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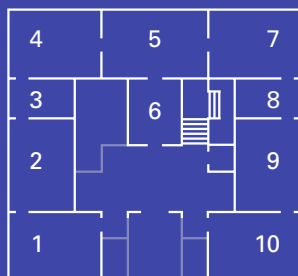
THE OTOLITH GROUP

25 MAY - 18 AUGUST 2019
VAN ABBEMUSEUM EINDHOVEN

ROOM

1	11.05	11.45	12.25	13.05	13.45	14.25	15.05	15.45	16.25					
	Anathema, 2011 37 min / English with Dutch subtitles													
2	video in loop													
	From Left to Night, 2015													
3	11.05	11.30	11.55	12.20	12.45	13.10	13.35	14.00	14.25	14.50	15.15	15.40	16.05	16.30
	People to be Resembling, 2012 21 min / English with Dutch subtitles													
4	11.05 NL			12.30 EN		13.55 NL			15.20 EN					
	O Horizon, 2018 81 min / Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mandarin and English with English or Dutch subtitles (see times)													
6	11.05	11.40	12.15	12.50	13.25	14.00	14.35	15.10	15.45	16.20				
	In the Year of the Quiet Sun, 2013 33 min / English with Dutch subtitles													
7	11.05	11.50	12.35	13.20	14.05	14.50	15.35	16.20						
	Medium Earth, 2013 41 min / English with Dutch subtitles													
9	video in loop													
	Sovereign Sisters, 2014													
10	11.05	11.50	12.35	13.20	14.05	14.50	15.35	16.20						
	The Third Part of the Third Measure, 2017 43 min / English with Dutch subtitles													

On the first Thursday of the month, Van Abbemuseum remains open until 21.00. On these days, *Xenogenesis* continues until 21.00.



Xenogenesis rooms

25 MAY - 18 AUGUST 2019
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Introduction Charles Esche	6
<i>Xenogenesis</i> as a Diagram for Thought	9
The Otolith Group interviewed by Annie Fletcher	
Digital Psychedelia: The Otolith Group's <i>Anathema</i>	21
Mark Fisher	
<i>Statecraft</i> : An Incomplete Timeline of Independence determined by Digital Auction	29
Kodwo Eshun	
The Idea of Eastman: Preliminary Reflections on The Otolith Group's <i>The Third Part of The Third Measure</i>	47
George E. Lewis	
about the exhibition <i>Xenogenesis</i>	59
about The Otolith Group	61

Introduction

This publication is a short introduction to some of the ideas that have informed and inspired the films and artworks in this exhibition. It is intended as a companion to the exhibition, to be read at home or in the museum café after seeing the show.

The texts and interview take a few of the works in the exhibition and unpack their form and contents. Our hope is that they give you access to the wider frame of references and influences out of which The Otolith Group develop their work. They might also encourage you to think about how you would unfold the works that are not analysed in such detail.

The Otolith Group was founded in London in 2002 by artists and theorists Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun. Their work draws on science fiction, sound and music, Afrofuturism, colonial and postcolonial histories and many other related bodies of knowledge out of which they forge videos and installations. Their work is layered, precise and sometimes quite mysterious. It uses beauty, slowness, choreography, repetition and other formal devices to hold your attention and ask you to consider carefully what you are seeing and how it feels to look. In my experience, the works ask you to sit and relax with them. I like to spend time with their images to discover what is happening or just allow myself to lose the sense of where I am or how long I have been looking. By doing so, I find myself taken into a mysterious world or a new way of thinking about how things happened in the distant or recent past and what that means for the present or future. This quality of time passing, crossing over or looping in relation to images is one of the great strengths of their work, and one I think you will enjoy experiencing for yourself.

The contents of this publication are a taster of the forthcoming extensive publication of The Otolith Group's work. I would like to thank the artists Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar very much for their dedication, as well as the curator Annie Fletcher and our team at the Van Abbemuseum for realising this project in all its complexity. After this first showing in Eindhoven, the exhibition will travel to the following museums and art centres:

VCU Institute for Contemporary Art, Richmond, Virginia USA
Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Canada
IMMA, Dublin, Ireland
Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, England
Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

Take your time and enjoy *Xenogenesis*!

Charles Esche
director Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven

**Xenogenesis
AS A DIAGRAM
FOR THOUGHT**

THE OTOLITH GROUP
INTERVIEWED BY
ANNIE FLETCHER
2019

Annie Fletcher: You have described this exhibition as a cross-section rather than a retrospective or a survey composed from works that you made between 2011 to 2018. This cross-section of selected works offers an opportunity to bring a number of your works together at one time. Looking at these works now, what does that suggest to you? How does that feel?

Anjalika Sagar: I have a sense that the screens in all these different spaces might say something about how we apprehend screens today. Certainly, our relationship to our mobile devices has changed the way we perceive, remember or gather knowledge. Mobile technology tethers us to systems that many of us do not understand, it seems we depend on data memory banks as if they were new forms of history that are updated like a new trend in fashion. Is it possible that we are developing a sixth sense without knowing it yet? A sixth sense that we do not, as yet, know how to use? Has this sixth sense been hijacked? If so, how do we rescue it? How do we perceive more deeply? What is at stake with this new sense? What I look forward to is perceiving the ways in which the act of sensing in this exhibition might begin to enact the concept that Denise Ferreira da Silva elaborates as 'difference without separability'. Someone said that the works look as if they could have been produced by different artists. This is probably because we have always been interested in obscuring and deflecting or reflecting back a polyvocality that seeks to confuse or confound the racial presumptions that circulate when one is moving in the world as an artist of colour. Yet, if the work does come across like it has been made in many different moments by many different artists, perhaps that is also because there's a sense of plurality or experiential overload to which we are responding. We know that there is a lot to be done and different ideas and emotions to be addressed.

Kodwo Eshun: Yes, I think part of what is at stake is not so much the destruction of the subject as much as it is the destruction of the presupposed unity of the subject.

The name of The Otolith Group tries not to point to the predicates that an individual is supposed to have. It is designed to disappoint or confuse the preexisting expectations that people might bring to the work. That practice of disappointing or confounding unspoken assumptions is something that the name of The Otolith Group was designed to do from the beginning.

AF: I would question the word 'disappoint'. Disrupt or interrupt, yes. But your work is very propositional.

KE: To disappoint an expectation is something that I take a great pleasure in. I do take pleasure in confusing assumptions about the artists that viewers bring with them when they encounter the work. I think that idea of disappointment – which, as you say, can also be characterised as disruption or interruption – could be linked to Alfred Gell's argument that making art can be understood as setting a trap in the sense that a trap can be interpreted as a portrait of a prey designed by its predator. If you decided to set a trap for a rabbit, for example, then you would have to know, in advance, what food it liked to eat, where it ate, the times at which it liked to eat, the time that it took to eat. All of that knowledge would be needed in order to set an effective trap which would function as a lethal parody of the affordances, the appetites, the dispositions and the desires of that rabbit. The rabbit would be caught by its own appetites. It would be trapped by its desires. I often think that a lot of the art world functions like that. Much of it is designed or to preempt appetites or dispositions that are not yours but are formatted as if they were. Making art is a question of learning how to exploit the discrepancy between the trap as an unsuccessful portrait or a successful parody.

AF: In a way, the mechanism of the exhibition is the perfect trap.

KE: In a way, yes. The art of confounding expectation comes from studying how traps work, working out why they do not work for you, so as to work out how to lay

traps of your own that do work. Sometimes I think of an exhibition as a series of propositions, to use your word, that are designed to observe the ways people react when they come face to face with works that don't work as they presume they are supposed to work. Part of the reason that we like Octavia Estelle Butler's novels so much is because all kinds of traps appear and reappear in the unequal kinships that Butler narrates between humans undergoing mutation and aliens seeking intimacy. In novels such as *Dawn* or *Wild Seed*, or *Parable of the Talents*, humans behave at their worst because they find themselves at their most desperate. When I look back at some Otolith works, what I see is an aspiration to disabuse viewers, which includes myself, of certain sustaining illusions that they might have about the kind of work they expect artists of colour to do for them, and with them. There is a reason why *Xenogenesis* starts with *Anathema* (2011). *Anathema* is one of those works that disappoints and delights audiences in equal measure for differing reasons.

AF: Can you talk about *Anathema* and *From Left to Night* (2015), as the opening sequence of the exhibition?

AS: *Anathema* and *From Left to Night* are a digital video and installation that saturate the field of vision with what is behind the screen. What is the point of view of a mobile phone or the life of crystals? It is a speculative, psychedelic journey into the world in which a certain kind of abstract animation takes place. We find ourselves animated by this pixelated, pointillist world of the digital image patterns. There is a sense of wanting to pull people into this space.

AF: The word that you often use is 'cosmological' with regard to this notion of the microworld that is behind the screen, in relation to the effect of what you call 'capitalist sorcery', in the ways in which you work at scale, examining those effects, blowing them up. There is a zooming out and zooming in that goes on constantly in your work.

KE: One way to think about that is to pose the question of what happens when artists of colour make work that is not immediately recognizable or identifiable as such. Darby English describes the critical interpretation of a David Hammons' work called *Concerto in Black and Blue* (2002), which, it is important to say, I haven't actually seen, in a way that I find to be helpful. In a darkened room, each visitor is handed a tiny blue torchlight that is used to navigate the pitch darkness. The work consists of these points of blue light moving about in a dark space, searching for what is not there. English points out that in the majority of reviews, white American critics immediately interpreted *Concerto in Black and Blue* as an allegory of blackness in America. That interpretation, English argues, demonstrates the extent to which the white critical encounter with abstraction creates an anxiety that is contained by interpreting darkness as blackness unbound by representation or figuration. Watching *Anathema* is not the same as an encounter with *Concerto* as it is asymptotic. When *Anathema* was premiered at the Lyons Biennale in 2011, it created a kind of cognitive panic in white audiences, especially with the curators that had some familiarity with earlier Otolith works. Then again, when it was screened at the Flaherty Film Seminar in 2013, it disturbed the majority white audience that had had little or no previous encounter with any Otolith works. In each case, but for opposing reasons, each audience was confronted by its incapacity to correlate *Anathema* with myself or with Anjalika. People were confounded by the fact that artists of colour had made such a work. Not only were there few people of colour in *Anathema*. It is by no means clear that anyone in *Anathema* is actually human. What I would say is that when artists of colour seize the means of abstraction, abstraction appears to confound the racial regime of representation. It glitches. What ensues is optical uncertainty and epistemic panic. *Anathema* is based on the phase transitions of liquid crystal which provides the technological basis for the communication matrix within which we are all immersed. What you see is that matrix from the perspective of the screen. What you see is what a

screen makes of, and out of, us. This anthropic inversion is what we call science fiction of the present, a term that we borrow from the writings of J.G. Ballard. From this inverted perspective, there are no talking heads that you can rely upon to articulate the problem with mobile phones. What you see are images of liquidity. Images used by advertisements to instruct us in a new gestural economy. Instead of a documentary that explains how you are tethered to your mobile phone, we wanted to create an experience in which the event of alienation that you experienced in watching *Anathema* is intensified into an alienation from experience when you watch *From Left to Night*. *From Left to Night* aims to exaggerate an encounter with *Anathema* to a degree that triggers a low intensity analogy panic.

AF: This is a good moment to come back to the notion of the title *Xenogenesis*. *Xeno* means *strange* or it can mean *alien* and *genesis* is *becoming*. So we can come up with four translations: *strange becoming* or *becoming strange*; *alien becoming* or *becoming alien*. *Alien becoming* and *becoming alien* situate themselves in the middle of the melodrama around migration, settlement and colonialism. On the other hand, *alien* also has this notion of outer space and science fiction. Then, we have *strange becoming* and *becoming strange*, which are less familiar. *Strange* relates to what Mark Fisher called 'the weird' or 'the eerie'. That which is *strange* alludes to that which is outside of what can be considered as the human. These three meanings: *alien* as understood in law and migration, the *alien* understood in popular science fiction, and the *strange* as the inhuman could all be mobilized to grasp what *Xenogenesis* means and hence how this exhibition might be approached. *Xenogenesis* is the title for the three novels written by Octavia Butler at the end of 1980s that are important for your thinking. In these novels, *Dawn. Xenogenesis: 1* (1987), *Adulthood Rites. Xenogenesis: 2* (1988) and *Imago. Xenogenesis: 3* (1989), Octavia Butler begins at the point of extinction or near-extinction of the human race and progresses to the question of alien intimacy, in which the surviving

humans have to learn how to live with the *Oankali*. These are alien migrants that survive by trading genes. Xenophobia is thereby exaggerated into speciesphobia – the human horror of the non-human. Can you elaborate on your thinking around *Xenogenesis*?

KE: I think a critical question to ask is why Octavia Butler's novels resonate, now, for us, and for so many people. It is partly because we are living under conditions of neofascism that exceed that of authoritarian populism diagnosed by Stuart Hall at the end of the 1970s. Surveillance capitalism, global warming and algorithmic capture converge in a present of drastically advanced regression. Under these conditions, people find themselves overwhelmed by depression, suicide or addiction. Butler called this *humanicide* or suicide at the level of the human species. We could say that Butler's writing opens a *xenogenetic diagram* that connects us to energetic resources needed to survive under conditions of unbearable capitalism. To me, Octavia Butler offers a way of thinking that suggests a diagram that links to figures such as Julius Eastman or Rabindranath Tagore. These are thinkers that are useful for the present. The desperate measures that Butler's characters undertake, the situations in which they find themselves, can be understood as personifications of a philosophical project narrated in a speculative mode. What is compelling is not only to think of Butler's science fiction in its immediate historical context but to think with the transtemporal implications of her writing. When you look at *The Third Part of the Third Measure* (2017), Eastman's music is travelling to us from the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s, from the era in which Octavia Butler wrote her novels. But the presentation of Eastman's music in *The Third Part of the Third Measure* is intended to be contemporary. It wants to present Eastman's music with an urgency that stems from the needs of the present. We think of Zubin Kanga, Siwan Rhys, Rolf Hind and Eliza McCarthy, the four pianists in *The Third Part of the Third Measure* as the gay guerrillas that Eastman invoked. We envision them in ways that speak to the year of its making in 2017.

Watching *The Third Part of the Third Measure* imposes a certain kind of concentration on the viewer which is intended as a commitment between the audience, the screen and the existence of the music.

AS: Yes, there are unearthly moments of contrast, such as the scene in which Siwan Rhys and Zubin Kanga are seated, unmoving, in meditative states, like defendants in a future court from a future world, absorbing the wretchedness of the 'great and grand American economy that we have' recited by Elaine Mitchener. Their esprit de corps evokes Donna Haraway's cyborg call for a 'non-essentialized metaphor of diffuse political coalitions along the lines of affinity rather than identity'. This coalition of affinities makes me think about *Advaita Vedanta* which is the oldest school of thought within South Asian classical philosophy. *Vedanta* does not recognize a distinction between subject and object. Rather, it proposes an entanglement between cause, effect, and matter. *Vedanta* is a Sanskrit term that can be translated as 'conclusion of process'. It points towards a practice of awareness that produces a vivid experience of a non-dualistic universe. This idea alludes to The Otolith Group's ongoing engagement with what can be characterised as the archives of synthetic Indo-futurism. *O Horizon* (2018) brings together a range of performances that constitute a translational aesthetic of NeoTagorean vitalism. What is important is a thought process that embodies an ethical relation to life that is not to be understood as an ideology, exactly, but rather as an experience of 'nirvana' in which experience and action, however that is to be understood is inseparable from an encounter with duration, causation, and effect. There is an understanding of the world as a series of traps within illusions but realisation of this brings a sense of wonder occasioned by the immeasurable potential for all that exists. All of this engenders a productive alienation that Octavia Butler inhabits in and through her work.

AF: Alongside the writings of Octavia Butler, certain types of music act as a constant point of departure

for much of the work in the exhibition. Could you talk a little about the significance of music for your work?

KE: There are a number of works from *People To Be Resembling* (2012) to *The Third Part of the Third Measure* to *O Horizon*, that are animated by a sonic imperative. In these works, sound is not so much the subject or the form of digital video, but its purpose. Are you watching a digital video with sound or are you watching a sound work with images? Perhaps that distinction between sound and image is no longer useful. At a certain point in *People To Be Resembling*, what you are watching starts to allude to methodologies for understanding what you are hearing. That moment is related to an earlier phase that announces the completion of a new work. There is a moment when you look at the work that you have produced with editor Simon Arazi, only to realise that it is no longer recognizable as your work. In this moment when the work is reducible neither to its research nor to its intentions, it is no longer possessable. It has become a work with its own capacity for movement.

AS: You can hear your whole life in certain pieces of music. You will never get bored of listening to Julius Eastman's compositions. I think that they have this capacity to take you into the sublime where time is absent. Certain films have that capacity. I have always been interested in how that happens. Where does it come from, that process by which a work of art achieves a state of unrecognizability that suggests a moment of genesis or naissance. Art gives one the capacity to slow things down and speed things up. You have these powerful memories of moments, of smells, of experiences. And you realise that this is related to this piece of music, or to this cooking. It is as if the structure of memory is attached to sensations and feelings, to your organs. I do care about people feeling something when they see the work. In life you remember how people made you feel, and how much they supported you, how much they really cared, and for what reasons. A work of art has to be like that.

I remember watching *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) or Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), on Channel Four in the 1980s. I was traumatized by them. I imagine it was because these were new emotions emerging through television in which one could get a sense of what the Soviet Union during the 1920s was, or watching Pasolini brought you face to face with a moral economy of refined corruption. When you are making a video you are drawing on this immense continent of unstable sensations, insistent feelings and volatile images.

KE: If one of the motivations for making moving images is the power, the beauty and the alienation of black music, in the words of Arthur Jafa, then those moving images will require you to engage in what Kobena Mercer calls a 'transnational aesthetic'. It's a question of transposing the alienation of certain musics by inventing a form capable of summoning certain feelings. When Raymond Williams developed the notion of *structure of feeling* in the 1970s, Williams was trying to capture what he called 'social experiences in solution'. These were experiences that had not, as yet, become *precipitated* as art or *crystalized* in the form of a novel. They were liquid experiences in which certain social states are dissolving. The question is: How do you formalize experiences that anticipate form? Experiences that exist as that which dissolves existing form? Do you require forms that are as soluble as experience is? How does an experience in dissolution sound? How does it resound? These are some of the questions posed by the work. Questions that each work never stops asking us.

**DIGITAL
PSYCHEDELIA:
THE OTOLITH
GROUP'S
Anathema**

MARK FISHER
2012

The aim of capitalist sorcery is to induce a kind of stupefaction, a paralysis of agency and imagination that by no means precludes a frenzy of pseudo-activity –a ceaseless treadmill of work and consumption, but also of communication, which is now both work and consumption. The sorcery operates on (what is taken for) reality itself. Its chief function is in fact a procedure of ontological limiting, a reduction of all available realities to those formatted by capitalism: the famous *there is no alternative*.

The Otolith Group's *Anathema* is not satisfied with simply exposing this sorcery at work, in the manner of ideology critique. *Anathema* wants to also constitute a counter-sorcery, a weapon built from the very same materials that capitalist sorcery itself uses. Its delineation of the currently dominant apparatus of capture is certainly acute. *Anathema* apprehends capitalism as (following Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers) a set of sorcerous practices: a system that operates by processes of beguiling seduction, and incantation. But who are these sorcerers? They almost certainly do not see themselves as sorcerers. 'If capitalism enters into a lineage of systems of sorcery,' Pignarre and Stengers write, 'it is in a very particular fashion, that of a system of sorcery without sorcerers (thinking of themselves as such).' 1 Naturally, the work of capitalist sorcerers is limited to the parliamentary arena. It is carried out most effectively by reality managers and capturers of desire: PR consultants, advertisers, and, yes, politicians insofar as they resemble these libidinal technicians.

Anathema concentrates on a specific kind of libidinal capture. We might call it communicative capitalist sorcery. Jodi Dean defines communicative capitalism as a system in which 'the standards of a finance- and consumption-driven entertainment culture produce the setting of democratic governance,' and in which messages become 'mere contributions to the circulation of images, opinions and information, to the billions of nuggets of information and affect trying to catch and hold attention, to push or sway opinion, taste, and

trends in one direction rather than another.' 2 The genius of communicative capitalist capture is that it is indifferent to content. It doesn't care how many anticapitalist messages are circulating, only that the circulation of messages continues, incessantly. This is a seemingly perfect system of capture, in which '[c]hanging the system seems to entail strengthening the system.' 3 One consequence is that an 'invidious and predatory political-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich' is disguised as its opposite: an open, participatory system that offers increased access. 4 By this sleight of hand, structural antagonism is made to disappear, 'multiplying... into myriad minor issues and events.' 5 And what is it that drives this circulation if not our desire –to make one more connection, to give one more reply, to keep on clicking?

What Dean calls communicative capitalism was anticipated by Jean Baudrillard in texts that now seem to possess an uncanny prophetic power. As far back as the 1970s, Baudrillard understood that the era of the enforced passivity of the spectacle was already being superseded by a control system that would demand, not passive acquiescence, but active participation. 'Solicitation is substituted for the ultimatum,' Baudrillard wrote in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*: 'obligatory passivity to models constructed from the outset on the basis of the subject's *active response*, and this subject's involvement and *ludic* participation, towards a total environment model made up of incessant spontaneous responses, joyous feedback and irradiated contacts.' 6 Recalling McLuhan, Baudrillard called this a 'culture of tactile communication': 'The people come to touch, they look as if they were touching, their gaze is only an aspect of tactile manipulation.' 7

Baudrillard could be describing here the eerie eroticism of *Anathema*, all those scenes in which opaque surfaces deliquesce into pool-portals, in which communicational orifices start to open up just about everywhere. *Anathema* gives us, as it were, the raw material of communicative capitalism, but doubly. Everything in

the film is sampled from advertising, but advertising devoted to the very touch-screen devices that communicative capitalism uses in order to propagate (smartphones, tablets, etc.). The advertisements were all gathered from one of the major nodes of communicative capitalism, YouTube, a site primarily generated, just as Baudrillard predicted, from the 'active responses' of participants. YouTube illustrates very well the communicative capitalist apparatus of capture: the participants who make all those time-consuming analogue-to-digital conversions, all those uploads, and who are not paid for their labor. It is the parasitic predator, capital, which accrues the value generated from the site.

It is tempting – and indeed necessary, but only as a first step – to decry the way in which communicative capitalism falls laughably short of achieving the liquid eroticism of contact that enfolds in *Anathema*. *Anathema*'s first step is to de-anchor the phantasmatic scenes that the advertisements construct from the products that they are ostensibly selling. This de-anchorage is responsible for producing much of the overwhelming affect of eeriness that pervades the film. *Anathema* composes a plane of consistency from these orphaned semiotic-libidinal fragments. As we watch, it is as if we are inside a machine dream. But who or what is dreaming here?

One way of seeing *Anathema* is as a glimpse into capital's own dreaming. This world of smoothly yielding orifice-interfaces, of instantaneous contact, of hard surfaces dissolving into liquid when touched, may be how the communicational matrix looks (and feels) to capital. But the experience of its human users is somewhat different. It is Franco Berardi who has done most to analyze the contrast between the economic-semiotic flow of capital and the overloaded and immiserated condition of the human nervous systems that function as part of the connective tissue of this global cybernetic network. 8 Marx called workers the 'mere conscious linkages' that are needed to connect the flows of

capital; but semicapitalism does not even require our consciousness – what it feeds on is our unconscious attention. And quite clearly it is not only or primarily in our role as paid workers that we give this attention. We are exploited now even and especially in our nonwork: our nervous systems work overtime trying to manage the semioblitz but we receive no remuneration for the value that our attention creates.

As soon as we have smartphones, we are fully immersed not only in cyberspace, but in cyberspace-time. Far from *Anathema*'s radically depersonalized erotic absorption, cyberspace-time is bitty, fragmented. Being perpetually plugged into multiple communication platforms – text messages, social media websites, email – results in the condition that Linda Stone calls 'continuous partial attention.' Here, very far from *Anathema*'s oneirically melting desiring architecture, we find ourselves instead in a state of digital jitter, our fingers twitching over the screen, always preparing to make the next click. The drive to click is a short-circuiting of desire that makes even the most exploitative pornography seem quaint. Pornography demands at least a minimum of lingering over its images, whereas with the click drive, the desire is always and only to click. A pure tactile automatism. There is no possibility of drifting and dreaming. The flashing red alerts act as trance-inhibitors, maintaining us in a state of insomniac insatiability – just one more click, just one more message. We become a channel through which communicative capitalism circulates and proliferates, slaves to click drive. And every alert brings with it a new urgency.

So, yes, it is certainly possible to contrast the promises of capitalist communicative machinery, as shown in *Anathema*, with our experience of these machineries and networks. But this is only denunciation and complaint; it isn't yet counter-sorcery. Counter-sorcery requires a reversal in the magical operation whereby changing the system entails strengthening the system. What that means is taking seriously the promises capital makes, but cannot deliver on. Militant asceticism is only a partial

answer to capital's libidinal engineering. Yes, we will need, as Fredric Jameson has put it, 'to relinquish the compensatory desires and intoxications we have developed in order to make the present livable.' 9

But in addition to denunciation and renunciation, we also need a counter-libido, something capable of outdoing the white magic of I-culture, of twenty-first century capital's regime of neurotic subjectification. It's all done with mirrors: we are induced into occupying what the character Gas in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* calls 'the most pathetic level of reality,' entranced by the most banal images of ourselves amidst the dreary gloss of mildly hedonic sociality. *Anathema* performs another kind of mirror sorcery, where reflective surfaces become thresholds to the outside. Hence the proximity of some of *Anathema's* imagery to that of weird or horror cinema: to the television screens and mirrors that act as gateways to the Other Side in *Poltergeist III*, to the inhuman fingers straining to break into our world through the surface of a mirror in *Prince of Darkness*, and to the liquid portals in *The Box*. Yet *Anathema* is far from horrifying. *Anathema* rather has the eeriness of dreams, its de-anchored images opening up the radically depersonalized desiring ocean beneath and beyond capital. The act of deanchorage reveals what we already know: dreams do not belong to anyone, especially not to capital. Capital itself is nothing – as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have long argued, it is merely a parasite, feeding not only on work but also desire. Capital can only dam, contain, and divert the flows of desire on which it depends. Seen from this angle, YouTube appears not as a space for the circulation of a communicative capitalism, but as a space of sharing and the collectivization of desire. *Anathema* gives us a glimpse into what this desiring zone feels like.

Perhaps the most important consequence of *Anathema's* de-anchoring of the libidinal fragments from the capitalist sigils with which they are arbitrarily articulated is its opening up of a mode of time very different from communicative capitalism's urgencies. One trap laid by

communicative capitalism is the temptation to retreat from technological modernity. But this presupposes that frenzied attentional bombardment is the only possible technological modernity, from which we can only unplug and withdraw. *Anathema* proposes a new use of digital machinery, a new kind of digital desire: a digital psychedelia, no less. When we watch *Anathema*, we become aware of how de-psychedelized mainstream culture has become. De-psychedelization is an aspect of capitalist realism that reduces everything to the imperatives of business and to neurotic psychological interiority. *Anathema's* digital psychedelia coaxes us out of anxious identification with our busy self, our business self. It dilates time; induces us to linger *and* drift. It is neither convalescence nor entertainment, both of which operate to refresh us sufficiently for a return to work. This desiring-time has as little to do with I-culture's drip-feed of hedonic nuggets as it has to do with the busyness of work itself. Lucid, delirial, and exploratory, digital psychedelia rediscovers the dream time that capitalist realism has eclipsed.

- 1 Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011), 40.
- 2 Jodi Dean, *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (London and New York: Duke University Press, 2009), 24.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., 24.
- 5 Ibid., 24.
- 6 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (New York: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1993), 24.
- 7 Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 70.
- 8 See Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009).
- 9 Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 384.

Statecraft
AN INCOMPLETE
TIMELINE OF
INDEPENDENCE
DETERMINED BY
DIGITAL AUCTION

KODWO ESHUN
2015

*Do the colour sequences of the long sets perhaps
refract the light of a strange sun?* Walter Benjamin 1

The Logics of Postal Politics

On October 15, 2013, the coalition government of the United Kingdom finally succeeded in floating the state-owned Royal Mail on the London Stock Exchange at a value of £3.3 billion. By March 2015, the Royal Mail, now owned by investors such as GIC Private, formerly known as Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, Kuwait Investment, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and UBS (Luxembourg) SA, was seeking ways to renege upon its Universal Service Obligation to deliver postage to twenty-nine million homes across the United Kingdom for six days a week at the same price. The partially privatized Royal Mail clearly resents the USO as a relic of its role as a former government department and is searching for ways to restructure the postal system. Under the current economic regime, the postage stamp, which certifies that postage has been prepaid on a letter, appears as the antiquated ornament of a superannuated infrastructure and the visible face of a backward looking British state. These critical attitudes characterize the privatized corporation's hostility to postal communication: if the letter is redundant and unprofitable, then the postage stamp, according to this logic, must be the apotheosis of unprofitability. The specialist collector, by contrast, exemplifies an antiquarian rather than a critical attitude to the future of the postage stamp. The specialist market prizes the stamp for its rarity. It values the exception and devalues the rule. It excludes the uniformity that characterizes the industrial production process of the postage stamp that was engraved and printed in factories such as Royal Joh. Enschedé in Haarlem, Netherlands, Hélio Courvoisier SA in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, Harrison & Sons in High Wycombe outside London and E.A. Wright Bank Note Co in Philadelphia.

Between these two positions of economic anti-quarianism and privatized critique, is it possible to formulate a third position that evaluates the future of the postage stamp according to its powers of standardization and centralization rather than its rarity and value? What if the stamp is understood as an industrial design process whose integral role in the new state's fashioning of nation, territory and peoples, makes it useful for producing an analysis of the arts of statecraft? To encounter the stamp as the vehicle of postal politics entails taking seriously its powers of replication. It means constructing a figurative project capable of drawing attention to the stamp whose monumentalism appears in the form of mass manufactured miniaturism. Such a project would direct spectatorial attention towards an artefact whose ubiquity condemns it to customary condescension. It would find itself face to face with the reductionism of the postage stamp which, upon close examination, reveals itself to be a medium capable of compressing colossal forces. It would find itself forced to reckon with what Thomas Pynchon presciently characterized as 'temporal bandwidth.'² It would be obliged to register the methods by which the stamp mobilizes the forces of iconography, indexicality and iconoclasm upon a scale that is never less than planetary.

The Promethean Politics of Pan-Africanism

The capacities of iconography and indexicality are common to all stamps. The postage stamp assumes a renewed relevance when it provides insights into the forms of inattention consistently bestowed upon the nation building projects of newly independent states. When postal politics is harnessed to the Promethean politics of Pan-Africanism, a work such as *Statecraft* allows one to perceive the stamp as a medium with specific designs upon its users. As an industrially produced artefact whose uniformity insists upon its machine-made manufacture, the form of the stamp

cannot help but draw attention to Pan-Africanism's industrial ambitions to engineer new citizens for a new Africa. From the perspective of *Statecraft*, Pan-Africanism becomes understandable as a grandiose political project of continental proportions assembled by and for the new governments of new states. In *Africa Must Unite*, Kwame Nkrumah, first President of Ghana, envisaged a Union Government of African States: 'Under a major political union of Africa there could emerge a United Africa, great and powerful, in which the territorial boundaries which are the relics of colonialism will become obsolete and superfluous, working for the complete and total mobilization of the economic planning organization under a unified political direction.'³

If *Statecraft* appears as a model of the political unification of the continent, then its scale also allows the spectator to grasp the fissiparous proliferation of newly independent nations whose appearance seemed to confirm Nkrumah's mistrust of the 'gift of fictitious independence'⁴ offered by France to its former colonies in Equatorial Africa now renamed *Republique Centrafricaine*, *Republique du Tchad*, *Republique du Gabon*, *Republique du Congo-Brazzaville* and *Republique Federale du Cameroun*. Frantz Fanon recognized the panic disguised as benevolence in France's 'gift of independence' when he mimicked the words of a French colonial governor: '...quick, quick, let's decolonize. Decolonize the Congo before it turns into another Algeria. Vote the constitutional framework for all Africa, create the French Communauté, renovate that same Communauté, but for God's sake let's decolonize quick... And they decolonize at such a rate that they impose independence on Houphouët-Boigny.'⁵ Nkrumah and Fanon suspected that leaders such as President Felix Houphouët-Boigny of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and President Leon M'Ba of the Gabonese Republic ran their countries as 'client states, independent in name but in point of fact pawns of the very colonial power which is supposed to have given them independence.'⁶ Nkrumah drew on Lenin's understanding of

the 'diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence.'⁷ Pan-Africanism oscillated between the euphoric prospect of a dawning unity, dismay at the sight of Eurafrica economic conferences in Yaoundé and Brazzaville and paranoia at the prospect of regional, tribal, communalist and sectionalist 'fissions in the national front.'⁸ The profound uncertainties, instabilities, reversals and betrayals initiated by Pan-Africanism's confrontation with Europe's empires become uniquely evident in the operational collusion and integral complicity of postal politics.

More than a witness to the aspirations of the newly independent nations, the postage stamp presupposed an imperial infrastructure that could be reverse engineered by those intimate with its logics of colonial centralization. In *The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba*, Jean-Paul Sartre elucidated Patrice Lumumba's ministerial ambition to unify the Republic of Congo in terms of postal politics. According to Sartre, Lumumba's work as a postman:

'integrated him into the colonial Administration and enabled him to discover its principal characteristic: centralization. This discovery was all the more easy for him because chance made him a cog in the centralized communication system. The Post Office network extended into all the provinces and even into the bush; through it, the government's orders were relayed to the local gendarmeries and the Force Publique. If one day the Congolese Nation were to exist, it would owe its unity to a similar centralism. Patrice dreamed of a general uniting power which would apply everywhere, impose harmony and a community of action everywhere, would receive information from remote villages, concentrate it, base the directions of its policies on it and send back orders by the same route to its representatives in every little hamlet. The Government atomized the colonized and unified them from outside as subjects of the King.

Independence would be just an empty word unless this cohesion from without were to be replaced by unification from within.⁹

The 'African political imaginary'¹⁰ envisioned by Lumumba took on its specific form through the 'general uniting power' of the postal network. As the ambiguous expression of oppression by centralization and emancipation through unification, the postage stamp participated in the processes of monopolization within and beyond the unstable borders of the new states. *Statecraft* emulates the postal procedures of epic reductionism and monumental miniaturism in order to produce an immanent enactment of the logics of unification deployed by ruling political parties throughout the continent.

An Immanent Analysis of Iconography

As a visual study that assembles a figurative project in order to study images by way of images,¹¹ *Statecraft* makes visible the vocabulary invented by designers for visualizing Pan-Africanist polity. *Statecraft* is not informed by the imperative to appropriate found objects nor by an archival impulse. It is an enquiry into the capacities and incapacities of the philatelic image. To respond to its visual language through a recourse to terms such as 'propaganda' or 'cult of personality' is to fall back upon critical reflexes. The styles of Pan-Africanist Pop Art encountered in *Statecraft* are compelling because of, not in spite of, their clichés and their archetypes, their tropes and their metonyms. In *Statecraft*, forms of arrangement, sequencing and illumination converge in an architecture perceived from a distance. At a distance of two to three metres, one observes colours without content. Refractions from a strange sun. Elements from a chromatic city. Columns. Blocks. Squares. Sequences suspended in series of simultaneous succession. *Statecraft's* philatelic skyline is determined by an economy that is not perceptible and whose causation

must be reconstructed. The online auction that determines the availability and sets the price for the stamps assembled in *Statecraft* plays the role of the hidden hand that crafts its ultimate form. eBay and delcampe.net are used as digital platforms for auctions organized by collectors from cities in the former colonial states of U.K., Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Portugal as well as U.S., Canada, India and Argentina.

Face to face with the stamps at thirty centimeters, a timeline begins to make itself apparent. A timeline that begins with five blocks of twenty-five stamps each dated 1847-1947 and captioned by the engraver E.A. Wright Bank Note Co, Philadelphia. The dark green 1c depicts the white five-pointed Lone Star of Liberia surrounded by ferns. The violet 2c personifies Liberty as the Goddess of the Republic. The purple 3c depicts the heraldic shield of Liberia that recounts the allegory of a ship at sea, the sun, a dove carrying a charter in its beak, land, furrowed, a plough standing idle, a palm tree. Beneath the escutcheon, a motto reads: 'The Love of Liberty brought us here'. On either side can be seen the national flags of Liberia flanking an elephant. In the dark blue 5c is a map of Liberia indicating its eight counties. The orange 12c portrays the Monument to Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the first President of the Republic of Liberia; at its right circles an aeroplane.

The timeline concludes with the incomplete issue of the First Anniversary of Independence of the Republic of South Sudan dated July 9, 2012. The red SSP10 integrates a photograph of a Nile Lechwe grazing. The blue SSP1 features male and female Shoe-billed Storks. In the yellow SSP2 can be seen male and female Bearded Vultures. The gold SSP5 depicts an identical pair of Saddle-bill Storks, the left one with its right leg crossed over its left. The green SSP20 displays the 'White-eared Kob found in South Sudan in Greatest Migrating Numbers', its legs are folded under its bulk. At no point do the Liberia stamps explain that July 26th 1847 was the date when the freemen of the American Colonization Society declared Liberia a Republic. Nor do

the stamps that memorialize the First Anniversary of Independence of the Republic of South Sudan mention the civil war from which the new Republic emerged. What is critical is to note that these elisions are not explained or clarified by *Statecraft*. *Statecraft* neither elucidates nor celebrates the ways in which the newly independent governments celebrated the ceremony of independence. Instead, *Statecraft* visualizes Pan-Africanism in the same ways as the states themselves. It sees like a state by restricting itself to the 'internal construction of image' produced by the state.¹²

The Emotional Values of the Political Calendar

A political sequence gradually begins to emerge from the interrupted political calendars instituted by each nation state. In her essay on the posters produced during the Cuban Revolution, Susan Sontag observed how Tricontinentalist posters connected the 'days commemorating the martyrdoms in Cuba's own history' to the 'days of solidarity with other peoples', instilling an internationalist consciousness in daily life by cultivating a 'sense of obligation' and a 'willingness to renounce private desires and liberties.'¹³ Pan-Africanist stamps promoted their own version of the political calendar by sustaining forms of attachment to the future memory of events linked to specific dates: The Anniversary of Independence; The Anniversary of the Republic; The birthday of the Founder. The signing of the Charter of African Unity; African Freedom Day; The Conference of Independence African States of April 1958.

Each of these dates was visualized as an allegory that formed a pictorial pageant that popularized the progress of the nation towards the liberation of the continent. If the intracontinental unity of Pan-Africanism was envisioned as the outline of the continent, then its emblem was the five-pointed Black Star radiating from Accra. In Pan-Africanist Pop Art, policy was

pictured: a conference charter became a laurel wreath, a declaration, a curved scroll with a quill, decolonization, a chain broken in two. Peace became Picasso's *Dove with Olive Branch* (1961), its wings outstretched. In this combination of neo-Garveyite, French Republican and Communist pacifist imagery, policy appeared in the form of objects while the new state often appeared in the form of a Pop Art of indigenous species. In the 1960 independence air mail stamps of the Federation du Mali, the Federation is an aviary that hosts native birds like the 100F violet backed merle amethyste, the 200F bateleur eagle and the 500F yellow-crowned gonolek. How surprising it is to see all these birds! How unexpectedly exuberant are their colors!

The Republic of Congo did not issue any stamps featuring Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba during his tenure in 1960. Instead, it reprinted the colonial Congo Belge floral stamps of 1952 with new printed values and the word 'CONGO'. At a moment of extreme political crisis in 1960, the new government expressed its vision of the nation in a compendium whose yellows and pinks and purples shocked with their inappropriately excessive enthusiasm: the 10c yellow dissotis, the 10c green protea, the 20c grey vellosia, the 40c salmon pink ipomoea, the 50c pale green ochna, the 50c pink euphorbia; the 1F yellow hibiscus, the 1.50F mint green Schizzoglossum, the 2F pale orange ansellia, the 3F pink costus, the 4F pale blue nymphaea, the 5F mint green thunbergia, the 8F yellow gloriosa, the 10F pale green silene, the 20F pink aristolochia, the 50F blue eulophia, the 100F grey pink cryptosepalum. Perhaps the euphoria generated by these stamps was audible enough to cloak the crimes committed by the new government of the Congo against its Prime Minister. Could the annual blooms of the protea provide a clock capable of counting the years in which the soil presses down upon the graves that hold the corpses that fertilized the floriography of the state?

In *Statecraft*, independence does not appear as a singular date devoted to a ceremony organized according

to diplomatic protocols and coordinated with press agencies. Instead, it approaches independence as the public phase of an extended process by which the ruling party seeks to determine the external and internal directions of the nation by unifying the state with the territory and the peoples with classes and with minorities. The stamp operates in the temporality of prospective commemoration. It looks forward to the future of the date it honours. It confers a prospective authority upon the face whose history it memorializes. It does not represent the heads of state as much as it plays a vital role in crafting the social body of the state whose head it represents. It is complicit in the crimes carried out by governments in the name of its nations and its peoples.

The despotic figure of Francisco Macias Nguema, President for Life of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is replicated in the issue of the red 0.50Ptas Guineanas, the purple 1Pta Guineana the green 1.50Ptas Guineanas, the grey 2Ptas Guineanas, the blue 2.50Ptas Guineanas, the brown 10Ptas Guineanas and the pale brown 25Ptas Guineanas that marks October 12, 1969 as the first anniversary of his government. The halo that cradles the seven profiles of President Nguema do not dignify the head of state. Instead, the colors of the seven identical heads impress themselves upon their subjects. It is as if the powers of unification, legitimation, multiplication and centralization have captured the tendencies of the future and the past in order to decrease the temporal bandwidth of the present. Is this why the stamps find it difficult to depict the rupture of the military coup, or the novelty of independence?

It is not just a matter of the delay inherent in postal commemoration. It is rather that the imagery of the coup d'etat is indistinguishable from the allegories of independence.

In the 1959 blue 15mms, the pink 55mms and the green 3P.T, the khaki-clad soldier shakes hands with the peasant in white robes while the map of the Republic

of the Sudan glowers behind them. The date of November 17, 1958-1959 is not explained but is described on its first day cover as the commemorative stamp for the first anniversary of the Sudanese army's coup d'etat. The euphemistic imagination of the military coup of 1959 renders the stamp an unreliable witness to history. The 1967 1Np blue, the 4Np brown, the green 12 1/2Np and the 25Np stamp describe the military coup that deposed the government of President Nkrumah as '1st Anniversary 1967 Ghana's Revolution of 24th February 1966'. General Afrifa, the leader of the so-called National Liberation Council is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the generals are zoomorphized in the shape of an eagle, a haloed, hallowed bird, Ghana's flag supported between its wings, broken chains dropping from its claws. Postal politics emerges in the inability of the stamp to distinguish between the coup d'etat and the day of independence.

Statecraft is careful neither to clarify nor to correct this indistinction. Instead it emphasizes the formal continuities which indicate that the non-party state of the military dictatorship adopts the centralized postal system of the unitary state. The former adopts the infra structure of the latter even as it topples its statues, burns its photographs and its paintings, torches its files, its publications and its newspapers, proscribes its cadres and its unions and privatizes its corporations and its industries on pain of detention without trial. Only the stamps issued by the old system escape the fires set by the new system. They circulate the planet as an unplanned, unaccountable anarchic that emerges, intermittently, in the digital aggregates of the online auction.

Iconoclasm Inadvertent and Intentional

At a distance of fifteen centimeters and armed with a magnifying glass, it becomes apparent that the principle of prepayment that organizes the postal system

effectively exposes the stamp to the ignominy of the postmark. By registering its date and location upon its face, the anonymous postal worker carries out inordinate acts of inadvertent iconoclasm. She routinely disfigures the image of the President for Life. Fangs emerge from the dictator's lips. A curved circle bisects his nose. Welts and weals mark his cheeks. The postmark renders its verdict upon the head of the state. It is a judgment that issues from the nameless hand of the worker. It pronounces sentence upon despots and freedom fighters alike, both of whom are revealed as monsters of history that personify the 'occult part of the stamp.'¹⁴ Such unintentional iconoclasm cannot, however, be compared with the calculated indignity of the overprint. To overprint means to redact the name and print value of a stamp with the new name and print value. This definition cannot account for the graphic mortification visited upon the newly deposed head of the state. By impressing its rule upon the face of the stamp, the overprint publicizes and participates in the forces of humiliation unleashed by the military coup, the popular uprising and the civil war.

In 1953, the new government founded by the self-proclaimed Free Officers Movement that led the military coup of 23 July 1952 against the ruling monarchy of Egypt recycled sixteen stamps issued in 1948, the brown 1mill, the red 2mills, the pale brown 3mills, the dark green 4mills, the pale green 6mills, the purple 10mills, the red 13mills, the light purple 15mills, the mid green 17mills, the grey 20mills, the bright blue 22mills, the pale green 30mills, the pale brown 40mills, the pale blue 50mills, the pale black 100mills and the light purple 200mills, are printed three black horizontal lines, evenly spaced across the face of His Majesty Farouk 1 of Egypt. The first line starts at the eyes, below the fez and the final line concludes at the chin. With this triple redaction, the Republic cancels the face of King Farouk and draws Egypt's royalty to its conclusion.

On January 12, 1964, His Highness the Sultan Seyyid Sir Abdullah bin Khalifa of Zanzibar fled the murderous

uprising of the Zanzibar Revolution in his yacht, the Seyyid Khalifa. Between January 2012 and April 1964, the new government of the People's Republic of Zanzibar reissued thirteen stamps from 1961. Each set of four, in pink, black, green and blue, featured the head of the Sultan floating above the interior of his palace, the palace exterior, fishing boats and a map depicting the coastline of Zanzibar. In 1964, the new Republic overprinted the words 'JAMHURI 1964' on the eyes of the exiled Sultan. This single uppercase word, which means 'Republic' in Swahili, terminated the Sultanate by pronouncing the last word on its last Sultan. In the dishonoured face of King Farouk and the discredited gaze of the Sultan, the new regime installs its principles by demeaning the public images of its enemy's value system. Severed from the progress of its calendrical march, each stamp lives on as a date that no longer commemorates an event nobody recollects ever celebrating.

In November 1965, the government of the First Republic of Nigeria issued six stamps that depicted birds against indigenous habitats set against an abstracted background. The colour of the latter deliberately clashed with the former even as both, in turn, jarred with the chromatic exuberance of the birds that perched on branches that joined dissimilar scenery. The crowded designs of the 1/ blue-breasted Kingfisher in a yellow habitat on a grey background with red leaves, the 1/3d Crowned Crane on a pale blue sky on a dark blue sky, the 9d Grey Parrot in a pink habitat on a dark blue background, the 6d Saddle-bill Stork in a pale purple habitat against a dark purple background, the 1/ and 1/2d Splendid Songbird in a grey habitat on a violet backdrop and the 2d Village Weaver and Red-headed Malimbe on a pale orange habitat on a dark orange backdrop offered an allusive portrait of the nation's ability to embrace its mismatched birds, peoples, places, customs and habits.

The military coups of January 1966 and July 1966 triggered ethnocidal violence throughout Northern Nigeria. On May 30 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu

declared the Eastern region of Nigeria an independent sovereign state with the name and title of The Republic of Biafra. In July 1967, the central government of Nigeria declared war on the breakaway Republic of Biafra. It was in the context of the civil war that supplies of Nigerian stamps ran low. The Biafran postal service overprinted the stamps of November 1965 with the coat of arms of the new Republic and reissued them on April 1, 1968.¹⁵ Postal politics participated in and contributed to civil conflict on multiple levels. In the clash between the overprint of 1968 and the jarring designs of 1965 could be read the antipathies that fractured Pan-Nigerianism along regional and ethnic lines. The coat of arms of the new Republic was printed in black and sometimes red in the centre of the stamps of 1965. It impressed itself upon the crowded images of the Blue-breasted kingfishers and Crowned Cranes. Biafra's postal system overruled the word 'Nigeria' with two black lines and retained the word Republic so as to combine it with the new words 'Sovereign Biafra'. Imprinting the heraldic shield of the Sovereign Republic of Biafra upon the sophisticated graphics of the 1965 issue seemed to overload both designs until they created partial superimpositions that inadvertently evoked Sigmar Polke's *Mao* (1972). Identical leopards, partially legible in obscured details, could be glimpsed supporting the shield visible in fragments. Their left paws rested on land linked by the unreadable motto of 'Peace. Unity. Freedom.' Some of the eleven points of the divided sun could be discerned but not the lower sections divided into three and linked by what looked like chains. Most identifiable was the crest in the shape of an eagle, its wings stretched, claws resting upon a tusk above a wreath rope that heraldic specialists call a torse.

The pictorial antagonism conducted in the compressed space of the stamp seemed to concentrate the agonies of the Civil War. Maurice Fievet's excessively stylized designs appeared to resist the incursion by the official shield of Biafra. It was as if the clashing colours of November 1965 and the beleaguered overprint of April 1968 were fighting each other for the foreground. In

many ways, the Biafra overprints of 1968 epitomize the entirety of *Statecraft*. They indicate the ways in which *Statecraft* functions as an experiment in immanent method.

Instead of emulating the museological collection or instituting a critique of the museum or celebrating independence struggles or correcting contemporary misreadings of Pan-Africanism, *Statecraft's* epic incompleteness speaks of the antipathies and enthusiasms generated by the ambition to assemble a new Africa on an intracontinental basis. To encounter Pan-Africanism as the scale model of a political sequence is to reveal the extent to which it flourished under the refracted light of a black star at odds with the sleepless light of the digital economy. Such a meeting brings one face to face with the assertions, adjustments, antinomies, aspirations, accommodations, accusations, arrangements and antagonisms adopted by newly independent states forced to craft new forms of encumbered dependence from the inherited infrastructures of European imperialism. In its totality, *Statecraft* suggests that the postage stamp, like its close relative, paper currency, is less an emissary of history than its apologist. An ornament whose official crimes reward ever closer inspection.

- 1 Walter Benjamin, 'Stamp Shop', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London: Verso, 1979), 92.
- 2 Thomas Pynchon, 'Temporal bandwidth is the width of your present, your now...The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are' in *Gravity's Rainbow*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 517.
- 3 *Africa Must Unite* was published to coincide with the first meeting of the Organisation of African Unity at Africa Hall in Addis Ababa in 1963. Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, (London: Heinemann, 1963), 221.

- 4 Ibid., 193.
- 5 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 55.
- 6 Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, 174.
- 7 Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, quoted in *ibid.*, 174.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 173.
- 9 Jean Paul Sartre, 'The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba', in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, translated by Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer and Terry McWilliams (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 190-191.
- 10 John Akomfrah introduced the term in the lecture that he delivered at the conference *Geographies of Collaboration 1: Writing of History* on 5 October 2013 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt.
- 11 Nicole Brenez, 'Harun Farocki and the Romantic Genesis of the Principle of Visual Critique,' in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?* edited by Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun, (London: Raven Row, 2009), 128.
- 12 James C. Scott, 'Just as the architectural drawing, the model and the map are ways of dealing with a larger reality that is not easily grasped or manageable in its entirety, the miniaturization of high-modernist development offers a visually complete example of what the future looks like' in *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 258. See also Siemon Allen on his work *Stamp Collection: 'Stamp Collection presented an image of South Africa that was and is constructed by the official voice of government and was therefore, for me, an internal construction of image'* in 'The Image of South Africa' *Newspapers: A Project by Siemon Allen*, (Anderson Gallery Drake University, 2004), 21.
- 13 Susan Sontag, 'Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artefact, Commodity,' in *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba 1959-1970* edited by Dugald Stermer, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), viii.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, *Stamp Shop*, 92.
- 15 The overprints were printed at the engravers known as the Government Printer at Enugu, Biafra's capital city. See Stanley Gibbons Stamp Catalogue Commonwealth & British Empire Stamps 1840-1970, 11th edition 2009, (London and Ringwood: Stanley Gibbons Ltd, 2008), 460.

**THE IDEA
OF EASTMAN:
PRELIMINARY
REFLECTIONS ON
THE OTOLITH GROUP'S
The Third Part of
The Third Measure**

GEORGE E. LEWIS
2018

The Otolith Group's film *The Third Part of the Third Measure* presents a performance of 'Evil Nigger,' composer and singer Julius Eastman's 1979 work for pianos. The film takes its title from a speech by Eastman that prefaced a controversial concert of his music at Northwestern University in 1980.¹ Most commentary on this speech notes Eastman's reference to 'a little problem with the titles' – which also included 'Crazy Nigger' and 'Gay Guerrilla' – that resulted in their eventual removal from the printed concert program.

Most often, the protests by the black students and 'one faculty member' that Eastman mentions in his speech are implicitly regarded as needlessly dour and Comstockian.² However, by the time of this concert, at least a generation of black Northwestern students, including future AACM members Chico Freeman, Adegoke Steve Colson, Iqua Colson, and Janis Lane-Ewart, had long been beset with widespread campus racism. Freeman recalls: 'Being attacked by groups of whites, attempts to run us over with cars on the campus. Fights in the gym, name-calling we got walking down the street.'³

Had that 'one faculty member' been black, he or she might well have been seen as something of an anomaly. In 1999, just a decade after the 1980 Eastman concert, Northwestern University's complement of black full-time faculty was just 2.4%; by 2005, the percentage had risen modestly to 4.4%.⁴ There is every reason to believe that this percentage was very much smaller – perhaps even vanishingly small – in 1980. Then as now, to the extent that students and faculty members, along with everyone else, were trapped in a complex system of discursive, social, and institutional signification that racialized access to both physical and cultural infrastructure, black students at Northwestern would have understandably been loath to fully support Eastman's invocation and exegesis of a word that they were probably already routinely hearing, from fellow students, perhaps some faculty, and the environment overall.⁵

The virtual disappearance of Eastman's sonic and historical presence, within just a few years of his untimely passing, recalls an African American composer of an earlier generation, Julia Perry (1924-1979), who passed away just as Eastman's work was beginning to be more widely noticed. Perry attended the Juilliard School of Music, studied with Nadia Boulanger and Luigi Dallapiccola, received two Guggenheim Fellowships, and won prizes for her compositions in the US and Europe. Nonetheless, within a decade after her passing, nothing more was heard of her work for many years, a situation which remains the case.⁶

Eastman's view of himself, published in a local Buffalo, NY newspaper, as 'a kind of talented freak'⁷ in the context of contemporary music, recalls the blind slave pianist Blind Tom, who could play anything at the piano on first hearing and became known even in the final days of American slavery for the virtuosity of his performances and the audacity of his compositions for the piano. But even Tom, once one of circus producer P.T. Barnum's grandest exhibits, disappeared from American music history for many years after his death.⁸

This precarity of the place of blackness in new music histories is more recently exemplified by the historical reception of the work of Benjamin Patterson, who despite having been highly regarded by artists as a central figure in the emergence of Fluxus, remained a cloudy figure in histories of the movement.⁹ Critical theorist Fred Moten's identification of 'a vast interdisciplinary text representative not only of a problematically positivist conclusion that the avant-garde has been exclusively Euro-American, but of a deeper, perhaps unconscious, formulation of the avant-garde as necessarily not black,'¹⁰ accounts in part for this myth of absence, which was memorably expressed by Kodwo Eshun in a brilliant lecture at Berlin's SAVVY Contemporary in March 2018: 'The work of forgetting the black avant-garde never ends.'¹¹

But who is doing the forgetting? Extending Eshun's portrayal of this dynamic, in the same lecture, as a form of 'collective agnosia,'¹² I'd like to suggest that this agnosia can be wittingly collusive. I emphasize witting agency alongside simple forgetting because so many attempts at redress are met with the disclaimer that no one is actually responsible for the problem - as in a now-forgotten corporate racial discrimination case from the 1990s that was settled for \$176 million dollars, where a corporate executive was heard on an audio recording, joking that somehow, 'All the *black jelly beans* seem to be glued to the *bottom of the bag*.'¹³

Even as the important African American musicologist Eileen Southern warned in a 1973 issue of the magazine *Black World*, 'If we black folk are serious about our commitment to the rediscovery and the redefining of our heritage in the fine arts, our scholars must take upon themselves the responsibility for developing an appropriate and exemplary literature,'¹⁴ the black classical composer has been almost entirely ignored, not only by the white-dominated field, but also by the major black cultural critics and public intellectuals who have come to prominence since 1960. Thus, Moten could be speaking not only about present-day, highly reviewed histories of contemporary and experimental music by white scholars, but also about, say, Amiri Baraka's lack of engagement with African American classical music.¹⁵

In the Otolith film, the visual presence of the score is crucial to establishing the presence of the classical. From William Grant Still's 1930 *Afro-American Symphony* to the symphonies of Florence Price, from Hale Smith's 1975 *Ritual and Incantations*, to Courtney Bryan's *Yet Unheard*, an oratorio detailing the final moments in the life of Sandra Bland, African American classical composition continues to reference elements of black life. In that light, rather than being a form of bourgeois assimilationism as it is often portrayed, the entry of Julius Eastman and other black composers into classical music becomes an oppositional stance, where the very

Idea of an Eastman problematizes not only dominant conceptions of black music, but also fixed notions of high and low, black and white. And of course, when The Otolith Group creates a film about black experimentalism, the resonances move beyond music to become intensely self-reflective about the implications of their own positions as fine artists.

During his time, Julius Eastman was known and admired not only for his compositions, but for the resonance of his voice – his singing voice, and the resonantly cultured speaking voice one hears on the 1980 recording. *The Third Part of The Third Measure* portrays two Eastmans, and two Eastman voices; this, along with the split screen, becomes an evocation of double consciousness, a sign under which the multiplicity of black lives and black liveness becomes subsumed.

The first Eastman voice is cool, a matter-of-fact Afro-diasporic man, prosaically explaining his views, first to (his) piano, and then to an intently listening Afrodiasporic woman. After a four-hands performance of the work, near the conclusion of the film, the second Eastman voice enters. That voice is hot, with that same Afro-diasporic woman reading in a very improvisative way, even singing the text in a way that recalls the passionate poetic performances of Jayne Cortez. The white folks (or folks who may *appear* to be white) who have just performed 'Evil Nigger' in such a sensitive way seem to be taking in her impassioned words with equal sensitivity, and at times, the first, male Eastman is intently listening to his alter ego, just as the female Eastman encountered hers.

In between the two monodramas, the viewer encounters music of the kind US audiences virtually never see on either mainstream or alternative channels, whatever the race, gender, or sexuality of the composer. We see intensely moving fingers, but intermixed with faces, avoiding the kind of faux-ethnographic finger-fetishism so subtly critiqued in Stan Douglas's 1994 video installation, *Hors-Champ*, which portrays two

contrasting views of jazz creativity – the standard, jazzistic view of obsessively oscillating body extremities on one side of the screen, and a humanistic view of faces, intelligence, and communication on the other.¹⁶ Douglas obliges the viewer to choose a standpoint; Otolith's visual aesthetic overcomes the fetish by emphasizing the poetry of the physical amid the intensity of the visage.

While Eastman is now belatedly acknowledged as an important early minimalist, a properly post-genre portrayal of minimalism would also engage the impact of John Coltrane, a major influence on composer-saxophonists La Monte Young and Terry Riley.¹⁷ The McCoy Tyner piano solo on Coltrane's 1960 recording of *My Favorite Things* is essentially a minimalist improvisation using repetition as a primary element.¹⁸ Both Coltrane and Eastman deploy an ecstatic affect that is well represented in the film's two-piano, four-hands performance. With Eastman, minimalism becomes a kind of referential endless shout, like James P. Johnson's 'Carolina Shout', the canonical Harlem stride piano work that a generation of musicians used to test each other, just as jazz jam sessions use Coltrane's pre-minimalist 'Giant Steps' chord sequence today.

Much has been made of the ostensibly provocative nature of Eastman's titles, but beyond the epithet, Eastman's peculiar transgression was to introduce specifically African-American tropes of highly politicized vernacular resistance into a classical music world in which such tropes had been in rather short supply. To reference Homi Bhabha, Julius Eastman's interruption of the circulation of the stereotype of exclusive whiteness around classical music's self-image counters the impoverishment and devolution of the field that has resulted from the consistent absences of the same ethnic, racial, and gendered voices from music histories and professional networks.¹⁹

I want to suggest that for many younger artists and audiences, as these real, not mythical, absences

become increasingly noticeable, a form of anxiety and even despair sets in, which the current desire for the Idea of Eastman seeks to overturn. Eastman's spirit of audible and sensuous adventure exemplifies a new, *creolized* formation, affirming that black liveness matters in contemporary classical music.²⁰ As with Zora Neale Hurston's joking account of the 1889 Johnstown flood in 'Mules and Men' ('Everything that happen, they got to be a nigger in it')²¹ Julius Eastman puts niggers on the classical agenda – not like Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, but like Jeff Donaldson's *Aunt Jemima and the Pillsbury Doughboy*.²² Thus, even in the midst of the world of contemporary classical music, Eastman makes common cause with the far more conservative legal scholar Randall Kennedy, who once insisted, 'Never give up your right to act like a nigger.'²³

Eastman's framing of the nigger as 'fundamental' implicitly invoked one pole of Malcolm X's already well-known dichotomy between the house, or good Negro, whose obsequious acquiescence to oppression values survival over freedom, and the field Negro, also known as the 'bad' or 'evil' nigger – the embodiment of up-front resistance. Like Eastman, Malcolm saw the field-nigger trope as the engine of radical change; the Field Negro, said Malcolm, 'had nothing to lose.' But even Frantz Fanon's view that 'The myth of the bad nigger is part of the collective unconscious' turns out to be just part of the story.²⁴ Toni Morrison, speaking with an interviewer, seems to be describing Eastman when she speaks of the 'bad nigger' in male-gendered terms as

a free man who could do a lot of things... This is a man who is stretching, he's going all the way within his own mind and within whatever his outline might be. Sometimes you see it when they do art things, sometimes just in personality and so on. They may end up in sort of twentieth-century, contemporary terms being also unemployed. They may be in prison. They may be doing all sorts of things. But they are adventuresome in that regard.²⁵

In another interview, Morrison sees

a wildness that they have, this special lack of restraint, a part of human life. It's in black men despite the reasons society says they're not supposed to have it. They may call him a 'street nigger'; but when you take away the vocabulary of denigration, what you have is somebody who is fearless and who is comfortable with that fearlessness. It's a kind of self-flagellant resistance, opposed to accepted notions of progress, the lock-step life.

Similarly, Eastman declared,

Most are afraid to admit to the world who they are. People fear punishment. There is always somebody who is trying to crush you. I refuse to be afraid of my own comrades, of being castigated, thrown out or thought of badly. What I am trying to achieve is to be what I am to the fullest – Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, a homosexual to the fullest. It is important that I learn how to be – by that I mean accept everything about me.

Yes, Julius Eastman wanted to be black to the fullest – but was he simply revaluing the term 'nigger' toward a normalizing valence? Or was there a more radical agenda at work? To explore this question, in a performance at Berlin's SAVVY Contemporary in March 2018, I used a sample of the audio recording of the Eastman speech, but inserted a nearly subliminal edit into his declaration, 'That is the reason that I use 'gay guerrilla' in hopes that I might be one, if called upon to be one.'²⁶ My edit went, 'That is what I mean by nigger, in hopes that I might be one, if called upon to be one.'

The African American composer Alvin Singleton's 1988 string quartet, 'Secret Desire to be Black,' presaged the emergence of Rachel Dolezal, a former president of a local chapter of the NAACP who was exposed to general public disapprobation in the wake of having been outed

by her white parents as passing for black.²⁷ When she decided to become black, did she also believe that she was signing up to become a nigger? Would you, esteemed reader, accept the task of being a nigger, if called upon to be one? Think before you respond. On a recording I made in 1992, *Changing With The Times*, you can hear the AACM singer and actor Bernard Mixon playing my father, telling his friends that when he informed my five-year-old self, 'You are a nigger,' I burst into tears.²⁸ He turned to his friends and said, 'Look here – nobody wants to be a nigger!' Here, we can look at how a work by visual artist Glenn Ligon reframes the classic Richard Pryor joke: 'I was a nigger for twenty-three years. I gave that shit up. No room for advancement.'²⁹

CONCLUSION

The Otolith Group has created one of the vanishingly small set of films that present a kind of black experimentalism that lacks overt links with jazz, funk, house, hip-hop, or other forms deemed by mainstream culture and its aspirants as genetically best suited to understanding 'the black experience' – as if there were only one such experience. But as the late composer and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams observed, 'We know that there are different types of black life, and therefore we know that there are different kinds of black music. Because black music comes forth from black life.'³⁰

- 1 'Julius Eastman's Spoken Introduction to the Northwestern University Concert,' on Julius Eastman, *Unjust Malaise* (New World Records 80638-2, 2005), 3 compact discs. Also see Ellie M. Hisama, 'Diving Into the Earth: The Musical Worlds of Julius Eastman,' in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, edited by Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 273.
- 2 See Andrew Hanson-Dvoracek, 'Julius Eastman's 1980 Residency at Northwestern University,' MA thesis, University of Iowa, 2011.


- Ellie M. Hisama quotes Hanson-Dvoracek, who identifies a black student group at Northwestern, For Members Only (FMO), as the organization that protested the Eastman concert. The group arranged a meeting with Eastman and Northwestern faculty composer Peter Gena, where it was agreed that the titles would be removed from the posters and program, and that Eastman would be afforded the opportunity to speak about the titles at the concert. See Hisama, 'Diving Into the Earth', 18n55.
- 3 George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 289.
 - 4 'Black Faculty at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Colleges and Universities,' *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, http://www.jbhe.com/features/48_blackfaculty_colleges-uni.html, accessed 12 March 2019.
 - 5 For both ethnographic corroboration and theoretical context for the experiences of African-American students at Northwestern University, see Sarah Susannah Willie, *Acting Black: College, Identity, and the Performance of Race* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). Also see Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 289-91.
 - 6 See Helen Walker-Hill, 'Julia Perry,' in *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 93-133.
 - 7 Quoted in Hisama, 'Diving Into the Earth', 269.
 - 8 R.J. Smith, 'The Ballad of Blind Tom, Slave Pianist: America's Lost Musical Genius', *Los Angeles Times*, 1 February 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-ca-blind-tom-1-2009feb01-story.html>.
 - 9 See George E. Lewis, 'Benjamin Patterson's Spiritual Exercises,' in *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies*, ed. Benjamin Piekut, 86-108 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).
 - 10 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 32.
 - 11 Kodwo Eshun's lecture may be accessed at SAVVY Contemporary, 'We Have Delivered Ourselves from the Tonal: Of, with, towards, on Julius Eastman, Day 1,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFGASwmmU9I>, 4:20:01.
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 David Warsh, 'Texaco Case Shows Good and Bad Faces of Battle For Racial Justice,' *Chicago Tribune*, 11 November 1996, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1996-11-11-9611110147-story.html>
 - 14 Eileen Southern, 'Music Research and the Black Aesthetic,' *Black World*, November 1973, 5-6.
 - 15 See my critique of Baraka in Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 365-370.
 - 16 See Scott Watson, 'Vancouver artist Stan Douglas excavates the ruins of the past in search of new utopias,' *Canadian Art* 11:4, Winter 1994, <https://canadianart.ca/microsites/cover-stories/1994-winter.pdf>, accessed 12 March 2019.
 - 17 For an account of Coltrane's influence on early minimalist composers, see Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 131, 148-150.
 - 18 John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things* (Atlantic 13420 [1961] 2009), compact disc.
 - 19 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 66 ff.
 - 20 See George E. Lewis, 'The Situation of a Creole,' in 'Defining Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Music,' forum convened and edited by David Clarke, *Twentieth Century Music* 14:3 (2017): 442-446.
 - 21 Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men: Negro Folktales and Voodoo Practices in the South* (New York: Harper & Row [1935] 1970).
 - 22 See <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG01/hughes/jempil.html>, accessed 12 March 2019.
 - 23 Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), xvii.
 - 24 Frantz Fanon, trans. Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Books [1952] 2008), 70.
 - 25 Toni Morrison, 'Robert Stepto/1976,' In *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille K. Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 19.
 - 26 'Julius Eastman's Spoken Introduction.' For the performance, see SAVVY Contemporary, 'We Have Delivered Ourselves from the Tonal: Of, with, towards, on Julius Eastman, Day 1,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFGASwmmU9I>, 3:12:55.
 - 27 For a contrary view, see Clarence Page, 'Why I accept Rachel Dolezal's commitment to her African-American identity,' *Chicago Tribune*, 8 May 2018, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/page/ct-perspec-page-rachel-dolezal-naacp-passing-for-black-20180508-story.html>, accessed 12 March 2019.
 - 28 George Lewis, *Changing With The Times* (New World Records 80434), compact disc.
 - 29 Glenn Ligon, *No Room (Gold) #42*, 2007. See <https://whitney.org/Education/EducationBlog/OnViewNoRoomGold42>, accessed 12 March 2019.
 - 30 Bert Vuijsje, *De Nieuwe Jazz: Twintig interviews door Bert Vuijsje* (Baarn, Netherlands: Bosch & Keuning, 1978), 199. Translation from the Dutch by the author.

about the exhibition *Xenogenesis*

From 25 May 2019 the Van Abbemuseum presents the first large-scale solo exhibition of The Otolith Group in the Netherlands.

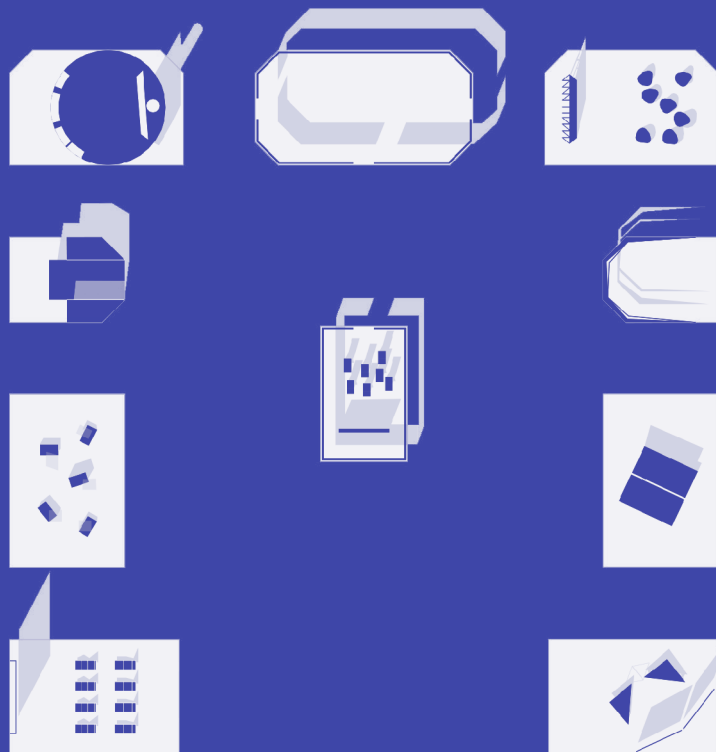
Curated by Annie Fletcher, *Xenogenesis* – becoming alien, becoming strange – presents a selection of the last eight years of work by The Otolith Group. Taking its name from Octavia E. Butler's famous science fiction trilogy, written between 1987-1989, *Xenogenesis* inspires the exercise of generative alienation encouraged in this exhibition. The Otolith Group wish to site their contemporary speculation of the possible future through the prism of this generative Afrofuturist fiction.

Including digital videos, animations and interscalar installations, the exhibition embraces multiple histories of science fiction, independence struggles, experimental music, global communication and ecological forces that precede and exceed the 20th and the 21st Century.

 Passarinho Studio; inspired by Octavia Butler's alien imagination, has created specific settings for each artwork that allow sensorial encounters with the force of speculation.

Works presented include *Anathema* (2011), *From Left to Night* (2015), *People to be Resembling* (2012), *O Horizon* (2018), *Statecraft* (2014), *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* (2013), *Medium Earth* (2013), *Who does the Earth Think it Is?* (2014), *Sovereign Sisters* (2014) and *The Third Part of the Third Measure* (2017).

The Otolith Group. *Xenogenesis*. will be on view at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven until 18 August 2019.



Exhibition floorplan. Architecture design by Diogo Passarinho Studio

about The Otolith Group

The Otolith Group (est. 2002) was established in London and consists of Kodwo Eshun (b. 1966, London) and Anjalika Sagar (b. 1968, London). The group's work emerges from traditions of the essay film and militant filmmaking. Encompassing their celebrated moving image work and writing, curatorial and educational projects, and installations of archival material, their practice bridges an expansive interest in science fiction and futurology with unresolved histories, particularly related to diaspora and the Global South. Their integrated practice weaves these themes across their artistic practice to support the work of other artists and thinkers. The Otolith Group has frequently collaborated with artists and thinkers including Mark Fisher and Justin Barton, Chris Marker, Chimurenga, Rizvana Bradley, John Akomfrah, Avery Gordon, Steve Goodman, Harun Farocki, Elaine Mitchener, T. J. Demos, Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson.

XENOGENESIS

This book is published to accompany the exhibition
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in the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

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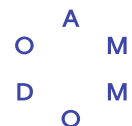
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