A LINGERING LUSOTOPIA: THINKING THE PLANETARY FROM ANGOLA

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This is the pathway to the stars

along the agile curve of the gazelle's neck

on to the harmony of the world.

AGOSTINHO NETO, "PATHWAY TO THE STARS," 1953

In 2012, *Le Monde* published an article entitled "A Ghost City Constructed by China in the Heart of Angola," which describes the new city of Kilamba, thirty kilometers from Luanda. Kilamba was constructed by a company owned by the Chinese State in return for access to Angolan oil.[1] The luxury apartments built in Kilamba stand empty; at US$120,000 and US$200,000 each, they are out of reach for most Angolans.[2] But the article in *Le Monde* was not interested in the financial well-being of Angolans. Rather, its concerns were symptomatic of a certain alarm in the West at new geopolitical alignments to control natural resources, such as those between China and Angola.

The Kilamba development and its somewhat prejudiced critique underline the problem that unbridled development poses for the future

1 "Une ville fantôme construite par la Chine en plein cœur de l'Angola," *Le Monde*, July 4, 2012. http://bigbrowser.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/07/04/dig-une-ville-fantome-construite-par-la-chine-en-plein-coeur-de-langola/ <accessed August 1, 2012>.

2 Ibid.

doi:10.1162/ARTM_a_00068

of our planet, a problem that has provoked new definitions of the term "planetarity" within two recent contexts. The first pertains to assertions made by ecologists and climate scientists that we are now living in the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch in which humans have unwittingly become geological agents.[3] In this discourse, planetary thinking involves the collective determining of safe boundaries for human expansion and exploitation of the Earth's natural resources.[4] The second context is that of Marxist postcolonial theory, which has also invoked the term "planetarity" to bring to the looming specter of ecological catastrophe an urgent concern with political agency and social justice. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, argues that acknowledging the human causes of climate change collapses the distinction between human and natural history and makes a demand for collective political action at the level of the human species, a form of universalism that, he points out, is at the limits of comprehension.[5] In the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, by contrast, "planetarity" is a conceptual and political move by which the figure of the planet is offered as an alternative to the "globe" of capitalist globalization.[6] While for Spivak "the globe" that appears "on our computers" presents the Earth as available for territorialization, "planetarity" involves an uncanny sense both of our fragile inhabitation of the Earth's surface and of the fact that our planet is but one small part of a vast solar system.

These two understandings of planetarity are crucial to understanding the importance of new social, cultural, and economic developments around the world, including in Angola. New urban constructions such as Kilamba are aligning supposedly disconnected countries and markets (Angola and China) in new ways while simultaneously remaking

3 Will Steffan et al., *Global Change and the Earth System: A Planet under Pressure* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2004); Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?," *GSA Today* 18 (February 2008): 4–8; Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369 (March 13, 2011): 842–67, doi:10.1098/rsta.2010.0327.

4 Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009): art. 32, accessed December 22, 2012, www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32.

5 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197–222.

6 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 71–102.

the Angolan landscape as a site for opulent urban living. This conjunction of urban and social planning can also be seen in the creation of Kilamba's sterile luxury apartments, the form of which echoes projects such as Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse (1924), in which modernist architecture proposed high-tech cities of the future and connected urban development to utopian ambitions for radical social transformation. In Kilamba, this utopian dream has given rise to a form of urban development operating under the imperative of economic growth, without "planetary boundaries" in the ecological sense or a redemptive historical horizon.[7] Mythic pasts and equally mythic futures come together through the transformed territories of the local and the global, such that Kilamba becomes just one small site in a much vaster satellite image of urban sprawl spreading over the surface of the planet.

In this essay I will consider two art installations that recall other visions of the future from Angola's recent past, when a socialist alternative to capitalist development was imagined. The first installation is the exhibition Lion & Ox, which was organized in Luanda in 2006 by Angolan artist António Ole and the French group Art Orienté objet (or AOo), consisting of Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin. Lion & Ox was installed at the Museum of the Armed Forces in the Fortress of San Miguel, a 17th-century building constructed by the Portuguese during the first wave of colonial contact with Angola. The installation comprised a labyrinthine display of sculptural works, videos, and photographs taken in Kisama National Park, all of which circled other sculptural objects placed inside the armored tank that had borne the body of Agostinho Neto, Angola's first president, during his funeral procession. As I will argue, the exhibition set out to critique the present government's attempts to revive safari tourism and, by extension, the corruption of the political elite. Central to this critique was the juxtaposition of natural history dioramas, including images of wild animals, the savannah landscape, and nationalist symbols derived from Chokwe culture,[8] with the surroundings of the Museum of the Armed Forces, a building that through its décor and the objects it houses forms a palimpsest of Angola's violent colonial and postcolonial history.

The second installation I will discuss is *Icarus 13*, created by

7 Rockström et al., "Planetary Boundaries."

8 The Chokwe are the ethnic group who dominated northern Angola until their first contact with the Portuguese in the 1930s.

Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda in 2008 and first shown at the 2008 Guangzhou Triennial, entitled Farewell to Postcolonialism. Whereas Lion & Ox critically addresses the reterritorialization of Angolan terrain, *Icarus 13* invites us to see the Earth in its entirety from outer space. It is a science fiction about an Angolan space mission to the sun told through a series of photographs of abandoned colonial modernist buildings and a monument to Agostinho Neto—again, a potent mix of nationalism, abandoned colonialism, and utopian ambitions.

Lion & Ox and *Icarus 13* both invoke the figure of Neto, the poet and leader of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), who became Angola's first president.[9] As a poet Neto conjured nationalist symbols out of natural phenomena and the symbols of "indigenous" culture as a riposte to Portuguese colonial rule, which only became entrenched across Angola in the 1930s. *Lusotropicalism*, the ideology of late colonial propaganda, proposed that the Portuguese were ideally suited to colonial rule because their race had a unique "genius" for governing local populations and adapting their culture to tropical climes, thus mystifying the colonial exploitation of Angolan natural resources and naturalizing the colonizers' claims to the territory.[10] Like many of the founders of the independence movements in Portugal's African colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, Neto became politically active when he was a student in Portugal in the 1940s and 1950s. His collection of poems *Sacred Hope* was written clandestinely while he was a political prisoner during the 1950s and 1960s. Neto's speeches as leader of the MPLA made a Marxist critique of colonial injustice, but his poetry proposes an alternative cosmic teleology, a revolutionary vision of the Angolan land and culture to counter the colonial mythology of lusotropicalism. The poems evoke an Angolan terrain that, though lacking social justice, is

9 The MPLA was formed in Angola in 1956, and in 1961 it began an armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. Its political base lay within the Ambundu ethnic group and the educated intelligentsia in Luanda. Internationally, the MPLA had close ties with the liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique and was affiliated with European and Soviet communist parties. At independence in 1975, the MPLA was the ascendant political force in Angola.

10 *Lusotropicalism* is a term invented by the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre. The concept was adopted by the Estado Novo in the 1950s. Yves Léonard, "Salazarisme et Lusotropicalisme, histoire d'une appropriation," in "Lusotropicalisme: Idéologie coloniales et identités nationale dans les mondes lusophones," ed. D. Couto, A. Enders, and Y. Léonard, special issue, *Lusotopie* 1997: 211–26.

imagined as verdant and prodigious. Deprived of an immediate audience because of the poet's imprisonment, these poems are songs that functioned as nostalgic manifestos for the future.[11]

Through the figure of Neto, Lion & Ox and *Icarus 13* allude to the early socialist ideals of the MPLA before it became mired in corruption, violent factionalism, and a devastating civil war with the opposition force UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).[12] The MPLA has held onto power since the first multiparty elections in 2001 and is intolerant of dissent. Those within its inner circle have become phenomenally wealthy through holdings in oil, diamond, and construction companies distributed across Angola, Brazil, Portugal, and the UK.[13] This has facilitated Luanda becoming a new hub for African contemporary art.[14] At the same time, extreme poverty and infant mortality remain unacceptably high—an example of what Spivak calls the scandal of "class apartheid" in the postcolony under global capitalism.[15]

In the pages that follow, I argue that if Lion & Ox explores the tension between nature structured through colonial taxonomies and the irreducible strangeness of the Earth's fragile surface, then *Icarus 13* suggests a shift in scale to a planetary imaginary, one that connects Angola to the stars. The notion of planetarity supports this conceptual shift between the two installations, just as Spivak connects our inhabitation of the Earth's surface to an awareness of the planet as being

11 Ana Maria Mao-de-Ferro, "Utopian Eyes and Dystopian Writings in Angolan Literature," *Research in African Literatures* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 48.

12 Playing out as a microcosm of the Cold War, the conflict was sustained through the involvement of external forces: MPLA was supported by the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, and Cuban troops, and UNITA was sponsored by the CIA, Zaire, and South Africa, whose army repeatedly attempted to invade Angola from Namibia. William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

13 Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 273–81.

14 The Sindika Dokolo Foundation, which has supported this new art scene, is closely associated with the ruling elite of the MPLA and has received a level of scrutiny from Western critics that has rarely been leveled at corrupt art patrons in Europe or North America. Ben Davis, "Art and Corruption in Venice," *Artnet News*, February 23, 2007, accessed December 12, 2012, http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/artnetnews2-23-07.asp; "Update on Dokolo in Venice," *Artnet News*, May 18, 2007, accessed December 12, 2012, http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/artnetnews5-18-07.asp.

15 Brautigam, *Dragon's Gift*, 273; Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 99.

part of a vast solar system. But it also suggests a way in which Neto's poetic vision of African socialism, which makes a cosmic leap beyond 20th-century developmentalism, might resonate with urgent contemporary ecological concerns.[16] The questions that I want to posit through Lion & Ox and *Icarus 13*, then, are: how do these references to the utopias of the recent past signify at a moment in which Angola reconfigures its place in the world? And how do these utopias linger in the planetary present?

TERRITORY

The title Lion & Ox suggests a moment of peace regained, referring to lines from Isaiah (7:11) that pronounce that, following devastating war, "the Lion and the Ox will eat grass together." Angola's civil war, which began shortly after independence in 1975 and continued until 2002, was indeed apocalyptic: some 500,000 people died, and over a million were displaced. An entire ecology was devastated, with the country left almost completely devoid of wildlife. This postconflict moment contrasts starkly with the images that decorate the Fortress of San Miguel, the site of the exhibition and a place layered with colonial history and relics of the armed struggle for independence. Built in 1634, the fortress was used by colonial administrators beginning in the 1920s; some years later they commissioned the elaborate *azulejo* tile decoration for the interior walls (azulejo being commonly thought of as quintessentially Portuguese, though in fact its aesthetic influences come from India, Holland, and North Africa). The tableaux depict early colonial history and the fauna and flora of Angola, with the design sampling patterns and drawings from the tales of European travelers in the 16th century.[17] Though now in a decrepit state due to years of neglect, these azulejo murals are rich in rococo figures and flourishes of foliage that frame a lush taxonomy of Angolan fauna, presenting a fantastical

16 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses make an analogous argument when they state that the emergence of 20th-century nationalist movements in Africa and Asia reanimated debates over how to reconcile Western rationality and science with more diverse forms of knowledge in tune with local ecologies. However, these concerns withered away with the independence of colonial territories: "'Defeating underdevelopment' became the new rallying cry." See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Beyond Northern Epistemologies: Another Knowledge Is Possible* (London: Verso, 2008), xxxvii.

17 *António Ole: Art Orienté objet: Leo et Bos*, text by Bernard Müller (Paris: Éditions CQFD, 2006), exhibition catalog, 23.

vision of abundant wildlife, with giraffes, elephants, and the famous giant sable antelope, the *palanca negra*, inhabiting an untouched paradise.

The very walls are thus replete with crumbling visions of a prelapsarian utopia, a Christian vision of an earthly paradise that Portugal projected onto its colonial territories for over four hundred years.[18] This vision is itself deeply ideological, as it masks the tenuous hold Portugal belatedly secured over its African colonies. Though evoking a utopia of virgin nature "discovered" by 15th-century Christian explorers, the azulejos were actually only commissioned from a Lisbon company, the Fábrica de Faianças de Azulejos Sant'Anna, in the 1940s. The tiles thus date from the mid-20th century, when the wave of late colonial settlement in Angola from the 1930s to the 1960s, encouraged so as to consolidate Portugal's late control of its "overseas provinces," brought the Portuguese population in Angola to some 350,000.[19]

In contrast to this vision of a bounteous nature, the artworks in Lion & Ox were framed by two funereal moments. Entering the exhibition, visitors encountered a sculptural installation by Ole comprising an odd array of white objects mounted on a white wall: a battered safari hat, sticks and branches, various kinds of masks, empty picture frames, a wire net, parcels tied with string, and bundles of papers. The whiteness recalled the white calico draped over the bodies of the deceased in Chokwe burial. A chair, also painted white, stood in front of this assemblage, as though waiting for tired visitors to use it. But any sitter would have found him- or herself too close to see the objects, the distance needed to get a sense of the work as a whole denied. Crowded together awkwardly, the objects were suggestive of an anthropological expedition. However, the exhibition refused the exoticizing drama prevalent in European conventions of ethnographic display. Instead, the objects were mute, suspended in a state of chilling obliqueness.

Visitors then thronged through darkened corridors in which doorways and windows were blocked by a series of photographs by Ole; another series of photographs by AOo was mounted on the walls.

18 Fernando Arenas, *Utopias of Otherness: Nationhood and Subjectivity in Portugal and Brazil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xv.

19 When the Estado Novo was formed in 1933, colonial policy shifted dramatically to ensure the suppression of local resistance and to consolidate Portugal's claim to its African colonies. Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau were reclassified in law as the "overseas provinces" of Portugal, and the Estado Novo encouraged a vast wave of new settlement.

Significantly, Ole's photographs were taken in Kissama National Park outside Luanda. The park was set up in 1938 by the Portuguese as a game reserve and was popular with tourists and settlers before independence. By the end of the civil war, wild animals in Angola had been virtually eliminated by poaching and destruction of habitat, while the lucky ones, like the human population also displaced by the war, escaped over the border to neighboring countries. In the years following the ceasefire, Kissama National Park became a key site for the Angolan government's plan to revive Angola as a destination for tourists lured by the promise of wildlife safaris. In 2001, the Kissama Foundation, set up by Angolans and South Africans and supported by their respective governments, began "Operation Noah's Ark." This ambitious project began transporting large animals such as lions, elephants, and giraffes from overcrowded wildlife parks in Botswana and South Africa.

Ole's pictures, however, are not only devoid of fauna but, crucially, also emptied of people. One photograph, installed within a tight alcove decorated with azulejos depicting lush foliage, shows the leafless branches of a baobab tree, which is sacred across Africa because of its "miraculous" biology—it can live between one thousand and six thousand years, can store vast quantities of water in its bulbous trunk, and holds within its branches, leaves, and roots many properties essential for human survival. In a second image, a makeshift wooden barrier stands in front of a tree; a third presents an abandoned canoe. These eerie images show Kissama National Park as an empty, abandoned landscape from which animals and humans have long departed. A further triptych presents close-up shots of tree bark. The rugged bark reveals human marks carved into the trees, though the people who made them are absent. The marks seem to be writing, but the words are indecipherable.

Above one of the walls, on the whitewash above the azulejos, a video work by Ole was projected in which scenes from Kissama were accompanied by an assemblage of literary quotes, music, and the sounds of leaves blowing in the wind.[20] The video recalls the fact that after independence Ole gave up painting for a time to become a filmmaker. Working for Televisão Popular de Angola, he traveled widely

20 *Ole: Art Orienté objet*, 64.

across the country and visited Lunda-Norte, the region of the painted walls and sand paintings discussed by ethnologist José Redinha, a figure Ole knew well and who had been his first guide to Angolan traditions of painting and sculpture.[21] Ole went on to make lyrical documentaries about the politics of popular culture in Angola—music and poetry that had given a clandestine voice to a revolutionary movement were consolidated into signs of a new national identity.[22] Ole's 1980 film *No caminho das estrelas* (On the Pathway to the Stars) was made as a tribute to Neto after his death, with contributions from other Angolan poets, writers, and artists. The film centers around a recitation of the poem that gives the film its title, in which "the harmony of the world" is sought through the cosmic energy that surges in a symbiosis between the land and the cultural rhythms of its people, from the rain-soaked forests to the stars. That same landscape in Lion & Ox, by contrast, is remarkably bleak. The signs of human inhabitation are present, but the people whose culture Ole depicted in his earlier documentaries are missing.

Art Orienté objet's video also depicts the empty landscape of Kissama, but over the course of the projection, the scene becomes populated not with animals but with their names—a taxonomic "bloom" that references the government's campaign to repopulate the park with spectacular wildlife. In AOo's photographs, animals are depicted in states that are precarious and unnatural, constrained by human activity and man-made borders, but nevertheless the object of utopian fantasy. In the photograph *On the Road*, a giraffe steps gingerly over a road that extends into the distance, caught in a moment of apprehension on uncertain terrain.[23] Other images are more explicitly biblical: The photograph *Lion & Ox* (from which the exhibit takes its name) shows a lion and a gnu apparently sitting side by side eating grass. This peaceful coexistence is of course an illusion—an assemblage of two photographs taken at different times at the same spot in Kruger Park, which is part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, a "peace park" overcrowded with animals that straddles the borders of South Africa, Zimbabwe,

21 António Ole, *Marcas de um percurso 1970/2004* (Lisbon: Culturgest, 2004), 14.

22 José de Matos-Cruz and José Mena Abrantes, *Cinema em Angola* (Luanda: Caxinde, 2000), 28.

23 The animals selected for transportation were often young and ill-equipped for survival in unfamiliar territory. Conversation with Marion Laval-Jeantet, August 14, 2012.

Art Orienté objet. *On the Road*, 2006. Photograph, 100 × 50 cm.
Image courtesy of Art Orienté objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin).

Art Orienté objet. *Lion & Ox*, 2006. Photograph, 75 × 200 cm.
Image courtesy of Art Orienté objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin).

and Mozambique.[24] Instead of depicting a paradise, AOo's composite images reflect the reality of animal containment and displacement, in which different species that would naturally stay away from each other and migrate vast distances are forced into close proximity because of unnatural overcrowding in the reserves. In *The Escape*, a pathway is hemmed in on both sides by walls of metal and wire; these fences are used to keep the animals in, and to protect them from poachers, but they also prevent the long migrations that animals of the savannah depend on. Humans are implicated in these images, too, as the fences cannot help but recall other borders or camps, marking this uncertain postconflict moment when national borders were becoming more rigorously policed.

In another photograph, called *Them*, an antelope, a zebra, an impala, a lion, and a buffalo stare back at the viewer. The composition recalls the vast dioramas first made for natural history museums in the 1930s and 1940s, which merge reality with fantasy to make elegiac depictions of fauna and flora in a supposedly "natural" state. Indeed, Lion & Ox was originally proposed to the Natural History Museum in

24 As in Angola, this region was ravaged by conflict during the postindependence years, when Apartheid South Africa sponsored wars of destabilization in the neighboring states that buffered it from the rest of the African continent. Now the parks draw foreign tourists, and the overcrowded conditions mean that the visitors are rarely disappointed.

Palanca negra antelope shown in a diorama display at the Museum of Natural History, Luanda. Image courtesy of António Ole and Art Orienté objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin).

Luanda, the only other museum that remained open throughout the long years of conflict, and which, significantly, was an institution set up by José Redinha, whose work on the Chokwe wall paintings was so formative for Ole. The Museum features a fantastical diorama made in the 1960s, in which stuffed animals are presented against a curved painted backdrop constructed to represent the fauna of Angola in its natural setting. These panoramas replicate an idealized Angolan savannah in which people are absent and the animals are available to the gaze. In Portugal, as in the rest of imperial Europe, institutions of natural history served to justify the idea that colonialism had a "civilizing mission" to further human knowledge about the world, producing classifications and hierarchies that confirmed the separation of human history from nature.[25] Such modes of displaying natural history ultimately structure the appearance of nature as a timeless object, a utopian animal kingdom. For the critic Bernard Müller, in particular, the Museum of Natural History in Luanda is "[a] world unto itself, a universe of daydreams untouched by the reality of war outside."[26] However, this apparent disconnect from social and political realities quickly evap-

25 Chakrabarty, "Climate of History," 197–222.

26 *Ole: Art Orienté objet*, 10.

orated: the Museum's extreme sensitivity about the artists photographing the display, and particularly the national symbol of the palanca negra, eventually led the artists to seek another venue in which to display their work.

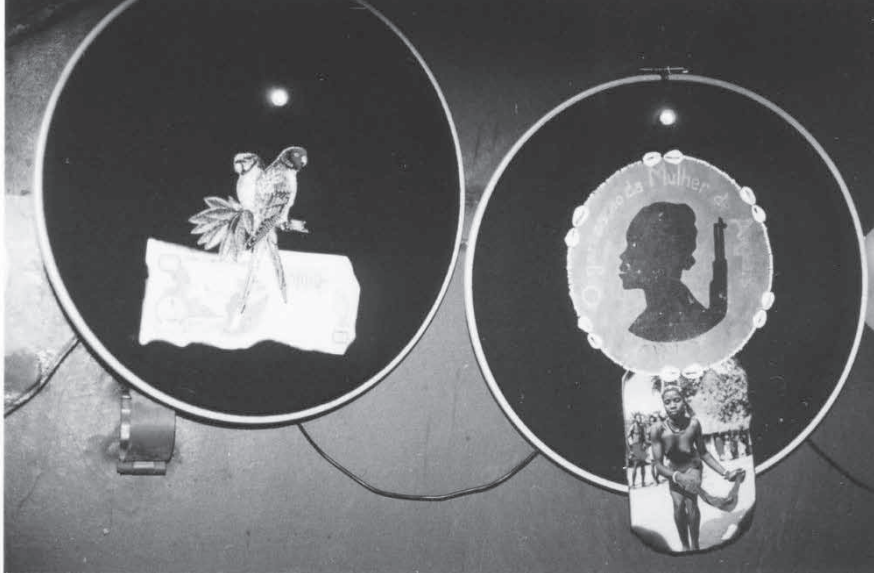
As Mary Anne Staniszewski points out, the techniques of museum display that structure how objects, animals, people, and ecologies appear in the world as available for consumption are also at play in television and other forms of visual culture.[27] This mode of display, apparent in the azulejos and the dioramas, in which fauna are arranged for the human gaze, recurs in the tourist images that tap into the fantasy of tropical luxury produced by late Portuguese colonialism, as well. The long-running Portuguese television series *Angola: The Other Side of Time*, made during the late 1960s and early 1970s and now a huge hit on YouTube, is an example of how visual culture fuels colonial nostalgia. In the series's episodes, nature is conjured as an object of enjoyment that masks its exploitation as raw material; white tourists are depicted photographing animals or relaxing in lavish hotels, while black people only appear as servants, as craftsmen, as entertainers, or as remote figures in tribal dress. This late colonial fantasy is reanimated in the present, insofar as contemporary tourism posits the territory as once again available for consumption.

In Lion & Ox, Ole and AOo's mounting critique of the commodification of the Angolan terrain was structured into the display of their artworks at the Fortress so as to make explicit its connection to corrupt politics. Passing through the Fortress's interior, viewers came out into the central courtyard. Under a corrugated iron hangar stood (and still stands) a tank that is part of the permanent display—the armored vehicle upon which Neto's coffin was laid out in the procession of his state funeral in September 1979. Small circular windows in the tank allowed viewers to peer in, revealing it to be something like the strange hidden brain of the exhibition. In the tank was a life-size wax cast of a human body in the pose of the Chokwe figure O Pensador (The Thinker), representing an elderly person deep in thought and symbolizing the wisdom of the ancestors. This figure, which also evoked the European classical tradition of Rodin's *The Thinker*, was kept from melting in a refrigerated cabinet, evoking death in its very material precariousness.

27 Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installation at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

Like the *palanca negra*, the Pensador is a potent symbol of Angolan identity, but it is one that operates in two directions at once—as a functional object within the Chokwe belief system and as an icon of national culture. According to Chokwe beliefs, witch doctors can call up the spirit of the ancestors by placing sacred wooden figures into a divination basket called the *ngombo*. If three Pensador figures fall close to the edge of the basket, the message is clear: the present generation has strayed from the wisdom of its ancestors. This has particular pertinence for contemporary times, too, for the Pensador is not a timeless symbol, but one whose modern-day use is inextricable from the history of colonial rule and corporate expropriation of natural resources. The Pensador figure was first carved in the workshops of the Dundo Museum, an ethnographic institution set up in 1947 by José Redinha for Diamang, the Luanda Diamond Company. Though based on Chokwe figures, its form was tailored to the tastes of the European art market. Indeed, its use as a symbol of national unity was another act of appropriation, for it masked the fact that during the civil war, UNITA was able to harness genuine resentment in the inland regions toward the MPLA (which remains dominated by the educated elite of Luanda and the Ambundu ethnic group).

Those who attended Ole and AOo's exhibition that opening night and were able to approach the tank were privy to a glimpse of other objects that were removed by the museum authorities the following day, censoring the elements of the exhibition that were most sensitive politically. Suspended around the glass cabinet were embroidery frames stretching delicate assemblages of symbols woven and printed on cloth. Iconic images of pan-African unity, symbols of MPLA revolutionary groups, and embroideries of animals were sewn to singed Angolan bank notes; the logo of the Organization of Women of Angola, which shows a female profile with a gun slung over her shoulder, was stitched to a photograph of a bare-breasted woman performing a tribal dance. Many of these images are symbols from the armed struggle for independence; they evoke a moment when the MPLA leadership embraced African socialism and articulated a strident attack on imperialism. Speaking in 1974, Neto pointed out that it took centuries for Portugal to dominate Angola, and even in the late 1960s it could not do so without the presence of other international partners, such as Great Britain and the United States: "Small and backward Portugal is not the chief factor of colonization. Without the capital of other countries,



Art Orienté objet. *The Thinker*, 2006. Detail of embroideries.
Image courtesy of Art Orienté objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin).

without growing investments and technical cooperation, without complicity at various levels, radical transformations would already have taken place many years ago."[28] The fight was not against the Portuguese people, but against the networked structure of the capitalist system that operates through nation-states.

Neto's poems were a proleptic articulation of a revolutionary nationalist culture that the embroideries symbolize through material culture. His verses envisioned a future revolutionary Angolan culture that would draw on indigenous cultures from which African peoples had been cut off through the colonial policy of assimilation—even as these indigenous cultures were themselves being transformed, reshaped by the very same colonial regime through petro-diamond patronage. The embroideries thus make explicit that Neto's dream of African socialism has been sold out. The neoliberal present, in which the political elite of the MPLA is indistinguishable from the predatory regime of global capitalism, blocks this earlier revolutionary vision of the future and quest for a more egalitarian world. No wonder, then, that these small, fragile embroideries attached to burnt banknotes were considered the most contentious elements of the show; following the opening night, the museum authorities insisted that they be removed.[29] The spirit of Neto was evoked only to be foreclosed.

28 Agostinho Neto, "Quem é o Inimigo . . . Qual é o nosso objectivo?" [Who Is the Enemy . . . What Is Our Objective?], transcript of lecture delivered at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, February 7, 1974, 11.

29 Conversation with Marion Laval-Jeantet, August 14, 2012.

TAKE OFF

Kia Henda's installation *Icarus 13—The First Journey to the Sun* (2008) is also rooted in the revolutionary politics of Neto's generation. The work combines photographs, text, and an architectural model to tell the science fiction story of an African space mission to the sun that sets off from Luanda. The hilarious proposal to travel to the sun "at night" and to stay for "a period during which the sun cools down for 8 hours" is based on an anecdote about the first president of Mozambique, Samora Machel.[30] During a visit to Angola in the early years of independence, Machel apparently boasted that his country would outdo the American moon landing by making a journey to the sun. Asked how they would achieve such an impossible feat without following Icarus's fate and being burnt by the sun's heat, he replied: "I have the solution! We will go at night!"[31]

Kiluanji Kia Henda. *Icarus 13*, 2008. Photograph mounted on acrylic frame, 8 × 120 × 8 cm, maquette and text. Image courtesy of Galleria Fonti, Naples.

The reference to Machel gives an indication of Kia Henda's reflexive use of irony. Machel was a charismatic orator. He frequently made deft appropriations of degrading stereotypes about Africa to cajole and heckle his audiences to identify with a politics of revolutionary nation-

30 Kiluanji Kia Henda, *Icarus 13—The First Journey to the Sun*, 2008, exhibition text.
31 Kia Henda, *Icarus 13*.

alism that was principled but authoritarian.[32] Despite his dignified comportment on the diplomatic stage, he was the object of widespread racist ridicule in Portugal and was mistrusted in Moscow due to his humble origins.[33] Kia Henda's appropriation of Machel's joke recalls a moment when Angola and Mozambique not only were united militarily against Apartheid South Africa, but also shared a vision of the future shaped by African socialism. Given the distance of this past from present-day realities, this appropriation is, to say the least, ambiguous.

The description of the first journey to the Sun begins with a flourish:

> "Icarus 13" is a pioneer project in Africa in that it gives wings to our knowledge, creativity and imagination by making use of new technologies and appropriate tools for building a spacecraft. The mission's purpose is to land on the largest of all stars, the Sun. The dream once attempted by Icarus, so the Greek legend tells, will now become possible: we shall travel by night.[34]

Kia Henda then adopts the humanist rhetoric of mid-20th-century space exploration as the pursuit of a universal good, tempered with a more contemporary ecological concern for survival on Earth:

> The purpose now would be to apply our knowledge of astronomy and physics to improve the future of our planet. A thorough investigation around the Sun would bring us a better understanding of the inconstant pulse of human beings and, thus, better protect the Earth's ecosystem.[35]

This is decisively an African project to "conquer space," the spaceship built and powered by local raw materials: steel, diamonds, and solar energy. Here the exploitation of raw materials has an ecological—indeed, a planetary—purpose. (The Indian newspaper *The Hindu* in fact cited *Icarus 13* in a recent article focused on possible future Indian and Pan-African space programs and the potential benefits of space

32 António Sopa, *Samora: Man of the People* (Maputo: Maguezo Editions, 2001), 103–10.

33 José Milhazes, *Samora Machel: Atentado ou acidente? Páginaas desconhecidas das relações soviético-moçambicanas* (Lisbon: Aletheia Editores, 2010).

34 Kia Henda, *Icarus 13*.

35 Ibid.

technologies, such as satellite images to countries of the global South facing natural disasters caused by climate change.[36]) The flight crew, we are told, was "composed of two astronauts and two beautiful air stewards," recalling the long-lost glamor of mid-20th-century air travel, but also preempting the final promise that, in line with plans afoot at NASA for space tourism, Angola would within five years launch the first "solar tourist" flight—the ultimate destination for sun-seekers.

This narrative flight of fantasy is anchored in images that bring us straight back to Earth, though it is to a strange landscape in which the ruins of past futures are strewn like spaceships and lunar bases abandoned by alien life forms. In fact, the series of photographs was taken by the artist in Luanda and in the Namibe Desert in southern Angola. The images visualize an odd, diverse landscape that includes modernist buildings abandoned by the Portuguese, Soviet monuments to international solidarity, and the vast new constructions of the present day that mark the global emergence of a new African sovereignty based on petro-diamond wealth and collaboration with other emerging superpowers, such as China. During the 1950s and 1960s, modernist buildings were constructed on a scale that would have been unimaginable in Europe, as a crucial part of the colonial project to make Angola and Mozambique into "overseas provinces" of Portugal. Modernist architecture was generally frowned on by the Salazar regime in Portugal, where the type of architecture favored by the dictatorship was *Português suave*, a nostalgic style that evoked an idealized rural existence by combining decorative features from different vernacular forms.[37] The tropical modernism built in Angola and Mozambique was a form of adaptation that chimed with colonial Portugal's lusotropical ego-ideal. In Angola, Portuguese settlers were able to access a lifestyle unavailable to them in Portugal, where many Western commodities were banned by the parochial fascist regime. In the months leading up to independence, there was a mass exodus of the Portuguese population. The civil war led to the widespread displacement of peoples, forc-

36 Aman Sethi, "Africa Aims for the Final Frontier," *The Hindu*, September 14, 2012, accessed January 4, 2013, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/africa-aims-for-the-final-frontier/article3893625.ece.

37 Raul Lino, *Casas portuguesas: Alguns apontamentos sobre o arquitectar das casas simples* (Lisbon: Livros Cotovia, 1992).

ing them to abandon their homes and leading to the devastation of urban infrastructures. In the midst of this destruction, monuments were erected to a different utopia, testifying to Angola's brief period of Marxist-Leninism and the country's uneven "socialist friendship" with the Soviet Union.[38]

Kiluanji Kia Henda. *The Spaceship Icarus 13*, 2008. Photograph mounted on acrylic frame, 8 × 120 × 80 cm. Luanda. Image courtesy of Galleria Fonti, Naples.

The first image in the installation, which Kia Henda names *The Spaceship Icarus 13*, is actually a mausoleum for Agostinho Neto. This strange constructivist monument bears a passing resemblance to a space rocket and was purchased by the Angolan government from the USSR. Made in 1982, the mausoleum was intended as the centerpiece

38 In 1976, Neto visited Moscow and signed the Soviet-Angolan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and an agreement of cooperation between the MPLA and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Igor Belikov argues that for the Soviet leaders the achievement of nuclear parity with the United States endowed the USSR with a global position that meant it could claim the "legitimate right" to resist "imperialist aggression in whatever distant region of our planet." Belikov also points out that the "Soviet respect for Angola's non-alignment was written into the treaty, and the treaty also stressed that each party had sovereignty over all its natural resources." Igor Belikov, "Soviet-Angolan Relations: Venture into Southern Africa," in *Troubled Friendships: Moscow's Third World Ventures*, ed. Margot Light (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993), 53–55.

Kiluanji Kia Henda. *Astronomy Observatory*, 2008.
Photograph mounted on acrylic frame, 8 × 120 × 80 cm.
Namibe Desert. Image courtesy of Galleria Foni, Naples.

Kiluanji Kia Henda. *Centre of Astronomy Studies and Astronauts' Training,*
2008. Photograph mounted on acrylic frame, 8 × 120 × 80 cm. Namibe Desert.
Image courtesy of Galleria Fonti, Naples.

for an Angolan Red Square that would face the Bay of Luanda, a monument to socialist solidarity at a moment when the revolutionary dream of a Soviet future was already ossified.

Another photograph in the installation portrays the supposed Centre for Astronomy Studies and Astronaut Training, where Kia Henda's imagined astronauts and their glamorous stewardesses are trained in the Namibe Desert to withstand extreme temperatures. The building photographed is actually an abandoned warehouse, though the decorative patterning testifies that even this functional construct was not immune from the expressiveness of tropical modernism. This architecture reveals an obsession with the sun. Like the architecture of Le Corbusier in Chandigarh, the buildings attempt to "discipline the sun"—to deflect its heat, create shadows, channel breezes, and thus master the climate.[39] Numerous modernist buildings in Angola follow Le Corbusier's model, in that they are oriented toward the sun's rays, with huge decorative surfaces of sun-breaks to give protection from the midday heat.[40] In another photograph, Kia Henda re-imagines a futuristic-looking colonial cinema in the Namibe Desert as his Astronomy Observatory. In the 1950s and 1960s mass audiences of Portuguese settlers flocked to these vast concrete structures to glimpse the stars of the silver screen. Abandoned by its Portuguese owners after independence, this particular cinema fell into disuse and became a public toilet, but in Kia Henda's narrative this abject site is resurrected as a space for gazing not at movie stars but at real stars and celestial objects.[41]

An image of construction workers leaning on a suspended steel structure is titled *Building the Spaceship Icarus 13*; but what they are actually building is the SonAngol tower, an edifice for the corporation owned by the Angolan state that controls the oil market and that was the means for the MPLA to buy arms, make political payoffs, and fund other state expenses during the civil war.[42] When finished, this vast building will tower above all others in Luanda—the mark of a new regime in which political leaders who once espoused Marxist-Leninism

39 See the discussion of Chandigarh in The Otolith Group's film *Otolith II* (2009).

40 Ana Magalhães and Ines Gonçalves, *Moderno tropical: Arquitectura em Angola e Moçambique, 1948–1975* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-China, 2009), 50–59.

41 Conversation with Kiluanji Kia Henda, July 2012.

42 Brautigam, *Dragon's Gift*, 274.

have become part of a predatory neoliberal elite. *The Launch of Icarus 13* appears to depict the spaceship igniting in a strange green glow; in fact, the photograph is of a spectacular laser show that celebrated the Angolan national football team's qualification for the World Cup in 2006. The *First Picture of the Sun's Photosphere from Icarus 13 in Orbit* is, in a bathetic inversion, an image of the sun reflected at the bottom of a beer bottle. Another image, *The Return of the Astronauts (5:00 a.m., 9 June, 2007)*, supposedly shows the space capsule landed back in Luanda. A disk-like structure, the toppled concrete canopy of a petrol station, lies amid urban debris in a corner enclosed by a fence of corrugated iron. In the background, behind the corrugated iron that is synonymous with the informal structures of the musseque, are two buildings, one modernist, the other more historic, whitewashed with shutters painted green. In the foreground, a couple walk down the street in this microcosm of Luanda's shattered history, reimagined as heroic explorers of the sun.

As curators Nav Haq and Al Cameron describe it, "Kia Henda salvages these ruins of a redemptive time and reassembles them as a storyboard for a B movie."[43] The title *Icarus 13* in part suggests a critique of the unfulfilled aspirations of postindependence African governments—their own doomed aspirations for local and international accomplishment—but this fantastical tale is not entirely melancholic. The mission is a success. The astronauts land on the sun and collect particles from the photosphere. They observe that the sun "has the most beautiful night."[44] Kia Henda's work is suspended between readings that are simultaneous yet contradictory: it recalls an earlier utopian moment of hope for the future proposed by African socialism, before the vast oil and mineral wealth began to be siphoned off by a corrupt political elite. At the same time, the work pokes fun at the West's apparent inability to recognize that it no longer occupies the position of global center in relation to its former colonies in Africa. While Portuguese remains the official language, Angola today is no longer in a position of economic or cultural dependence on Portugal,

43 Nav Haq and Al Cameron, "Notes from the Sun: Representations of Africa in Science Fiction," exhibition essay from Superpower: Africa in Science Fiction, at the Arnolfini, Bristol, UK, May 5–July 1, 2012, n.p.

44 Haq and Cameron, "Notes from the Sun."

and is focusing on other partners for economic investment.[45] With rapid expansion in Angola in contrast to economic crisis in Europe, this reversal is now openly acknowledged; Angola has become a destination for economic migrants from Portugal.[46]

For all that space exploration is dependent on advanced computing and technology, we might recall that the astronauts on the American spacecraft *Apollo 13* survived in space following a technical failure thanks to their capacity for improvisation, a spirit of everyday inventiveness much apparent in the absence of state infrastructures in Angola.[47] In Kia Henda's Luanda, away from the asphalt, this ever-shifting pulsating life creates its own utopia of the now-here:

> the musseque reinvents itself in every instance. It makes no difference if we live in communism or capitalism, mono or stereo party system. Power here is autonomous to any institution, or religious belief. It is dispensed on the streets and neighborhoods, enclosed in its borders. Economy is homemade, based on the retail of retail. Culture is hybrid, intense and extremely experimental. High-tech marries animism, the rhythms and dances take over by storm the city of asphalt. Candongueiros (informal taxis), as if they were youtube, propagate the music and attitude arising from the musseques through cities and villages, all over national territory. The musseque at last has created a national identity.[48]

And yet, *Icarus 13*, like Lion & Ox, still sifts these other utopian ruins, and therein finds ambiguous remains that sit uncomfortably in the present: from the architecture of tropical modernism, to the reappearance of lusotropical fantasies of nature, to the figure of the land as cos-

45 The CPLP (Communidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa [the Community of Portuguese Language Countries]) was formed in 1996, but the traffic between nation-states that it encourages is multidirectional. The handover of Macau in 1999 has opened up a new route for China to build on its already massive investments in Africa, via this lusophone connection.

46 David Smith, "Portuguese Escape Austerity and Find a New El Dorado in Angola," in *The Observer*, accessed September 16, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/16/portuguese-exodus-angola-el-dorado.

47 Conversation with Kiluanji Kia Henda, July 2012.

48 Kiluanji Kia Henda, "Niemeyer's Dream and the Parallel Universe," *Buala*, May 13, 2010, http://www.buala.org/en/city/niemeyers-dream-and-the-parallel-universe.

mic symbol of a revolutionary futurity. These are specific utopias, the remains of Portuguese tropical modernism rubbing up against Angolan Marxist-Leninism in the intense years of the Cold War. They linger awkwardly in the present as Angola reconfigures its relationship to the rest of the world and the political elite travel still further from the ideals of African socialism.

Icarus 13 might be understood as a wary celebration of the fact that, for all its vast inequalities, Angola's future is in the hands of Angolans. Lion & Ox, with its critique of nationalist symbolism and a present-day reterritorialization of the land that marginalizes the vast majority of the Angolan people, suggests that this in itself is not enough. In Ole's photographs and video, the savannah landscape and its ecosystem have an alterity that speaks to our uncanny sense of inhabiting a planet. This alterity emerges in part through the absence of the very people evoked so powerfully in Neto's poetic vision of an Angolan revolutionary futurity produced in dialogue with local indigenous cultures. Spivak evokes our fragile dependence on the land in opposition to the globe of globalization, in which the Earth appears as territory available for exploitation, on which is imposed "the same system of exchange everywhere."[49] To invoke the planetary repositions us: "The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan."[50] As the allusions to planetary ecology in *Icarus 13* suggest, a utopian aspiration is implicit in the very image of the Earth seen as a whole from outer space that exceeds Angola's emergence as a new regional superpower and the insertion of its political elite into the financial networks of globalization.

There is an inevitable sense of complicity here, given that the artists' works seek to challenge Western representations of Africa, but do so by navigating the networks of petro-diamond patronage that underpin the ideals and myths of lusotropicalism.[51] Yet beyond the

49 Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

50 Ibid., 71.

51 In 2005, Ole and AOo approached the Alliance Française in Luanda for financial support for the Lion & Ox project; Alliance Française then secured funds from the multinational oil company Total, which meant that the work was vulnerable to the anxious scrutiny of a corporation keen not to offend the Angolan government. Kiluanji Kia Henda came to attention internationally when his work was included in the African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007. This exhibition, Check List Luanda Pop, featured art selected by Fernando Alvim and Simon Njami from the Sindika Dokolo collection, which is controversial for its connections to Angola's political elite. See note 10.

familiar critiques of art's engagements with the traffic of global finance, the artists' interrogations and appropriations of Angola's juxtaposed utopias suggest a unique place from which to speak to aspirations for a planetary alternative. Lion & Ox and *Icarus 13* critically question the particular brief history of Marxist-Leninism in Angola and its confrontation with Portuguese colonialism's own utopian mythology; at the same time, the works address present-day environmental concerns that are not divorced from struggles for social justice. Rather, these concerns make a demand for human collective action on a previously unimaginable scale.[52] In this collision between past and present, *lusotopia* might describe this destabilizing space between idealism and corruption, between decadence and myth, emanating from a specific context to ask questions about our inhabitation of planet Earth.

52 Chakrabarty, "Climate of History," 222.