrums, vexations and painful complications involved in the intercultural encounters between Europeans and Africans, more accurately, between a world of people designating themselves as whites and a world of darker skin colour, the designations being used as legitimations for colonial subjugation of the latter by the former. The valorization of white and the literal ›denigration‹ of people of other hues and shades became a commonly and widely held prejudicial structure or ›mental inscription‹ among the European public, and the avant-garde artistic productions are only the last and most prominently visible ripple of a pervasive undercurrent, the spectacularization of exoticized others permeating popular entertainment venues, particularly during the second half of the 19th century.

The differentiation in evaluation was fostered by a plethora of scientific disciplines, developing after the middle of the 19th century around notions of evolution. They were often supported by misleading interpretations of

assessment of the diversity of influences on Senghor, from Bergson to Frobenius, and his engagement with them, see Michael Echeruo (1993). As far as well-meant advice regarding the concept of race being one which should be put out of academic circulation, as Nina Jablonski sensibly argues (see Jablonski in John Brockman 2015), one may take account about the recursiveness and also the amnesia about discourses of only two or three generations ago. Thus, after Franz Boas (1911 onwards), Alfred Louis Kroeber argued convincingly that the concept is out of date (Kroeber's compendium ›Anthropology‹ was published in 1924, revised in 1948), as it depends on the number of traits counted, how many ›races‹ one may come up with (there are schemes with about 300). The generation of disciples and colleagues of Boas and Kroeber, among them Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead (see above in the text about the ›Rap on Race‹ of 1970) did their best to counter-argue racist argumentations. We should, however, remind ourselves, that putting a concept out of bounds does not get rid of deep-seated and historically transmitted prejudices or tendencies of thought and attitude. Interestingly, there seems to be a new rise of a racializing agenda within the sciences of genomics, moving the discussion from the surface to the deep structures, as it were (see Gilroy, earliest in 1987).

Darwin, extrapolating from earlier differentiations of skin-colour of the human species, from studies in physical anthropology, debating whether certain human groups could be taken as ›missing links‹ between apes and humans, and from widely debated works transferring concepts from biological speculations to ideas about cultural and social ›progress‹ through developmental stages (of bodies, minds, emotions, aesthetics and morality; see footnote 2).

In its hardening into attitudes of conventionalized and taken-for-granted ›racism‹, this differentiation shows its particularly sinister aspects, when it is combined with a legitimation of dominance hierarchies by recourse to the equation of skin colour with value scales about cultural, social or mental abilities, even predicating the very properties of what it is to be counted as ›human‹ and/or ›civilized‹, or to be designated to a group or collectivity being considered to belong to a ›primitive‹ or ›savage‹ stage (in human evolution) or – in a seemingly benign form – to belong to the ›people of nature‹, both notions being inextricably entangled in the perception of difference.⁶

⁶ On the other hand, Europe's obsessions with the projection of an Edenic Africa do seem to continue unabated till now: the highly advertised presentations of Sebastiao Salgado's photographic cycle of ›Genesis‹, touring the world from 2015 onwards, contains one of the most surprising reminders of the mythic cliché about ›natural mankind‹, by including – as one of the very few photos about humans among countless images of ›pristine‹ nature – the proverbial Yanomamö from the Amazonas region, staged in a way that would make Eisenstein envious, as the latter had created one of the most ›romantic‹ visuals of ›indigenous‹ hammock lovers, though putting this into a dramaturgy that showed the destructive influences of the Catholic mission as well as the colonialist's atrocities of plantation bosses (QUE VIVA MEXICO of 1931). Previous widely circulated novels of romantic love stories set in tropical surroundings, come from the famous interpreter for American readers concerning Japanese customs of refinement and aesthetics, Lafcadio Hearn, who lived in the 1870's in the Caribbean and published two novels; the second one, ›Youma‹ of 1890, besides depicting in lurid colours the dreamy quality of the lusciousness of tropical life (and love), ends with the savage atrociousness of former slaves rising up against the plantation owners in the typical exotism of his time, tinged with the belief in the dark potential of ›half-civilized‹ minds. It is against this grain that some novels by Tony Morrison like ›Tar Baby‹ seem to present the anti-dote by a pro-

The questions posed concern the entanglements and value laden differentiations which permeated for long the relationships between European and non-European – specifically and prominently African – populations, including their respective aesthetic productions.⁷

tagonist discovering that modern civilization produces only shit to be circulated (1981). Whether turning topsy-turvy of worlds of ›wilderness‹ and ›modern life‹ as utopia solves the problem of differentiation into dichotomies – even if the ›own‹ is made inferior to the ›other‹, as a criticism of existing conditions through imaginary alternatives –, will remain a contentious issue at least since the discussions about the writings of Daniel Defoe (›Robinson‹ of 1719) and Jonathan Swift (›Gulliver‹ of 1726) and the whole genre of satire, persiflage and pastiche (see below on irony and satire).

⁷ It took until the mid- to late 1920's to actually publicly acknowledge in the United States that black people had ›culture‹, primarily through the work of Melville Herskovits, at Northwestern University since 1927, tracing also cultural continuity from African to Afro-American language use, music and dance-styles as well as rituals like Voodoo (with fieldwork in Haiti, Surinam and West Africa, his first encounter with that continent occurring in Dahomey in 1931). Herskovits was the first American scholar to have studied both, the Afro-American cultures, including the Caribbeans of Surinam (who had resisted for 300 years any re-enslavement as independent society of ›Saramaccas‹), and African cultures. In contrast to then hegemonial views on black people as being determined by racial descent, Herskovits emphasized the cultural relativity and variability of these cultures. How difficult ethnographic reporting on Afro-American cultures could become, can be gauged from the divided response to the partly fictional writings by Herskovits' academic colleague and assistant, Nora Zeale Hurston, who, having worked with Boas and Mead, published fictional anthropology, introducing idiomatically well observed forms of a southern ›patois‹ English from her home area of Eatonville in Florida (one of the first all black towns incorporated in the United States). She was criticized by some leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance to cater to white chauvinist expectations. Her 1935 novel ›Mules and Men‹ had however already addressed the carefully researched brutal practices of the abuse of black women by white workers, and the eroticizing going together with exotism and with suppression of black females in forms close to conditions of slavery. For her generation of black political activism she seemed not politically ›engaged‹ enough. Only after the mid-

Thus, the ›primitivizing‹ modernism in avant-garde arts moved the productions of non-European populations from the fleamarkets to the high-class galleries, with the difference that the original pieces were not those to be admired. Admired were those artists who took these pieces or practices as triggers for their own productions, pronouncing the latter as ›creative‹ while giving the former the status of ›mirrors‹ to be displayed *en face* with their modern ›version‹, playing into an ambiguously double-faced response: to admire the anti-traditional forms of the avant-garde, while adding value to the original pieces that were actually the spoils of colonial expropriations and devoid of any contextualization, now desirable for their ›elective affinities‹ with the most advanced Western creativeness. It must also be re-emphasized that the entanglements and the value-laden differentiation are due to an underlying interpretational hegemony, unquestioningly appropriated by Europeans, when they inscribed the originals with their own agendas, sustaining instead of subverting the colonialist propaganda of political regimes.

Interpellations

The three citations – and with them the re-staging of the ballet of 1923 – recall to us this turning upside down of the creative processes, invoking the silent screams of those who were robbed of their voices and their values. They are therefore more than interjections or rhetoric interventions, they are in fact what I would like to call – borrowing the term from parliamentary prerogatives – ›interpellations‹: they require an answer and a legitimation as well as a continued reflexivity about taken for granted historical events and on-going practices in relationships and perceptions of ›otherness‹ with an equal involvement and on an egalitarian footing for both sides. Answering to those interpellations is therefore more than a parliamentary strategy: the answer is more than a game of polite and/or polemical

1970's did she gain wide recognition for her work as advocate of human, black and women's rights. Both, Herskovits as well as Hurston, realized that mockery can take a very unnoticed form by those who are mocked: the indigenous idioms in Surinam as well as in Eatonville were designed to voice criticism without the targeted person perceiving this, a key element to which Linyekula's performance as pastiche is certainly related.

scholarship using either the empiricism of ›evidence‹ of science, or the rhetoric of the assumed moral underpinnings and dependencies of all human studies -, as this gets to the roots of a critical hermeneutics. The critical stance requires – following Gadamer – self-reflection as an absolute necessity in order to understand those prejudices which would otherwise – if not reflected upon – dominate our thinking unbeknown to us and thus oppress us, or rather, keep us in a self-chosen prison of endlessly circulating the same beaten paths of discursive redundancies.

Refractions toward ›appropriations‹ in different disciplines: anthropology/philosophy/arts/theatre/performance studies

The desperate shout of the chief dancer at the end of the ballet's new framing reverberates not only with a particular audience present at the performance, but recalls similar interpellations which lead us right back to the times of the production of the original ballet through luminaries of the then European avant-garde of modernist art, to the foundations of cultural as well as political movements like ›négritude‹, once – and still or again – heatedly debated across the four continents and one archipelago of the Black Atlantic (Africa, South America, North America, Europe and the Caribbean islands). The third quote refers to the time of the foundations of ›négritude‹ in the late 1920's which is coeval not only with the production of the original ballet, but with the whole movement of a fad or fashion labelled ›negrophilie‹ in the Paris of the 1920's, involving the resonance by Europeans to art productions of what was then indiscriminately called ›L'art nègre‹, encompassing a rave for African sculptures as much as for Afro-American, Caribbean as well as South American music and dance styles which in turn influenced new African styles of metropolitan areas like Dakar or Accra (depicted in Jean Rouch's films).

The heated discussions about ›négritude‹ and the ›l'art nègre‹ movement within modernism are directly related to the continuing controversies about what is labelled an ›appropriation‹, when Western performance practices involve the taking over or inclusion of cultural repertoires from other, non-Western cultures.

Various domains of scholarship have found different ways of coping with this colonialist heritage and its repercussions in attitudes of ›encountering‹ otherness. Anthropological methodologies have tried to cope with the ethical

issues of ›authoring‹ otherness through a long process of self-reflexivity about ›writing otherness‹. Yet, while many ethnographers got bogged down in laudable but seemingly unending self-reflections, indigenous self-empowerment moved through legal venues to secure their rights to land as well as to ritual imagery and the protection of their secrecy from invading media (as did the Australian First People's movements in regard to issues of the ›sacred/secret‹, having classical anthropological texts and images withdrawn from publishers and authors, this of course being another form of ›erasure‹).⁸

In the field of Fine Arts, by turn, the discourses on modernism seemed to get stuck and mired in endlessly repeated discussions about ›formal‹ criteria or biographical genealogies and comparisons within a European canon, scarcely touching issues of political involvement and how it may be evidenced in the productions themselves, mostly assuming some ›anti-authoritarian‹ or spurious ›anarchic‹ stance to be resonating in modernist paintings or sculptures. Only recent controversies between specialists on the works of Picasso, as those between Patricia Leighton and John Richardson, have begun to engage with modernism's paragons position vis-à-vis colonialism's realities (Picasso's po-

⁸ The claim of a complete erasure of a cultural repertoire of a whole continent, as implied by Linyekula's performative intervention, posits a special borderline case, in fact as much as in argument. We have only a few reported erasures on the other side of the colonial/colonized divide: ethnographers themselves destroying their diaries or evidence, including objects, in particular in regard to ›sacred/secret‹ ritual spheres, legitimizing these acts with a saving minority cultures from spectacularization through ›uninitiated‹ eyes. The most controversial cases are those of the Zuni ethnographer Frank Hamilton Cushing, and of Ted Strehlow, specialist on the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia among which he grew up as son of the German missionary Carl Strehlow. A case of literary fame was the complete ›re-invention‹ of the ›Kalevala‹, the ›national‹ myth of Finland that could be taken as a form of erasure of oral traditions. These are complex issues that cannot be evaluated generally, yet an interdisciplinary re-evaluation of such events, in a case by case comparison, may foster new sensibilities for the whole field of the ›inter- or transcultural‹ transactions in different fields, of changing horizons of production, reception and mediation. In addition, folklore research by Finnish scholars has shown how ›inventive‹ oral traditions can be: having told a story in one village they found at revisits over several years that the tale they told was re-narrated in very different versions.

litical orientation regarding colonialism is still contested, positively asserted as anti by Leighton 1990; queried by Richardson 2010; with a resounding retort by Leighton 2013; critically assessed and found to be lacking evidence in produced art work by Bridget Alsdorf 2014).

In the domain of literature the magisterial pronouncement of Sartre about the ›anti-racist racism‹ of the literary movement of ›négritude‹ of the late 1920's and early 1930's, coming to political fruition after 1960 with the independence of many former African colonies, seems to be conceived till now as a ›kiss of death‹ to that movement (Bachir Diagne 2014: 4 on the preface of 1948, where, Sartre coined the ambivalent concept of ›Black Orpheus‹ for the first publication for Leopold Senghor's »La nouvelle poesie nègre et malgache de langue française«). This opinion is partly shared by V.Y. Mudimbe, when he describes Sartre's comment as a ›shroud‹ instead of the expected ›cloak‹ for négritude (see Mudimbe 1988: 85).⁹

⁹ The foundations of ›négritude‹ also contain considerable erasures, as the contributions by the Nardal sisters, dating back to as early as 1948, anticipate many of the arguments put forward by Césaire or Damas. The Nardal sisters, hailing from the West Indies, offered their home as a kind of ›salon‹ for these groups of the black avant-garde (on these erasures by the ›Afro-Bergsonian‹ sort of ›boys' club‹, compaire Césaire 2005; Sylvia Ba 1973; Sharpley-Whiting 2002, coining the term »masculinist«; and Donna Jones, 2010). Erasures of categories of ›race‹, ›gender‹ and ›class‹ are highly volatile and constantly reconfigured conjunctions, as criticism from feminist scholarship about the foundations of the field of cultural studies shows, as much as on the otherwise highly praised last publication by Mbembe in 2015, because his only comment on black femaleness refers to the ›frivolity‹ of black women's employment in dubious male ›salons‹ at least since the 18th century in metropolitan Europe, while long known for plantation social life in the American south (see fn. 4 on Nora Zeale Hurston's work of 1935). The private entertainments of the class of Berlin stage directors in the 1920's, and their excited reception and sponsoring of Josephine Baker by Max Reinhardt, are another chapter in this genealogy, emerging from the publication of the private diaries of Harry Graf Kaessler (see for instance, Easton 2002). To anticipate some generalizations about people like Blaise Cendrars: his male chauvinist and war-mongering as well as grandstanding attitudes make him a contemporary ›mate‹ of Kessler, but also of Hemingway and of the German novelist Ernst Jünger (Jünger probably coming closest to Cendrars's political

Added to and embedded within these debates are also the discourses on ›inter-cultural performances‹ going back to another critic of colonialism and the cultural misappropriations of the West, Edward Said's ›Orientalism‹ of 1979. Said had made the point that any representation of the ›oriental other‹ was governed by the aesthetic and political as well as economic hegemony of the West, so that even if the orient wanted to represent itself, it could do so only through the lens of discourses and practices of Western representations (see Said 1979: 21; the very point that made Linyekula chase up the background for the narrative of the ballet of 1923, suspicious about himself looking at Africa through European eyes).

The stumbling stone for a heated controversy became the nine-hour performance of the ›Mahabharata‹ by Peter Brook in 1985, putting Indian theatrical traditions and body formations, dances and musical styles on the world stage. Some academics took the position that this revamping and incorporation of repertoires from foreign cultures was a sign of a successful ›humanitarian‹ and ›humanist utopian‹ impulse to synthetically create a ›world community‹ (see Shestsova 1991: 222). Other writers confine any form of transcultural (or intercultural) transference, including inter-Asian transferences to an all too easy framework of always being mediated by Western interests, economical as well as aesthetic (Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert 2002, taking an extremely narrow historical focus). Rustom Bharucha took the extreme position of finding Peter Brook guilty of an actually inexcusable cultural abduction for economic profits (see Bharucha 1993: 68).¹⁰ A different sensibility about paternal-

leanings). The co-variance of the ›gaze‹ within the racial as well as the gender discourse is beyond the limits of this essay, but it is an obviously necessary scholarly task, when remembering Fanon's utter outrage when discovering children's gaze upon him and his ›coloring‹, while in the same book haranguing the tendency of Caribbean females to ›pass‹ for liaison purposes through mimicking ›whiteness‹ (see Fanon 1952).

¹⁰ Many authors do still rely on a simplified scheme of ›source culture‹ and ›target culture‹, introduced by Pavis though the actual interchanging and learning of traditions, as far as Asian repertoires are concerned, seems more complex and multiply recursive as well as controlled within and between particular stage companies; see Pavis 1996. The practices of the Singaporean ›Intercultural Theatre Institute‹ (ITI) are quite a different matter as far as the appropriations and mixtures of performance styles are concerned. One may, however, remind afic-

istic and hegemonial powers of representation, taken for granted by Western authors, was the angry reply by Aijaz Ahmad to Fredric Jameson's claim that all third-world novels are by necessity copies of a ›national allegory‹ derived from Western models (with reference to the novel »Xala«, »The

cionados that Singeporean political realities are quite different from theatrical collaboration: since Lee Kuan Yew's presidency, the policy of clear segregation of ›racial‹ groups (Chinese, Malays, Indians) is upheld by legal agendas that make intermarriage most difficult, an actual taboo. It is frowned upon, since, so argued Lee – similar to his arch enemy in Kuala Lumpur, the then head of state, Mahatir – the mixing would decrease the IQ of children. Both racists had studied anthropology in their younger years, but embraced clear sociobiological tendencies. These policies however are not reflected in the daily ›borrowing‹ of repertoires from other cultures (including the all-pervasive fashion houses of the West and Japan). The daily practices of employment and social standing are clearly reflected in segregated housing and eating areas as well (with the exception of the ›Grand Magasins‹, hubs of wealthy tourism and the Singaporean middle and upper classes of all ›ethnic‹ – self-ascribed – groupings).

I am foregoing the intricate discussions on ›diffusion‹ and the borrowing of whole groups as collective forms of appreciative appropriations, a topic in early German as well as American anthropology, with the very different aims of proving historical migrations as well as to point to selectivity of borrowing, depending on barriers through existing conventions as well as environmental limitations (the German founder of anthropology, Adolf Bastian, steered a vaccillating course between universal laws of human inventiveness and cultural transfer; see Köpping on Bastian's ideas of the »psychic unity of mankind«, 1983/2005). Kroeber (1924) believed that 80 percent of human cultural repertoires were borrowed, leading to Herskovits' discarding these distinctions to encompass by the concept of ›innovation‹ both, ›invention‹ and ›diffusion‹. For early anthropological theory these were questions to account for distributions of averages, not questions of political coercion, suppression or denial of autonomy or identity, problems that are implicit with the recent terminology of ›appropriation‹, reminders of Marx' use of ›expropriations‹. The new historicism of Stephen Greenblatt has taken a different stance: cultural repertoires are parts of the cultural capital to which Bourdieu referred, that may, however, re-emerge and be sub-merged at different times, contingently, but they never fully disappear (Greenblatt 1991).

Curse« »by Ousmane Sembene – becoming world famous for his cinematic transposition in 1957 as *XALA*); Ahmad's vociferous indignation was similar to that of Bharucha on Brook (see Ahmad 1987 on Jameson 1986). Femi Osofisan, dramatist and author from Nigeria put the colonialist's fault at a different level of presence: he blames ›insidious‹ Western machineries of cultural policies and media practices for making African original productions basically ›invisible‹ (see Osofisan 2001). I would concur with much of his criticism – and this is the centre of Linyekula's ire –, as both, famous director's choices tending toward ›aesthetic profundity‹, and a public thirsting for the spectacular body (›wonder-drummers‹ from Japan or Africa, circus artists from China), seem to indicate a felt ›lack‹ or void, similar to that assumedly experienced in the Paris of the early 20th century, filling this with the manufactured ›ideal‹ of an exoticized otherness (erasing concretely many ›living‹ and ›evolving‹ traditions by neglect or considering the ›written‹ versions as ›authoritative‹).

The initial quotes therefore lead a long way back into the complexities and paradoxes of aesthetic performance cultures and the ›borrowing‹ of cultural productions from regions of the Black Atlantic almost a century ago, and to the ambiguities surrounding the foundations of European aesthetic modernism and its convoluted entanglements with discourses on ›primitivism‹, or, to put a name, a date and a particular piece to the abstract concept: to the entanglements coalescing in the still controversial debate about Picasso's ›Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)‹ of 1907, in particular his previous visits to the collection of African and Oceanic artefacts (not yet called ›art‹) in the Trocadero, the then location of ethnographic objects collected if not plundered by colonial administrations, expeditions and outright wars of aggression and expropriation (being the fore-runner of the ›Musée de l'Homme‹, with its own devious history of the exhibition and strife over Sarah Baartman's remains; the majority of ethnological collections were transferred in 2006 to the newly built ›Musée de la Ville de Paris‹).

Yet, Linyekula's re-staging of the 1923 production does not only lead us back into the events and incidents of the acquisition of the sources of the ballet within a colonial context largely left as void, the point that the choreographer indeed emphatically focusses upon. Through his various frames he tries to performatively transform concepts such as ›void‹ that point to an ›erasure‹, into what I labelled ›interpellations‹ to audiences to start a reflexive search for their own ›amnesia‹ or forgetfulness (even suppression, for

political reasons, or ›repression‹ and ›displacement‹ of shameful acts in psychoanalytic parlance; on the notion of ›anamnesis‹ see Köpping 1987a).

Starting the frame: Ravaging Africa

Linyekula frames the ballet of 1923 by a prelude in which a bodice without head, hands or feet, lying in the spotlight on the stage floor, is taken up by dancers to be torn and twisted into all directions. The metaphoric reference to Africa and colonial exploitation is clear to all who attend this pastiche of the original first ›Ballet nègre‹. This abstract metaphoric dance is accompanied soon by all dancing bodies throwing themselves on the stage floor with a reverberating thump, rolling about, then crouching, slithering and twisting on the floor.

This danced metaphor appears in sculptural form in one of the well known installations by Yinka Shonibare in his ›Scramble for Africa‹ of 2003, shown in Berlin in the Friedrichswerder Church, not far from the place of the Berlin Congo Conference of 1885. It shows fourteen persons without heads gesticulating around a table with the map of Africa in front of them, attired in the colourful garb that is now taken for West-African indigeneity (Shonibare having believed this himself), while it was a mercantile strategy to sell the designs on cotton which Indonesians rejected as they were not on the traditional Batik cloth in a new and growing market in West African colonies (the clothing style nowadays considered an ›indigenous‹ custom by most West Africans, reminding us of the case of the recent re-evaluation of the books by the missionary Trilles by scholars from Gabon, and the general issue of cultural transfer as problematized through terms like ›diffusion‹ or ›adaptation‹; see below on Trilles; see also fn. 7, second part). Both artistic transformations of course can also be understood as a ravaging, in the double sense of a love-play (the ›innocent‹ but tumultuously danced sexuality of ›La Création‹ at the end), and as a plunder in the concrete colonial expropriation, through which Leopold II wanted ›a slice of the magnificent cake‹ for himself.

Fig. 2: Yinka Shonibare, Scramble for Africa, 2003, Fourteen life-size mannequins, fourteen chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cotton, 132 x 488 x 280 cm.



Source: © Yinka Shonibare MBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2015. Image courtesy The Pinnell Collection, Dallas. Commissioned by the Museum for African Art, NY.

Cake-walking the cargo

The most disturbing intervention by Linyekula is having his dancer (or himself) circumambulate the stage in the first half of the re-staging, before the ›original‹ reconstruction is coming into the audience's view, by cake-walking or black-bottom imitation – though in a decidedly machinic body motion – slowly unravelling parts of the back-curtains of the stage machinery. While he is carrying on, the props and designs of Léger's figures can be glimpsed from huge cargo-crates with half-opened doors. The references to ›cargo‹ seem obvious, yet the hiding of Léger's work from the spectator's eyes may be read as a more complex metaphoric reference on a conceptual level: the ballet is hiding the erasure, and cargo is always connected

to the moving of extracted treasures – though hidden in ›containers‹ – the ballet of 1923 itself being considered a ›treasure‹ of ›occidental art‹.

The performance most challenging to European eyes is Linyekula's imitation of a shimmying shuffle-dance, the referencing points to the Parisian negrophile dance fever for cake walk mixed with the styles of Charleston and of black bottom. While the dancer disappears at half-time behind the curtain on one side of the stage, he leaves the audience in abeyance, an initial silence ensuing. Then his hand pulls the curtain to the side and he mockingly remarks »why don't you clap, this is where you used to jump from your seats«. The Duesseldorf audience was clearly stumped in every way, some people having clapped, possibly by habit, as clearly there was a hiatus in the piece, with the curtains being drawn. After his mocking interpellation, only a few laughed self-consciously, but most people applauded then, possibly honouring his prompting and his choreographic skills. On the whole, it seems that the audience was here taken with a reflective affectivity, being torn between shame, reluctant approval and relief to have been exculpated, if one had applauded ›naively‹. The unease was a form of embarrassment in at least two directions: the embarrassment about watching a black dancer do the movements that somehow everybody knew were not to be watched as ›spectacle‹. The other attitude may have been the notion of liking the spoofing of the audience's historical selves. Whatever other second thoughts may have entered the audience's minds, Linyekula succeeded in leaving the whole audience in a quandery, stifling and thus re-directing the immediate affective response to a ballet's bodily skills, making, as it were, the ingrained ›machinery of performance culture‹ that includes the polite inanity of applause, ›stutter‹.

The only similar response I can recall, happened when I showed students the film by Dennis O'Rourke CANNIBAL TOURS of 1988. Everybody was cringing with embarrassment, when a German tourist depicted in shorts went on to demand from a Sepik villager, to show him the place where ›they‹ were formerly killing their victims, duly being shown such place by the villager, and, after taking the photo, talking to the film-director about the over twenty countries, in particular in Africa, where he had already visited ›first-hand‹ the places of cannibalism. The peak of self-shaming of viewers of the film always occurred at the end, when the motley group in the evening danced to ›tribal music‹, having donned tatoos and invented garbs, as ›New Guinean‹ primitives they had not actually encountered,

playing out their own fantasies on a tourist ship on the Sepik. The Sepik villager had previously shaken his head, when telling the film's director that he could not understand why people would go and visit strange countries. He compared them to the ghosts of the dead that he and his fellow villagers believed in –,thus resoundingly comparing white tourists to ›dead‹ people. The many implications on touristic exoticism should also make us ponder about our obsession with certain and particularly exotic repertoires from other cultures, about the ›intercultural‹ denotation, beyond the slogans that claim to be fostering the ›understanding‹ of other cultures. Various performative solutions to overcome dichotomies of inequality have been tried out, from Odin Theatret and Barba's attempts at ›participatory exchange‹, to Guillermo Gomez-Pena's spoofing of our own clichés (and the collaborative ›exhibition‹ with Coco Fusco of the ›Couple in the Cage‹ of 1992, playing on Western voyeurism and avidity for exhibitionist exoticisms, yet the results remaining ambivalent, some people being puzzled, some believing in the reality behind the spoof, and some even taking the spoof at its horns and molesting ›the native woman‹). The results of Barba's performing ›exchanges‹ remain provocatively disputed as much as instructive for comparative discussions across disciplinary boundaries (theatre, cinema, and anthropology for instance). In the cinematic version of Barba's encounter with the Yanomamö, when North European women are performing yodling – waiting for and expectedly receiving a dancing performance from the Amazonian women –, the spectator of such filmed events may feel queasy, when fully dressed Europeans, shown in doubtlessly ›staged‹ and ›rehearsed‹ forms of ›playing at being equal‹, are filmed with naked women from elsewhere, in particular from ›the jungle‹. Spectators who know the ethnographic film styles of Robert Gardner or Timothy Ash (THE AX FIGHT of 1975, among the Yanomamö, by Ash, probably as widely known as DEAD BIRDS, by Gardner of 1965) will be quite aware about the ›construct‹ of ›the native‹ that is proffered, and that, in Rouch's terminology, the ›truth‹ of a ›documentary‹ is always a ›cine-truth‹ (the ›cine-pravda‹ of Vertov).

Questions about what becomes ›canonical‹: whose authenticity is staged?

As this form of erasure is one of the extreme cases of enactment as well as reenactment, it does offer a good platform to think about notions such as ritual, repetition, redundancy and performativity and its effects, effectivity and affective resonances in a different way, raising questions such as:

»Who may or should perform what kind of otherness for which audience?«, as well as:

»Do we admire the skill of the performing dancer, or do we only applaud our own nostalgic and narcissistic satisfaction about the creativity of what we claim to be our own tradition?«; Or finally:

»Do we express our admiration for the reconstructive efforts?« When we see people – as did the in-crowd in Paris of the 1920's – rushing to be entertained by ›authentic‹ African dancing: ›whose Africa are we thirsting for?«

The machineries of marketing know quite well that we are easily duped into accolades for the ›real thing‹, even when this is manufactured in the finest detail, our penchant for ›cabinets of curiosity‹ (whether called circus, arena, world exposition or a ›show‹) being inexhaustible. The exotic other remains an attraction which forces even those who want to gain from tourism to succumb to the lure of self-exotization, if they don't want the ships to sail by. Here too, the questions raised by Linyekula about the filling of voids due to erasure are also addressed to us: which void do we fill with our accolades for an authentic otherness?

Linyekula's performances as transformations: Recoveries

Linyekula's pastiching is, in fact, a fortuitous choice, as he offers performative venues for a healing of traumata, for a recuperation or recovery of memories and histories, of experiences and reflections, through recourse to the performing body. Performative (or other aesthetic) practices are potentially transformative strategies, as powerful and possibly more persuasive than the violence that Frantz Fanon found indispensable for the healing of the traumata of colonial oppression. It should, in fairness, also be remembered that Fanon accorded almost equal importance to the power of per-

formativity when he referred to the impact of trance and possession states for the sanity of the minds of those oppressed through colonial subjugation (see Fanon 1961, English translation 1963).

One of Linyekula's projects of recovery – using the term for the double but related aim of ›healing‹ and for the ›recollection‹ of memories, of history and identity – was the lecture performance of 2011 in the Walker Arts Centre in New York to which the first citation refers. The other one is the performance of ›Dinozord III‹, having its German premiering in Berlin in 2013 which segues closely into the lecture performance of 2011, both choreographically interrogating the political vagaries of the ›Congo‹ after the colonial subjugation, colonialism and subjugation never having vanished or been vanquished (Linyekula himself dislikes the ascriptions of generalizations for people, like ›African‹ or ›Congolese‹ though this is exactly what happens in advertising his choreographies; the reason for his critical stand can be gauged from his lecture performance of 2011 in New York, see below, referenced by the first citation preceding this essay). Within this framework, the restaging of the ballet of 1923 as pastiche acquires a different hue, one of historical depth as much as of contemporary political relevance, for both, performers and audiences.

Reenactments as erasures or remembrancers

The re-staging as pastiche raises important questions about the effects of reenactments as well as about restorations of past performances. The problems start with the ascription of concepts to such reenactments: while Kenneth Archer and Millicent Hodson prefer that their – doubtlessly meticulous and well informed – reconstruction is labelled a ›recreation‹ of a ›Postwar Cubist Collage‹, they consider Linyekula's version a ›reconstitution‹ (see Archer and Hodson 2012). This raises a number of contentious issues about reenactments, such as the question whether all reenactments are not by practical experiences, if not by definition, erasures of previous performances, a kind of palimpsestic covering an original with continuously changing re-interpretations, so that an original repertoire's faithful ›rendition‹ – another dubious term suggesting ›authenticity‹ in a re-play – remains an imaginary goal, never achieved and always vanishing. This prevaricating comment should not be taken as a debunking of the term ›authenticity‹ on my part. Though I have some doubts about its claim to being ›real‹, the per-

formative genre itself speaks strongly against such usage. However, it is closely connected to Linyekula's choreographical search for his personal (less the collective) identity and memory, while being also inextricably connected with collective history and collective memory, reminding us of Hillel Schwartz' adage – in his work on duplication, twinship and cultural mimesis – ,that we should continue to search for ›authenticity‹, because the search for the original behind the copy keeps us alert for such processes of ›imitation‹ and ›camouflage‹, but also hopeful to not always fall into the traps of ideological falsifications (see Schwartz 1996: 17, where he exhorts that tricksters and imposters may be agents provocateurs to a more ›coherent, less derelict sense of ourselves; they may call us away from the despair of uniqueness toward more companionate lives‹). Every restoration could indeed be understood as a ›re-creation‹ in the sense of a ›re-invention‹, bringing together the fictive and the factual, experiences and imaginations, even the festive and the bodily or mental recovery, in ever-new – often only metaphoric – constellations. Other points of view may have recourse to the notion of ›cultural repertoires‹ pre-orienting our perceptions – our recollection of previous experiences of the same narrative, figure or event –, leading to a complex accumulation of different layers, condensed in concepts of figures like ›Richard III‹. We may scarcely have a chance to perceive this figure against the grain, as the Shakespearean text is so overwhelming and pervasive, while the known performances of an Olivier give the figure such a devious tilt, that no historical counter-evidence will ever erase our negative cliché of that king. Reenactments always have to steer their course between erasure, often done intentionally to cover up unpleasant events or narratives, and the duties of the ›remembrancer‹, a notion put back into the discussion about memorial events by Peter Burke who considers this figure necessary, even if only as a symbolic token, for what Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 called ›collective memory‹ (see Burke 1989; Halbwachs 1925/1992).¹¹

¹¹ The critical engagement with reenactments and other forms of repetition and recollection would of course have to engage with Nietzsche's rhetorical master narrative on memory and forgetting in historical perspectives (Nietzsche 1874, ›On the use and abuse of history for life‹, the *Second Untimely Meditation*). He does not favour any ›traditional‹ form of memorization (particularly collectively understood), the two major ones, the ›monumental‹ and the ›archival‹ forms,

Ambivalences in burlesquing

Yet there are more sides to Linyekula's burlesquing: on one side, there are such burlesquing dance forms in the original ballet, as Millicent Hodson's reconstructions for the dance forms show: in particular, the first human couple, emerging at the end of the invented mythical tale at the end of creation, is dancing a wild dance of ›primitive sexual excitement‹ (through a mixture of Charleston, Black Bottom and/or Cake Walk or Black Bottom, before retiring. This was exactly the dance style so much vaunted in the Parisian night-club scene, though we know that people who wanted to join in this scene – still considered ›transgressive‹ –, would rehearse at home, and, through this very act, prove that they were ›performing‹, to a kind of ›idiot's guide‹, because the danger of what Walter Benjamin called ›immersion‹ or ›innervation‹ (in reference to the cinematic apparatus and its affectivity), that is, the danger of really ›transgressing‹, by being ›carried away‹ by the jazz dances of Afro-Americans, would indeed have been breaking a ›taboo‹.

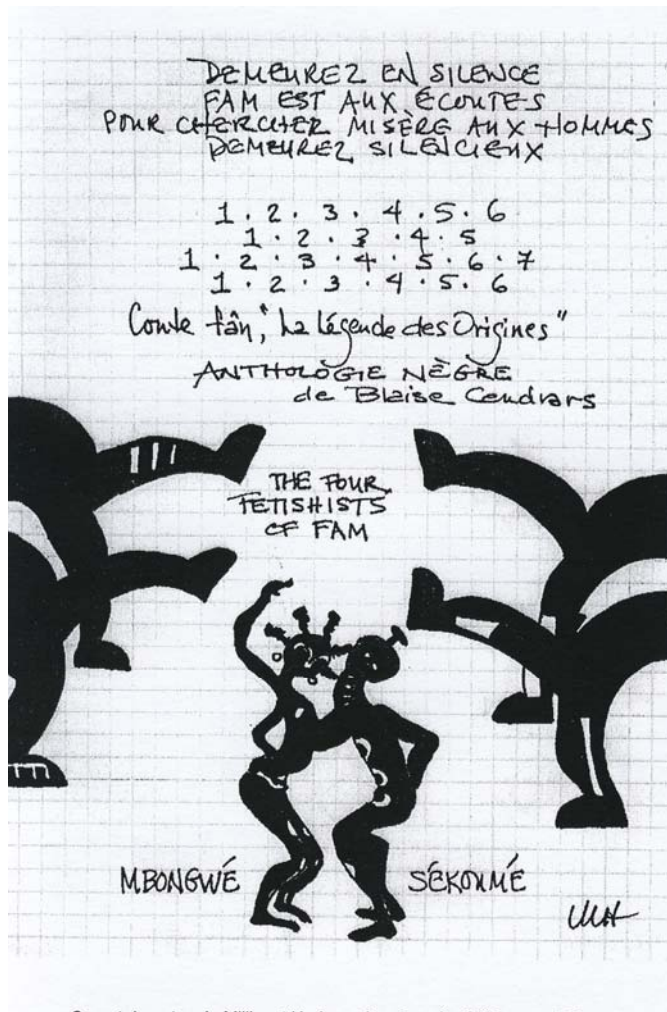
Maybe, the mocking of the audience by Linyekula leaves us in a conundrum, as the story of ›black bottom‹ dances has a further twist: it was originally danced as a persiflage by black personnel on plantations, mocking the plantation owners stilted conversations, gesturing and dance movements (trying to ›upper class‹, pretending to be the new aristocracy on American soil). As expectable, the persiflage was not understood by ›the

both having their advantages and disadvantages. Yet he provocatively demands more ›forgetting‹, as that is for him the more desirable quality for going on in life, opting for an experiential attentiveness and a letting go into ›living‹ or ›being‹. This is a difficult proposition which, while highly relevant for an individual's choice of life-style, thus also encapsulating an ethics, it does lead into a serious discourse on philosophies of life that cannot be pursued here. In many ways, Nietzsche would probably advocate a critical discourse that may end in ›peace of mind‹, a kind of Stoic ›ataraxia‹, or ›imperturbability of the soul‹ that enables ›presence‹ to an occasion or a form of ›surrender‹ to a flow of living. I mention this line in the context of Linyekula's choreographic trajectory, as he did indicate that the performance of ›La Création‹ achieved for him to get the anger out of his system (personal communication at the occasion of a conversation in Berlin in 2015).

masters, but first taken as jolly entertainment, and later imitated as the ›true Negro thing‹ in urban areas by white aficionados of jazz. This is a resounding reminder that mockery is not always perceived as such, as it requires the ›look through the eyes of others at oneself‹. It also requires the insight that the subaltern groups may actually not be that enrapt by the prestige of higher classes, although, when done at other times and outside that context of hierarchical order it may be attached to new interpretations. The reception of the above mentioned works by Nora Zeal Hurston is a good case: what she showed as a mockery through black subalterns of white superiors (in her home town Eatonville in Florida; later shown as linguistic camouflage through the then so-called ›Bush Negroes‹ of Guyana by the fieldwork recordings of Herskovits), giving a chance to ›talk back‹ and to criticize without the recipient understanding these innuendoes, was taken by some writers and advocates of the Harlem Renaissance as a ›mockery‹ of the presumed inferiority and debility inferred to black Americans, to play along those lines of debasing the other; in fact the meaning inferred in publishing these forms of expression was seen as playing into the hands of white supremacist ideologies and their legitimation through reference to linguistic and other ›deficiencies‹ (see fn. 4).¹²

¹² Black bottom dancing offers close reminders to the past, with Sarah Baartman being the most harrowing case, as well as to images of ›black venus‹, applied to Sarah nowadays as accolade and memorialization, and turning forward to the chosen appellation by Josephine Baker, the iconic adage again pointing back to Jeanne Duval, companion of Beaudelaire from the West Indies (with allusions to Manet's ›Olympia‹). All these lines of connotative recollections which Linyekula is touching upon, can scarcely be taken up here, as the vortex of denominations and evaluations turns repeatedly. One of the latest takes on the complex figure is the book-cover by Deborah Willis ›Black Venus 2010: They Called her Hottentot‹, choosing the photo-exhibition by Renee Cox donning metal breasts and buttocks as an emancipatory display of picking up ironically on the spectacularization of Sarah Baartman in the first two decades of the 19th century (the photo-exhibition cycle by Renee Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris, photographs, was called in 1994 ›The Good Life‹).

Fig. 3: Notebook page for reconstruction in 2000: Entrance of the Fetishists during duet of human couple, called Sékoumé and Mbongwé in 1923.



Source: Pen and ink drawing and notes by Millicent Hodson: animation of original costume sketch by Fernand Léger, showing how figures can move in costumes. Costume reconstruction by Kenneth Archer. 2000.

Burlesquing in itself always has a double edge to it when done as a mimicry – it is literally ›multi-targeting‹ –, as it can be taken as aimed at the group that is performatively depicted, while simultaneously being directed against conventions or even those writers from within conventional boundaries who publicly deplored and denounced the transgression, thus burlesquing the moral criticism about transgressive performances itself.

Two cases of the inherent contradictory messages, about the multivalence of a performance genre, shall be contrasted here, that of Josephine Baker – having a direct relevance for the provocative mocking by Linyekula's black bottom performance –, and of Paul Guillaume who shows the ambivalence persisting and prevailing among the other side of the Parisian spectrum, the artists and their mutually dependent public relations mediators.

Controlling mimesis? – Josephine Baker

Grotesqueness, burlesquing and pastiching (close to the satirical impulse), was apparently widely used by women entertainers to undermine eroticist allusions, by providing a space, particularly for female performers, to distance themselves from the invasive gaze by male customers, while they were obviously also playing on their conveying this ›contagious‹ aura through performative allusions. This has in fact been suggested for Josephine Baker's performative control over the role of subverting the expectations about ›the savage female‹, endowed with a presumed unbridledness and lecherous tendencies that were the very notions that scientist like Cuvier entertained about the amply grotesque buttocks of Sarah Baartman around 1810. The public fascination with the image of savage cannibal black women warriors goes back to the first appearance of Dahomean ›Amazones‹ in the Casino de Paris in 1892 (see Gordon 2008: 148 f.), highly acclaimed and as sensationalized – as was the village of 150 Dahomeyans at the ›Exposition d'Ethnographie colonial‹ at the ›Champ de Mars‹ in 1892 -, somehow ›replaying‹ the Dahomeyan war just finished after two years of savagery through French annexation (the later Senegal). They were actually feared and considered as degraded as animals and of grosser savage energies than any other African group, the women even more so than

the men, as commentators exhorted, also legitimizing to the enraptured public the necessity of the French ›civilizational mission‹.

Baker, however, was intentionally ›pastiche‹ this image through pulling grotesque faces, squinting her eyes and exaggerating her clownishness, extending from her early minstrel experiences with extreme black-facing, before appearing in ›la revue nègre‹ – without the black-facing – in 1925. The contradictions are not easily resolvable, as Baker herself was quite carried away with the ecstasy of her wild dancing with the Antillean dancer Joe Alex, as she speaks of her having felt ›ecstatic‹ in the upside-down whirling of bodies (quoted in Jules-Rosette 2007: 48). This ecstatic quality of her performance overwhelming the performer may be taken as an important factor, explaining her success beyond the issues and aspects of the ›spectacularization‹ or ›erotization of black female bodies‹ as an imposition of a dominant male gaze. The previously mentioned comment on such experiences by Simone de Beauvoir shows the ›contagiousness‹ of ecstatic dancing styles overwhelming spectators, even if they don't participate (a telling case of the affective resonance of the performative as genre).¹³

¹³ I agree with Jules-Benette on the suggestion that Baker became master of her icon, as her later self-representations in photography seems to prove (like the picture titled ambiguously ›Black Venus‹, taken by Vogue photographer Hoyningen-Huene in 1929, showing her in a self-possessed posture, while holding a white dress in front, her body being kept in a dark shading); not to forget her bending of gender roles (performing as male bandleader); or her self-empowerment joining the French resistance as well as the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King; and previously, becoming the ›mother‹ to children of motley background, adopted and living in the Chateau des Mirandes as ›rainbow tribe‹. It should, however, not be forgotten that her figure on the stage, including the played out eroticism as much as the clowning, were very much rehearsed and governed by the savviness of the director of the show, van Vechten, generally better known as the trusted executor of Gertrude Stein's literary estate. Here again the intricate connections and interlacings of the European as well as American artistic communities come to light, as Gertrude Stein was also the person – besides Vlaminck and Derain – who Picasso asked for advice and through whom he obtained many objects of African art for flea market prices (see Leighton 1987).

Double mimesis : Paul Guillaume – Playing other while mocking the self

To give just a typical example for this trendy contradiction of the 1920's avant-garde scene: the gallerist Paul Guillaume, championed by Apollinaire, used as public relations gimmick for his exhibition of African and Oceanic art works in 1919 to sensationally advertise his soirees of ›fêtes nègres‹ (the first ›fete nègre‹ having been a ballet antedating ›La Création‹, but also based on Cendrars' ›anthologie nègre‹, performed at the gallery in 1919), during which luminaries like Jean Cocteau would imitate African drumming, singing songs in invented African languages and dance to jazzy tunes.¹⁴ These shenanigans may be considered post hoc as harmless frolickings of a generation of artists who wanted to show off their ›subversion‹ of traditional styles and authorities, but they did this in a form of clearly mocking the originators. The ›adulation‹ of the exotic vibrancy and vitality was in fact less a valorization than a hiding of origins, the ›copying‹ being considered the ›real thing‹. But there are always more levels or shades of complexity involved. The general attitude of the modernists to scare the bourgeoisie and showing an anti-mainstream attitude as en vogue, appears in satirical performances, like ›Le Crapouillot‹ of 1922 (possibly translatable as ›villainery‹), where Guillaume mocked the voices in the French press and the public that was somewhat terrified by the ›negrification‹ of French culture. They produced a piece – in the same year as Paul Maran received as first African writer the Prix Goncourt for his ›Batouala‹ – in which a certain ›Fernand Divoire ... de la Cote d'Ivoire‹ is accompanied by ›Arthur Haut-Niger...ou Honnegre‹, and by a ›Tristan Tsahara‹ (quoted in Blake 1999: 89).

¹⁴ Parisian avant-garde games with the imaginary of savagery in African permutation, can clearly be traced to the Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1917, where fake African languages were intoned, while African masks hanging on the wall were providing the spiritual, ›fetishist‹ powers. As far as dance history is concerned, the plethora of suggestive appropriations of angular and jagged or jarring movements of limbs became fashion with the connection between the modern dance promoters like Wigman, Delacroze and Laban, and had since then a strong genealogy in dance modernism to which Börlin may be added, though he shifted stylistically from clumsy, folksy to smoothly languid movements, but also to jarred angular or machine like style.

›Contaminating‹ genres

The ambivalences of the time and of the polyvalent genre of the grotesque come to the fore (the ambivalence of course being the key element for such genres as burlesquing or cartooning and satirizing are often used, starting with Greek Old Comedy and extending to Rabelais in the Renaissance, Erasmus of Rotterdam being the master of disguise when claiming that all his satirizing of conventions and professions in ›Encomium Moriae‹ were but sayings of ›Dame Folly‹).

As Seidel once put it when writing a discourse on August Wilhelm Schlegel and the importance of satire, ›satire sullies‹, implying that the satirical as general genre (extending to the burlesque, the grotesque and possibly other dark sides of ›humor‹), results in the writer to hit his target by heaping ›dirt‹ on it (a group or individual target), the risk being always that the speakers (writers, performers) become smudged themselves, dirt either ›sticking‹ or becoming a boomerang (see Michael Seidel 1979 on satirical genres). ›Dirt‹ as ›a matter out of place‹ (as Mary Douglas called it in 1966, following Lord Shaftesbury, hailed by Herder as a ›gentle‹ literary beacon), has the potency of disturbing a whole system. That being its transgressive power, it needs careful hedging or framing, predominantly through a sacred or ritual taming (and possibly through artistic forms as well). By contrast, ›self-irony‹, as one form of ›mocking‹, was considered by August Wilhelm Schlegel as the highest form of self-transcendence (for the complicated extrapolation of Schlegel's notions see Szondi 1986). In the light of such considerations, I perceive Linyekula's cake-walking as more than a mockery of a European audience: while mocking us, he is also ironizing himself, and thereby ironizes also the European expectations of the 1920's toward jazz musicians or black body movements generally, causing for the spectators an affective impasse, cleverly playing with this unease, having transformed his original anger into the relief of humorous distancing, or, as he intimated in a conversation in 1915 in Berlin, he got Cendrars out of his system (personal communication).

Double mimicry – Creolite and l'art nègre

Linyekula implicates that the narrated myth of the ballet ›La Création du Monde‹ play to the imaginations of ›Africa‹ as felt desirable by European

eyes, erasing at the same time the voices of African narratives by replacing them with a European manufactured tale and embodiment. The ballet does not so much ›imitate‹ in some evaluative way African lives: it actually eradicates the blue-print. Even more: the narrative and the decorative figures of the legendary ballet or other forms of expressions such as jazz music are typical realizations of how Africans have learned to look at themselves (Linyekula's remarks on his own self-reflexive perception, voiced in several interviews). I would extend the earlier notion of *négritude* that West Indian ›hybrid‹ cultural life may indeed have been built upon the requirement (understood by the ›civilizing mission‹, a propaganda tool which Joseph Conrad at first believed in as much as did Roger Casement when they met in the Congo in 1890), of what Aimé Césaire called an ›aping‹ of white behaviour.

Upon this first layer of mimicry was imposed by the ›l'art nègre‹ movement a second request for mimetic performance, the notion of the ›native‹, the primitive as savage child (›yes, master‹), or in the performative tradition of dancing rhythmically, though ›syncopated‹ arrhythmically¹⁵, gesticulating outrageously, mimicking virtuosity and proving the energetic vitality, supposed to be inherent in an African heritage. In this way, they are forced to enact a mimesis of alterity (the colonial other, to become acceptable as civilized, even human beings), but also a mimesis of the European imaginary, to show in embodiment that savage as well as pristine original and instinct driven humanity, that is loaded simultaneously with impositions of derangement, danger, unpredictability, volatility. The insulting comparative ›scientific‹ proof, that such people are also a kind of ›missing link‹ to primates, found wide acceptance – beyond the notorious objectification of Sarah Baartman – in the reading public at the turn of the 19th century (the adjective ›simian‹ even being taken up much of the popular magazines; see ›Dancing with Darwin‹ by Rae Beth Gordon, 2009; Gendron 1990). The counter-image of European self-perception is one of a tiredness, of having lost the impetus for cultural innovation, a demise or decline of

¹⁵ A-rhythmic syncopation is applied to dancers who move, like Josephine Baker, different parts of their torso into different directions.

creativity, as well as a being stifled by restrictive body codes inhibiting ›natural‹ inclinations.¹⁶

These tangents of referentiality of Linyekula's appellation in the re-staging of the ballet already point to the ambiguity of ascriptions and appellations and their almost endless concatenation of images invoked.

¹⁶ This explanation is also subscribed to by Archer and Hodson, the plausibility of the connection remaining open for debate. For the connex of boredom and ennui with a yearning for excitement we may find numerous examples, from Beaudelaire to Rimbaud, yet Michel Leiris' many volumes are testimony – and acknowledged self-portrait – of the search for excitement always expected from ›beyond the horizon‹ actually being in vain and ending in the endless loop of a soliloquy. The anthropologist Malinowski was possibly the first to warn about honing in on the extravagant spectacles of other's lives, and to advocate the turning of attention to the humdrum or boring everyday life. The repeatedly uttered legitimization of searching for ever new thrills in honing in on exotica seems a somewhat trivial argument, as counter-examples on relieving traumata can be found in such harrowing paintings as those by Georges Rouault, who, incidentally, also contributed to Jarry's ›Almanach‹. However, the general idea, that what was formerly called ›melancholy‹ can be healed by ›entertainment‹ or ›sports‹, derives from a better argued treatise by Richard Burton, ›The Anatomy of Melancholy‹ of 1621. Taking my clue from Burton, it would appear that the legitimization for freeing oneself from outworn conventions, as is clearly the case for young people and for women in the 1920's, could resort to any ›sports‹. Why the rejuvenation has to come from ›the primitive‹ would remain a contingent factor. That indeed would sever the connex between modernism and primitivism and make any search for a collusion by the avant-garde with colonial regimes quite futile.

Fig. 4: Messenger (female), called ›Gnoul‹ in original 1923 production and reconstructions in 2000, 2003 and 2012.



Source: Pen and ink drawing by Millicent Hodson, 2000: Animation of original costume sketch by Fernand Léger, showing how figure wears stilts and uses lance. Costume reconstruction by Kenneth Archer, 2000.

Double mimicry as empowerment: Jean Rouch and the ›Hauka‹

The reminder of the double mimicry imposed upon black actors, musicians and other performers in the Paris of the 1920's explains partially the polemic aversion by many African intellectuals in the 1950's against the ›documentary‹ by Jean Rouch of 1954/5, *LES MAITRES FOUS* (which Rouch would have labelled rather a ›cine-truth‹, separate from the domain of ›documentary‹).¹⁷ However, considering the complex twisting of mimetic expectations, the film and its protagonists, the members of the cult of the ›Hauka‹, do appear in a very different light. The film is probably the only existing cinematic approximation for an inversion of double mimicry: the labourers of Accra in Ghana (then still called the Gold Coast) are performing a ritual in which they mimic the behaviour of the colonial masters (called ›Masters of Madness‹, ›Hauka‹), but they are at the same time victims in the sense of being possessed or taken over by the spiritis of these masters of madness. While in states of possession, they do perform the activities of colonizers in a bizarre way of mocking, of excessively and outlandishly performing military and civilian forms of conduct through utter slow motion or through bodily distortions. They include actions such as the sacrifice of a dog and forms of omophagy, then foaming at the mouth and speaking through a form of mixed language in automatical overdrive of speed, rhythm and staccato utterances, paralleling the jerking and trembling of bodies being slowly possessed from toe to tongue. Critics have – erroneously – always interpreted this cinematic masterpiece as debasing indigenous populations in Africa in a form reminiscent of such notoriously vilifying fake documentaries as Giacometti's ›Africa Addio‹ of 1966. Considering the problem of mimetic desires of European expectations, the film by Jean Rouch undermines the European stance of superiority. Visually, it is the most impelling piece of cinema, making sense of the data recorded by a plethora of ethnographies about millenarian movements about salvationist cults pertaining to and ritually invoking a future utopia, without suppression by colonialism, also known as ›Cargo Cults‹, that spread widely after World War II in large parts of Oceania, New Guinea, but also in South

¹⁷ On Jean Rouch's ideas about cinema see the collected articles and interviews in Steven Feld 2003.

America and which, a century back (between 1860 and 1890), were prevailing among North American indigenous populations at the verge of extinction (not to forget cults among Australian Aborigines who were relegated to mission stations in the 1930's in the Kimberleys, ›inventing‹ – under influence of biblical sermons – inversion myths about a coming deluge that would drown all whites and wash the color off their own skin; see Köpping 1987, vol. 15 of ›Encyclopedia of Religion‹ on ›Ungarinyin Religion‹, relying on Helmut Petri 1954 and own fieldwork observations on the mission station of La Grange, about 80 Km south of Broome in the late 1970's).

The Hauka not only put the world upside-down, they mimic and mock at the same time, they are victims and rulers, and their mimicking performance swerves along lines which are theoretically difficult to classify, but the visual impact is for European audiences not so much one of disgust but one of a surprised holding of breath about the critical edge of colonized subjects.¹⁸ The reaction by Marcel Griaule, the leading anthropological ex-

¹⁸ The idea of evoking ›nausea‹ is suggested by Paul Stoller's ethno-biographical survey of Jean Rouch, in 1992. The reactions by people of African descent in Paris, among them Sembene, seemed more in line with the experience of that ›hidden‹ racism apparent in the times under discussion, comparable to the visualizations in in booklet of lithographs used as advertisements, called the ›tumulte noir‹ of Jean Colin (who flogged Josephine Baker's infamous flyers in banana skirt – purportedly designed by Cocteau –, or with the fluffy white dress surrounded by two male minstrels in blackface, for the ›revue negre‹ of 1925, immortalized by Covarrubias' cartoon sketch of 1927, ›Jazz Baby‹). Covarrubias was one of the great ›facilitators‹ among the Parisian avant-garde groups: the Mexican cartoonist who had worked many years for ›Vogue‹, was responsible for many background designs for revues as well as for ballet, sharing the excitement about the archaic and the exotic, concentrating later on serious anthropological work about Aztec cultures, and being as enamoured with Bali as was de Mare. He later designed the Viking Medal for outstanding anthropologists chosen by the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The medal could with a critical post-colonial view be considered ›exotistic‹, repeating the stereotypical imagery for four ›racial‹ groupings to represent ›mankind‹ and their ›unity‹ (the declared aims of the anthropological foundation); indeed, the African representation of a female with protruding breasts and buttocks – the only naked figure among the four – smacks of ›racist‹ imaginaries, the icon belonging to a ›stock imagery‹ of

plorer (and pilferer) of African arts and artefacts of the period of the early 1930's (vividly described in Michel Leiris' ›L'Afrique Fantome‹ of 1934 about the Dakar-Djibouti expedition from 1931-33), understood perfectly the message (or one message) of the film: he was outraged at the depiction of the colonial order (while gad-fly of the arty scene in Paris, still gathering around Cocteau in the 1950's, found the film a phantastic proof of their own beliefs about people with unbridled instinctive expression, still reveling – as did the surviving or newly evolving circle of surrealists around Bataille – in finding evidence for those ›rituals‹ which show the excessivity of human behavioural tendencies, such as initiations, blood-sacrifices, forms of torture and self-immolation. By contrast, Rouch stressed in his interpretative framework – besides the ethnopsychiatric line about healing and self-healing of wounds of colonialism's brutal exploitative order: to play insane avoids going insane under inhuman conditions – the remarkable insight, by the people playing the ›Hauka‹, in the dependency of the colonizer's regime on a technicized environment replicated in social demeanour; Rouch also gives us here a hint to reconnect to the ambiguities of the rise of Europe's modernism and its collusion as well as dependency on the imagery of ›primitivism‹. In a ›preface‹ to the film Rouch comments on the meaning of the grotesque and mocking body movements of the possessed being jarring, angular and contorted: the Hauka performers do want to ›imitate‹ the admired and powerful ›civilization mechanic‹ and they do want to take part in it, to – as it were – ›possess‹ it, while being possessed by it in real life (as oppressed party), the ritual possession however turning the ta-

sculptures of African female figures, copied in this case most probably from Einstein's work of 1915, as were many of the design for the deities which Fernand Leger basically copied onto white paper-sheets, almost as a grattage, Leger adopting a kind of ›archaizing‹ transposition (for the pictorial evidence see Rosenstock in Rubinstein 1982: 479, where the closeness of the images of a Chokwe figure - and Leger's for a divinity of a ›Fetish-figure‹ - are juxtaposed with the stance that Jean Börlin took for a ›primitive dance‹). These figures are for Leger also envisaged as forms that on the stage should convey something of a mechanical within humans; he tried to project this by oversizing the figures of deities and intermediare ›fetisheurs‹, the deities painted on back-stage curtains moving across from left to right and back, while the fetishes are shown on stilts as danced figures.

bles. With these comments, Rouch is leading us back to reevaluate the artistic productions of people who took their cues as much from primitivistic imaginations as from ideas about mechanical humans (vide Picabia or Schlemmer), but viewing the performance which Rouch communicates to us, we are also confronted with a revealing imagery of ourselves and our ›mad pursuits‹ when seen ›through other’s eyes‹: we are gazed back upon.

Black satire: Yambo Ouologuem

This is where Yambo Ouologuem from Mali intones a very different, much darker register about ›primitive art‹ and modern economics, aided by early anthropology: in his polemic novel ›Le devoir de violence‹ of 1968 he makes the observation about the fad of ›Shrobeniusologie‹, mocking Leo Frobenius (much admired by Senghor (1948) and by African scholars still today, Ouologuem calling scholars to have climbed on a high chair ›sorbonicale‹), stating: »henceforth Negro art was baptized ›aesthetic‹ and hawked in the imaginary universe of ›vitalizing exchanges‹« (p. 110), and continues, »Negro art found its patent of nobility in the folklore of mercantile intellectualism«. In the summary by Anthony Kwame Appiah, for Ouologuem one needs four parties for these global forms of commodification of otherness: »an anthropological apologist for ›his‹ people; a European audience that laps up the exoticized Other; African traders and producers« (who then cheat Shrobenius by burying recently carved objects in swamps to give them patina); and finally, »ruling African elites who require a sentimentalized past to authorize their present power« (Appiah 1991: 354). Ouologuem intimates further on that nothing pleases the ›négrailles‹ (a most derogatory term, here implying the ruling classes, translated by Appiah as ›nigger trash‹) of Africa more than to be told »par un Blanc que l’Afrique etait ventre du monde et berceau de civilisation« (ebd.: 111).¹⁹

¹⁹ Ouologuem seems extremely critical of African academics, who, like Sheikh Anta Diop – having been trained in physics, biology and anthropology, becoming honoured professor at and patronym for Dakar University –, promoted vociferously the contested hypothesis of the Nilotic origins of all African cultures, adding that the ancient Egyptians as ›cradle of civilization‹ were black. Dakar University also became the venue for Sarkozy’s infamous speech in 2007, admonishing young Africans to come out of their mythological mental universe,

Fig. 5: Romuald Hazoumè, La Bouche du Roi, 1997 – 2005. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Collection of The British Museum.



Source: © Photo by George Hixson, courtesy of October Gallery.

while he also tried to win African intellectuals over by referring back to ideas of Senghor and Frobenius. Sarkozy's speech starkly reminds us in the context of Linyekula's performance of the derogatory notions held by Cendrars about African ›fetishes‹ and African's presumed ›mythomania‹. Sarkozy's speech is available as ›Unofficial English Translation‹ on the web-site www.africaresource.com/essays-a-review/; last accessed 05.07.15

Picasso's case and his presumed disingeniousness

It is with some prevarication that I can only partly agree with the specialist on the period of primitivist modernism, Patricia Leighton, when she observes: »The modernists self-consciously subverted colonial stereotypes..., but their subversive revisions necessarily remained implicated in the prejudices they sought to expose, so that modernist images now appear no less stereotypical and reductive than the racist caricatures they opposed« (Leighton 1990: 610). The first assertion has so far not been proved through reference of actual evidence in Picasso's oeuvre (see Alsdorf on Leighton 2014). The presumed reduction to a Hegelian negation of a negation does not quite seem appropriate, having been abused by Sartre already, and it seems trite to point out that any inversion needs a ground or prior convention to become an inversion or subversion at all. Nobody seems to ask the question what for example the Fang could or should produce nowadays? Imitations of Picasso?²⁰ We would continue the void of our own collective memories, if we were to exonerate Picasso or other primitivists or surrealists for remaining aloof from colonial complicities and denying African arts their contextual importance for memory and identity formations.²¹ The case of Picasso's seemingly disingenious throw-away remark: »L'art nègre,

²⁰ The Fang mask is now a part of the collection of the Musée National de l'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, but was for decades in the private possession of Maurice Vlaminck and Andre Derain (a photographic reproduction was published in Rubin, op.cit., vol. I, p. 296).

²¹ It seems remarkable how tenaciously the complicity of Picasso is denied, while recent African artists are much more forthcoming about the involvement of African rulers with the colonialists slavers. Thus, the multimedia installation by Romuald Hazoume from Benin, called »La Bouche du Roi«, has been acquired by the British Museum on the occasion of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. The installation shows two heads of »kings«, with a yellow and a black »face« and a crown, gauged into petrol cans, guarding a slave ship on either side, the enslaved people also being shaped from petrol cans. Without going into the details of this complex installation (addressing the visitor's auditory as well as olfactory perceptions), the message about »complicity« and inextricably interwoven histories, also those of power and suffering, is abundantly clear and balanced.

connais pas«, seems, however, more complicated than is mostly reported (Picasso 1920, picked up in every extant biography on Picasso, unquestioned by Leighton 1990 as well). It seems that Picasso visited the Trocadero's ethnographic collections, being attracted but also nauseated by African masks. According to a private conversation, afterwards with Andre Malraux, published after his death, Picasso intimated that he considered the ›fetishes‹ powerful and guarding with their gaze ›against everything‹ (like witches, ghosts of the dead),²² and to have added: »I understand them very well, they are like me«, meaning ›against everything‹, and that he thought that he got his idea for ›Demoiselles‹ at that moment. This would imply that Picasso understood – however intuitively – something of the spiritual dimension of African ›art‹, besides being impressed by the raw expressionism of form (Malraux as quoted by Gendron 1990).²³

²² ›Fetishes‹ seemed to have been the obsession of a number of artists from Dada to Surrealism, in particular for Cendrars who considered Africans to be ›mythomaniacs‹. Fetishes were also the primary interest for the missionary Trilles (see Trilles 1914). The interest in fetishism and animism, once considered the ›ogres‹ of prejudicial anthropological writings about ›primitives‹, seems again on the rise toward a positive evaluation by an astonishing interlacing between arts and sciences, proclaiming a new horizon of post-humanism that embraces the chain of connectivity of agencies between matter, humans, and animals, starting in a way where Frazer left off in the 1920's, and where people like George Steiner in his work could show the operation of a logic that combines danger, sacredness and contamination into the one concept of the puzzling Polynesian ›Taboo‹ (Steiner 1956).

²³ Laude provides a different version, of Picasso saying that the genius who understood new forms of expressivity has by accident been an African (Laude 1968). Leighton holds that Alfred Jarry had some influence in his attitudes on Picasso. In a footnote she hints at her colleague, the connoisseur and private art historian of greatest repute, John Richardson, having alluded to his archival research not being able to prove any such connection (in 1989, see Leighton 1990, fn. 7). In the meantime (by 2010) four volumes of Richardson have been published. It seems indeed the case that Picasso never met Jarry, though he claimed that a revolver he was brandishing about was the one that Jarry used to scare the public with (Richardson, vol. 3, 2010). Alfred Jarry seems indeed the only truly anti-colonial artist among the avantgarde. His piece ›Ubu Colonial‹ of 1901 is prob-

As far as Picasso is concerned, the aesthetics of ›Desmoiselles d'Avignon‹ may have been truly a shock for art-connoisseurs and the general public – showing women with leering and grotesque faces. The association of prostitutes to a mask hailing from Africa hides a much more contentious terrain, leading back to doubts about the agendas of Cendrars and his collaborators in the ballet of 1923. The Picasso mask having been identified as one from the group of the Central African ›Fang‹ speakers, carries connotations of ›cannibalism‹, as continuously stressed by the missionary Henri Trilles who had collected the oral traditions of the Fang – their myths becoming the source of inspiration by Cendrars' narrative script for the ballet. Associating women (as prostitutes) with the imaginary of the ›savage‹ and of cannibalism

ably the most clear-cut case, using the trope of the excremental vision to metaphorically ›heap shit‹ on the colonial administration. Yet, a closer account of that Swiftian piece of performance script is beyond the scope of this essay. The interpretation of the script through the painter Pierre Bonnard in ›Almanach pour Pere Ubu Coloniale‹ of 1901 seems open to debate: were these disjointed black figures meant as ›illustrations‹ or are they at the same time mocking black dancers? (see Plate 17 in Leighton, op.cit.; generally my above mentioned critique about the historical aestheticization of French modernism carries very pronouncedly over into catalogues about a Bonnard exhibitions in circling the globe from San Francisco to Paris in 2015, valorizing among other things his humour being an ›inborn French quality‹; no reference to the caricatures about African dances seems to emerge from many hundred pages by curators or specialists among art historians). As these images inform the reconstruction of the ballet of 1923 through Archer and Hodson for reenactment, the question is indeed important for the intention being put forward about the wildly dancing first couple at the end of the mythic narrative. Archer and Hodson take their hint from a caricature by a certain Bonnotte, from Archives of Bibliotheque Forney, Paris (see Archer and Hodson, 2012, p. 10. As I explain in the footnotes, my own search led me to the caricatures designed by Pierre Bonnard for Jarry's ›Almanach‹ of 1901. The main point for further discussion would be to establish the different tonalities of possible messages entailed in the probable blue-prints, one, Bonnotte's, being indubitably caricaturistic, while Bonnard's ›caricatures‹ are supposed to illustrate Jarry's lampooning of colonialist's delusions. To know which of such circulating imageries were used by Cendrars, may make a difference in assessing his straightness or mischievousness.

balistic cravings surpasses even the phantasmatic imaginations about man-eating ›femmes fatales‹ which the white women performers before Baker, like Mistinguette and epileptic singers like Polaire, had fostered, making them favourites of popular entertainment culture (see Gordon 2009: 222). The connection of a mask of primitivism, associating cannibalism – or at least being connoted by Cendrars with his obsession about ›fetishes‹ – and black women seems to go a long way back the prevailing ›scientific‹ myth of the comparability and equation of mental and bodily ›deformations‹ – meaning a lack of control and of rationality – of ›primitives‹ with children and even animals, generally with the savageness of instinctual drives.

›Le ballet nègre‹: The ›original‹ ›La Création du Monde‹ of 1923

When using the term ›original‹ for the ballet of 1923, as staged in the Theatre des Champs-Elysees, we are referring to the first ›ballet nègre‹, having been commissioned by the Ballets Suédois under tutelage of Rolf de Mare, choreographed by Jean Börlin, the props and dresses designed by Fernand Léger, the musical score by Darius Milhaud, the narrative myth having been scripted by Blaise Cendrars. Linyekula's pastiche however is an original choreography that envelops the blue-print of twenty minutes duration through a creative interventions, lasting a good seventy minutes. Linyekula's pastiche thus does not valorize the splendor or creative genius of the inventors of the original ballet, but has a very different goal: to point to the erasure that has occurred on several levels, all of these levels pertaining to the total disappearance of any original African voices. The conundrum points to the trauma of emptiness, he is experiencing and trying to recover from, through a recuperation of those foundations on which he can begin to reconstruct and assemble his own identity.

The musical score

The musical score is for any aficionado of the musical scene of jazzy Paris of the 1920's – then and now – clearly derived from South American carnival tunes and from Afro-American rhythms of jazz bands then en vogue in Paris (Sidney Bechet and other black soldiers remaining in France after 1917). Milhaud became familiar with these musical styles through his trav-

els to London (in 1920 in the company of Jean Cocteau) and to New York. He considered the inclusion of jazz tunes a necessary part of musical modernism, expressing, as he intimated, the melancholy of black people's sufferings, actually, as he formulated it, ›this authentic music had its roots in the darkest corners of the Negro soul, the vestigial traces of Africa« (see Milhaud 1953: 137; he also mixed in Hebraic religious chants; see Archer and Hodson 2012). Yet, Milhaud, as many other proponents of modernism, insisted on the paradigm of a structural adherence to a supposedly European canon of ›orderedness‹ instead of unpredictable improvisation (the ›black jazz–white jazz‹ debate finding an early European equivalent here. The public in the 1920's, following what has been been aptly called ›vernacular modernism‹ (see Gordon 2009), may have easily confused the difference of African and Afro-American artistic and musical styles. This could not be said of Jean Cocteau who was reminiscing in 1935 about an experience with the dance troupe from the United States, ›Les Joyeux Nègres‹, visiting Paris in 1902. Cocteau seems to recall his astonishment and positive resonance to the rotating, stepping and kicking style, in particular of the ›cake walk‹ of this group of ›dancers who could throw their knees above their chins‹ (cited by Gendron 1990, picked up as important evidence to understand the gist of Cocteau's foresightedness or him not easily falling into the otherwise obtaining equation of ›jazz‹ with ›African primitivism; to by Gordon 2008, p. 175, fn. 55). He somehow understood that jazz ›belongs to the city and the motor-car‹, instead of evoking the ›jungle and the fetish‹, in contrast to the images of romantic primitivism as did Blaise Cendrars in his ›La Création‹. Thus, Cocteau literally uttered in 1919 about Blaise Cendrars: ›B.C. est de nos tous celui qui realize le mieux un nouvel exoticism: Melange de moteur at de fetishes noirs« (see Steins 1977: 3; see also Cocteau 1935). Often, Cocteau seemed to shift erratically in his chaperoning the art circles of Paris, having taken over this role of impresario or ›Cicerone‹ of ›fashions‹ and ›fads‹ from Apollinaire. Around 1920 he declared that the ›crise nègre‹ had become boring and that there was to be an end to the ›brutish disorder‹, thus coming around to that form of ›ordre‹ which the classical composers were considering important (Milhaud, Stravinsky, Satie among others).

The vitality and vigorousness which both popular modernism and avantgarde modernism embraced, had also different, darker tonalities of connotations, mentioned previously: the dance troupe ›Les Joyeux Nègres‹

and their imitators were compared to the St. Vitus dances, and thereby put close to forms of excess and insanity. The disjointedness of bodies was on the one hand seen as sign of ›primitiveness‹ – the ›African‹ label of ›l'art nègre‹ – while also being compared to the movements of ›hysterics‹ with pictures of people jumping up and down or apparently loosing control over their limbs in the collection of the Salpêtrière. Hysterical forms of body movements as well as of singing techniques were thereby tainted also with the libidinous abandonment, supposed to be typical of mentally unstable persons (on the photo-collection of the ›Salpêtrière‹ in that time and the fad for ›hysterical‹ singers, see Gordon 2008, pp. 47 ff.; both being ›performative stagings‹, the photos as well as the posturing of the singers' disabilities).²⁴

›Ashes‹ remaining: Blaise Cendrars' invention of Edenic Africa

The fake of Cendrars (1887-1961, born Swiss, under the name Frederic-Louis Sauser), rarely mentioned in learned discussions of the avant-garde movement of the 1920's in Paris, is an instructive example of European ›regression‹ or escapist tendencies after World War I, using an invented Edenic Africa as pristine form of ›mankind's childhood‹ being in tune with nature, while ambivalently at the same time adoring and yearning for that vigorous vitality and energetic life-force emanating from the dance movements and the rhythms of black bodies. It is at this complex juncture that

²⁴ For the fad about ›epileptic‹ singers and performers, starting in the 1870's, see Gordon 2008, chapter 1, discussing the famous singer Polaire as well as Mistinguette in her early phases, commenting that we find here cases where »a transformation from pathology to performance« takes place (ibid., p. 36), showing also a litograph how inmates of the Salpêtrière conduct a festive ball in dresses that are reminiscent of paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec from the clubs of Montmartre (ibid., p. 16, the picture being entitled ›Le Bal des Folles et des Hystériques‹). This is the period of the theories of Charcot, where bodily contortions, clowning, as much as contagion through mimicry and laughter were adduced to females on one hand, to ›primitives‹ on the other, as forms of hysteria as well as abandonment of rational control. See also Mary Russo 1995 on the ›female grotesque‹.

Cendrars inserts his bricolage of the mythic narrative of ›La Création du Monde‹. His fame rose through his association with the circle of surrealists and modernists being championed by Apollinaire, and gained notoriety when conducting himself in public as anarchist calling for violence as means for social change, raising his left arm – having lost his right arm in the war –, and boasting in writing of having killed and having enjoyed it in the slaughterhouse of the world war. He prided himself in emulation of heroic life, putting into this category ›adventurers, missionaries, explorers, seamen as well as hybrids and ›le bon nègre‹ including the ›apaches‹ – much heralded in literature from Beaudelaire to Walter Benjamin (Cendrars ›Le principe d' utilité‹ 1931: 46). He valorized people like Stanley who he admired for the strength of spirit to record the tales of Africans at night time while mistreating these same people during the day (cited from Mac-cotta 2011: 145). Stanley had been called by Leopold II as surveyor and assessor of many unknown parts of the Congo from 1878-1884 (being called ›bula mata‹, ›the pulverizer of stones‹). One can sympathize with Linyekula's clearly expressed ire at this accolade, himself hailing from the region around Kisangani, once called ›Stanleyville‹. Cendrars finally made a name for himself as a connoisseur of African ways of life, of their mythologies and rituals, by publishing the notorious ›L'Antologie Nègre‹ in 1921, being invited to conferences as ›insider‹ who, as some French editors of his work even at the turn of this century still maintain, he truly understood the ›soul of Africans‹, while in fact his only experience on African soil were a few weeks in harbour cities.

The ambivalences about this ›l'âme nègre‹ epithet do resound ubiquitously in the time of the composition of the ballet of 1923, Bergson's ›elan vital‹ of 1907 (›L'évolution créatrice‹) spooking everywhere, also becoming the focus of Senghor's négritude. In reality, Cendrars was pilfering the libraries of explorers and missionaries, in particular the works of Henri-Louis Trilles (1866-1949). Erasing any original African voices through his own collagist selections, the *anthologie* however was translated into English and hailed by Afro-American writers as paradigm of authentic African voices; the irony being that at the same time, René Maran who described the habits of Central African life from personal observations over many years, hailing from Guyana and having been in the colonial service like his father, had published his ›vrai roman nègre‹ during the same period, ›Bat-

ouala« being awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1921. In the preface, he accuses Europe by saying: »tu batis ton royaume sur des cadavres«.²⁵

Fig. 6: Yellow Monkey, in original 1923 production and reconstructions in 2000, 2003 and 2012.



Source: Pen & ink drawing by Millicent Hodson, 2000:
Animation of original costume sketch by Fernand Léger.
Costume reconstruction by Kenneth Archer, 2000.

²⁵ The choice of name seems post hoc to have quite a metaphoric depth to it: Cendrars wanted his name to indicate the fire that leaves ›ashes‹ (cendre), in fact leaving a trail of such for African oral history and original voices, very much in line with the personages he adored and mimicked, the explorers as ›trail-blazers‹ (with a similar connotation in English).

The primary fabrication: Trilles

To add insult to injury, the narrative of »La Création du Monde« by Cendrars has been found to be his plagiarizing of an already freely collated translations of original African voices through Trilles. This »ventriloquist« purported to »record« the oral bardic traditions of the Fang speaking groups of Gabun (we notice the Fang as the almost mythic centre of primitivism). Trilles actually mixed those mythic narratives freely with those from other groups, while inserting a narrative structure into the story of »origins« which suffuses it with a Christian »idea of trinity« (three divinities engaged in creation) as well as the dichotomy of good and evil forces preceding the creation of humanity, the myth talking about a »second creation«. Trilles actually invented a story of a first creation by a divinity allocating labouring to a black male and riches to a white male, because the first black human was disobedient and lazy (see Maccotta 2011: 154 ff. for details).²⁶ Trilles had even the cheek to claim to have met the legendary pygmies and to know grammar and vocabulary, fooling anthropological luminaries of the time, like the founder of Viennese anthropology, Father Wilhelm Schmidt. In terms of cultural appropriation, the voraciousness of Trille's »appetite« seems to point metaphorically to his own unconscious insights into his way of »incorporating«, actually a devouring of the oral narratives of the Fang: he refers repeatedly and almost gleefully to tales of their cannibalism. For Trilles, the Fang literally »munched« their way to their present geographic location from the Nile to West-Central Africa. Unfortunately it, and here the erasure which Linyekula problematizes, shows a seemingly never-ending recursivity: recent reports about bardic traditions, and about the reporting by Gabunese researchers about these traditions in scholarly journals, seem to indicate that Trilles made it into the heart of the oral traditions – brimming with references to Nilotic origins of the Fang – and being given late honours as a reliable »eye-witness« of older layers of mythic narratives

²⁶ Interestingly, Archer and Hodson also identify the intermediaries between divinities and mankind or the created world, the »fetishes« – in the ballet's narrative the representatives and survivors of a former creation's bad energy, by comparing them to »Lucifer«. This would be in line with Trilles' christianizing interpretative framework.

(see Cinnamon 2011). Cendrars indeed only left ›ashes‹ all around, effacing all collective memories (see fn. 24).

Börlin and the Ballets Russes, or: How ›authentically African‹ could his dance be?

The concrete cinematic recordings of original forms of African dancing which Rolf de Maré, the Swedish millionaire impresario and financial backer of the Ballet Suédois, had made on his travels around the world (touching upon Bali as well as Mexico and West Africa), have been lost probably completely, though they may have been seen by the choreographer Börlin.²⁷ Yet, Börlin's dance of ›sculpture nègre‹ of 1920, with an African mask and a grass-skirt, has clearly been fashioned after a publication by Carl Einstein on ›Negro Sculptures‹ in 1916 (for a photography from Danse Museet, see Laura Rosenstock, in Rubin 1984: 479). Considering

²⁷ In the staccato utterances by the black dancer, the question ›what did you see, Börlin?‹, is discernible. This touches upon the research problem about the complete loss of de Mare's filmed material. The only surviving record of his globe trotting for archiving the dance styles of different cultures, seems the Claire Holt collection at the Danse Collection of the New York Public Library. The filmed materials, slides and compendious writings of Claire Holt document her starting with filming of Indonesian dance forms by accompanying de Mare in 1930 on expeditions all around Indonesia, together with Hans Evert. Holt, having trained with Indonesian teachers, was an intellectual guide for de Mare. The circle of friends of Holt reveals the closeness of the group of scholars and artists interested in anthropology as much as dance and other arts of Indonesia, among them Margaret Mead, Walter Spiess, Jan Belo, Cora du Bois (see Nancy Shawcross, The Claire Holt Collection, in *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 19, 1987, pp. 25 and 27-35. About the African recordings by de Mare no trace seems to be left. The reconstruction of monkeys and fetisheurs with crutches or on stilts is therefore open to interpretation: Archer and Hodson tend towards a suggestion that these are reminders of World War I; however, it is possible to argue that Börlin actually saw stilt dances and crouchings through the films of de Mare; many West African forms of dances of this kind are extant until today among the Dogon and many other groups. Thus, Börlin may in fact have been trying to come close to what he perceived to be ›traditionally African‹.

what may have been customary in the 1920's to express ›the natural body‹, Börlin may have been in line with many choreographic ›modernists‹, as he seemed to have displayed those languid and slow fluid movements which can be observed in the reconstituted choreography by Archer and Hodson. The styles of ›naturalness‹, coinciding with the ›primitive‹ may have included the rolling and slithering on the stage floor, as much as limping and walking on all fours. Such forms of modernism can be detected in the reconstructed version as well as in the pastiche version of the ballet, as presented by Linyekula/Archer-Hodson, Linyekula emphasizing the slithering and thunderously slapping of bodies on the stage, Hodson's choreographic ›re-creation‹ showing in the languor of the movements by dancers of the ›original‹ carapaced figures. Both together may, after all, convey the entanglement of choreographic history of early 20th century. One may wonder, whether Léger's designs of crutches for the monkeys may be influenced by such expectations to new dance forms as much as by references to disabilities, not necessarily disabilities reminding of the world war's victims, but also recollecting the excitements of formerly popular burlesque shows.

These forms of coincidence of contradictory intentions could explain the popularity of dancers like Jean Börlin. The Swedish dancer tried to ›mimic‹ some form of ›primitiveness‹ which stood, on the one hand, in stark contrast to the tradition of the Ballet Russes that had toured France with great success for a decade previously with pieces such as ›Sacre du Printemps‹ (composed by Igor Stravinsky, staged in 1913 under Sergei Diaghilev with the choreography of Fokine, the dancer Vaslav Nijinski and the designs by Nicholas Roerich). The Russian ballet was informed by a ›classical‹ style of formal execution of specific symmetries, toe-steps and rhythmic speed as well as ›academic‹ artifices (which Cendrars gleefully derided when back-handedly lauding Börlin for his ›Swedish peasant's feet‹; see Cendrars ›Hommage‹ in 2005: 568).

On the other hand, both ballets were representing, in a remarkably similar trajectory, forms of modernism with its contrary notions about ›the primitive‹, ›the pristine‹, and ›the archaic‹, while looking toward the overlapping of ›the primitive‹ with the ›non-agentive‹ of possession forms, of angularity, uncontrolledness, contortions, mixing the mechanistic futuristic with the presumed archaic of a formal taming of the instinctual expressiveness: thus the painter Natalia Gontscharova, one of the sometimes stage designers for the Russian ballet (painting in a similar style generally as did

Roerich which may be described as naïv/folksy-naturalistic-impressionistic), tried to ›excell the French modernism‹, by introducing her ›ray-onnism‹, for instance in her famous painting of bicycles where one can almost palpably feel the rotation of the wheels (reminiscent of Italian futurism). However, at the same time, she was doing research in manuscripts and by visiting folk-dance events in order to fathom the supposedly ›genuine Russian‹ feeling for mystical powers of ›witches‹ and ›shamans‹, or of pre-Christian blood-sacrifices, finally put on stage in the ›Rites of Spring‹ (the reenactments by Maurice Bejart or Pina Bausch are still repeating the imaginary repertoire or even pattern of ›archaic‹ or ›wild‹ rituals as expression of ›instinctual‹ or ›imprinted‹, but possibly suppressed, substrates of human feeling, societal solidarity or other legitimations for the universal meaningfulness of artistic/ritual expression).²⁸ It is this uncanny intertwining and thereby redesignation of two apparently contradictory, but broadly appealing, forcefields that resist a definite resolution for modern reevaluations (as interpretations capturing the context of the time of production).

²⁸ The return to ›ritual‹ as a renewal strategy also informed Antonin Artaud, and the world or colonial exhibitions was found exhilarating with the staged shows of exotic life panoramas and their dances, attires and musical styles. Such ›expositions internationales‹ or ›universelles‹ were held in Paris in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889. The exposition of 1900 was particularly sensational and co-incided with a popular run for ›savage‹ entertainment, as France had conquered in a bloody war the kingdom of Dahomey between 1890 and 1892, and prints of ›Amazons‹ with cut-off dripping head-trophies or of mass-sacrifices, falsely reported about that region, providing a legitimation for the propaganda machine of the French ›civilizatory mission‹, were popular with the masses (see Gordon 2009: 220 ff.). ›Bring ritual back into the theatre‹, was a typical slogan since the 1920's, the Dadaists having started this kind of shock for the bourgeoisie in 1917 with Hugo Ball's appearance as ›shaman‹ (having no inkling whatsoever what that designation means). For a critical review of these issues of theatre history and theatre anthropology, see Richard C. Webb 1979. Critical viewers may find echoes of such fake-exoticism still operative in some of the imaginative but largely imaginary attempts of Joseph Beuys's experiments with felt, lard and coyotes. Others will of course prefer to see this as an artistic anticipation of a new awareness for a non-anthropocentric vision.

Thus, while Börlin's dance movements and attire may suggest what was considered ›primitive‹ or even ›primordial‹ in terms of a ›natural‹ motion of bodies, the dancer was also known for his embodiment of the often angular, jagged, even contorted or clownish positioning and moving of arms, legs and head in forms suggesting ›machinic‹ or ›robotic‹ elements of the modern machine age, and of puppets, for that matter (supported through the music of Eric Satie as much as by the designs of Fernand Léger or Francis Picabia; Charlie Chaplin's films being the lasting icon for these modernist bodies).²⁹

These are some of the few points of reference, extrapolated from a plethora of possible connections to reveal a probable agenda behind the original 1923 ballet's artistic collaborations and possible sources of ›primitivism‹ as much as ›modernism‹ in their uncanny alliance and hidden complicity.³⁰

²⁹ Some famous reconstructions and cinematic archival material show the pervasive notion of the mechanical body: ›The Triadic Ballet‹ of 1924 by Oscar Schlemmer, the ›Ballet Mecanique‹ by Leger, with the music by Antheil, in 1922; most pronouncedly the ›Skating Rink‹ of 1922 with the Ballets Suédois, in which Börlin figured as main dancer and choreographer, music by Honegger, costume design by Leger.

³⁰ The first exhaustive circumscription of ›primitivism‹ is published about twenty years after the ›fashion‹ by Robert Goldwater in 1938, also known for his comparison of methodological approaches between art history and anthropology. The problems of notions of ›ritual‹ entertained by artists and those of anthropological ritual theory are innumerable. Artistic notions seem to have taken ›ritual‹ to belong to the sphere of ›excitement‹. There is nothing to be criticized, considering that ritual is closely tied to ›festive‹ occasions, festivals being indeed the times of heightened attention, or in Le Goff's words, having a ›cataclysmic‹ quality, labelled previously by Durkheim as ›effervescence‹. On the other hand, people like Artaud with being tired of traditional theatre's ›performative pretenses‹ and possibly ›pretentiousness‹ did not see the ›iterativity‹ of rituals, particularly of ›liturgical‹ forms of it (which Stravinsky may actually have understood well). A more dynamic understanding of ›ritual‹ came into anthropological discourse only with Tambiah 1979, seeing both sides, emphasizing performativity as well as redundancy as preconditions for ritual to lead into other forms of perception or consciousness (see Köpping 2013 a and b).

Linyekula setting the tone in 2011

In his lecture performance of 2011 (at the Walker Arts Centre in New York), preceding the reenactment of the 1923 ballet, Linyekula poses a more personal question about his individual identity vis-a-vis collective ascriptions pertaining to the constantly shifting identities of rulers or designations of national collectives (›Congo‹, ›Zaire‹, ›Democratic Republic of Congo‹). Such frames of ascription make him doubt where he belongs and who he is: what, so he is asking in 2011 – if all these designations are nothing but lies? Fittingly, one of Linyekula's first choreographies had the title of »Le festival des mesonges« (in Avignon, 2006/7). In his lecture performance of 2011, he set the tone for his choreographic work having as central focus the search for identity and authenticity, for memory, history and the situatedness of African arts in the world, and where – if they exist(ed) once – their erasure occurred. If such artistic productions were (and are) still existing, how was it possible to have them not only (mis)-appropriated but actually ›abducted‹? If the creativity of African artists has been virtually negated and been replaced by the other's, the European's, the colonizer's imaginations of what ›Africa‹ is supposed to mean, how then is it possible to recover the living traditions and the memories entailed in them and possibly not only re-appropriate, but literally re-invigorate them with relevance to an existing present, corporeally bringing them to presence?³¹

Linyekula does this in 2011 by ›showing‹ audiences the process of finding his anchoring of individual and collective identity, by what he called a

³¹ That could theoretically mean to create from scratch such memories in terms of recollection through bodily practices, to spur the mental anamnestic reflexivity to overcome the amnesia of forgetting, through a recourse to the senses leading to, if not affective, at least reflexive responses. This philosophical problem between enactment and experience and their feedback loops shall however not be discussed here. On the problem of overestimating affectivity (and thus performativity as not only being effective but also generating similar or predictable affective resonances), see Berlant 2008. The discussion on affective resonance for undermining prejudicial mental horizons is, however, of utmost importance for the topic at hand, as it points to the difficulty to find effective strategies to counter a racism that does not diminish through the scientific proof that the category is basically useless.

›framing of a void‹, through recourse to the memory of his sensing body as dancer with its own authenticity of inscribed experiences. He starts his soliloquy by stroking with the palms of his hands his inner and outer arms, winding them together slowly while beginning to speak about the room he is performing in, a small cubicle with an ›open‹ fourth wall, by labelling it his refuge, his home, a protected space, a cocoon, for another, calling the proscenium stage his ›kabako‹ (in memory to his friend and colleague Kabako who died of the plague, this name connotation only becoming clear in ›Dinozord III‹).

This is a very different tonality, highlighting the more gentle optimism and graceful invitation to dialogue that is offered to us by Linyekula's performances. However, there exists – outside the reenactment of ›La Création‹ in Linyekula's works a consistent voicing of anger and dancing of pain in his disgust about the corrupt elites at home, starting with his lecture performance in 2011, bringing it to a crescendo in his ›Dinozord III‹ in 2013, when he exclaims in despairing fury: »I am the vomitory of the Republic«.

The interpellations as ›window‹ and ›wound‹

The interpellation, in particular the last one referred to so far, opens for spectators a window to glimpse a piece of a historical event and to perceive through that window – opened by the reenactment's powerfully and evocatively shouted question – , the cover-up, the riddle about the original ballets false facade; on the other hand, the opened space may also be perceived as a hint and metaphoric reference to a trauma, a wound, an open space in the performer's body and memory, the wound and anguish about a loss, a gap, an erasure of a past that has become meaningful for the performer in his present, enabling him to go forward into a future without a festering wound of not knowing where it originated. He is healing his wounds through retracing his own experiences since childhood through the dancing body, thereby also collapsing the difference and hiatus supposedly being constructed between colonial and postcolonial periods.

Coda

How audiences will resonate with performances that dismantle their own imaginations, will remain contingent, as the estrangement of dearly held beliefs and identity markers, including world-views, of individual or collective selves is often difficult to endure. The question we have to ask ourselves remains: »When do we vomit?«, ricocheting Linyekula's self-disgust in *Dinozord III* of »I am the vomitory of the republic«. Do we reconsider the atrocities of colonialism as our heritage plus debt and become nauseated not about our own savagery so much, as about our forgetfulness in celebrating »primitivism«, by not considering at what costs we have acquired the kind of exquisite aesthetics of modernism? Do we recognize in the contorted and horribly grotesque faces of the »Hauka« our own camouflaged desires, even actions committed, but not admitted? The »true« faces behind colonialism's »civilizing mission« and still pervading myths about »foreign aid« (the duplicity as well as complicity having only recently been shown to us through the Malinese/Mauretanian director Cissako's film *BAMAKO* of 2006).

Linyekula seemed to have opened for himself a way to gain a new perspective on the reaction of people at home to the ruling brutality: as he explains in his lecture performance of 2011, he understands that the despotic conditions of African rulers compel people to dance to those tyrannical tunes (that are also raising the ire of Mbembe in 2001, having been as much the target of cinematic black satires by the late Ousmane Sembene). The only venue open – argues Linyekula – is the »showing off«, because »performing« a show is the only way to keep their dignity in a situation which has no depth, where all is surface and make-belief, in a situation where there can be no trust, because one is constantly under observation, and begins to self-censor one's utterances. He intimates that one can only survive sanely in panoptical conditions by undermining the instruments of domination through the pretense of play, play being the only venue to speak the truth. How can one find one's feet in such an environment, one's feeling of balance, of sanity? Linyekula resorts to the »safe haven«, as he calls the proscenium theatre in New York, feeling protected as in a cocoon, moving his body to a melody of his grandmother, at first only heard in his head, then sung to the audience.

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