OF WORLDS AND ARTWORKS: AN INTRODUCTION

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... in the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides (Glissant, 1997, p. 20)

Particularly in the last two decades, the "world" has been a key concern in academic debates. Since the collapse of Cold War binaries, and in an era of globalization as a market force and paradigm, transcultural and multicultural identities have become a preoccupation of the humanities (and other fields of study). Early on, under the influence of the poststructuralist/postmodern debates of the 1980s and 1990s, hybridity, notions of composite cultures and selves, and multiple belongings had already begun challenging suppositions of stability, uniformity, and the fixity and stasis of culture and identity. Postcolonial scholarship both benefited from and contributed to this process, celebrating the "liberating potential of difference and movement" (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 13). In literary studies, postcolonialism has added a global perspective, questioning the previously restricted canon of the West while also endowing it with a geographically broader vision, as hardly any zone of the globe has remained untouched by colonialism. This entails laying emphasis on transnational relations and creative bricolage, unearthing subversive and hybrid registers, and critiquing long-lasting power inequalities, underlining the postcolonies' right to participate in the world rather than remain its perennial "other." Under the notion of Afropolitanism, Mbembe (2001), for instance, claims a place for "Africa in the world" rather than "worlds apart." Yet such deconstruction as the sole critical force has also been criticized. Alongside celebrations of a more inclusive world of flexible identity constructions, there are ever louder protests against mechanisms of exclusion along the lines of gender, race, and class, which have real-life consequences for marginalized actors and communities: does the sugarcoated de-essentialization of identities undermine political struggle and global inclusiveness? How can communities defend their marginalized identities if identity is dissolved altogether? Moreover, how does the reification of identity also recreate problematic exclusions? Do the new forms of identity politics liberate or call back the ghosts they actually set out to eliminate?

In this context, the arts in a broad sense have acquired new prominence, both as a field of heated debate about global mechanisms of exclusion, and as liberating forms of imagining and creating alternative worlds and breaking through coercive mechanisms and epistemologies. How can the arts "think" relations anew? These are the primary concerns of

the contributions to this special issue, as of the research section Arts and Aesthetics, which organized the workshop that has culminated in this special issue.

The Arts and Aesthetics research section is part of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence. Its reconfiguring of African Studies takes place at both Bayreuth University in Germany as well as the Africa Multiple centers at the University of Lagos, the Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Rhodes University in Makhanda (South Africa), and Moi University in Eldoret (Kenya). The workshop from which this special issue takes its name, "Of Worlds and Artworks," took place from February 10 to 14, 2021 at both the Research Institute of Music Theater Studies (Forschungsinstitut für Musiktheater, styled "*fimt*") in Thurnau as well as the Iwalewahaus, each part of Bayreuth University. The workshop brought together twenty-seven participants from Europe, Brazil, and Africa, including senior scholars, doctoral students, and even performing artists. Through a series of songs and stories, musician Corina Kwami broached the issue of what music and dance can show us about our shared worlds, and what jazz can teach us about the different worlds from which it emerges. Her concert-in-dialogue was also part of the renowned Thurnauer Schlosskonzerte (Thurnau Castle Concerts) series at *fimt*.

Thirteen of the essays presented at this workshop have found their way into this special issue, including the artist's reflection by Chinelo Jeni Enemuo, a multi-faceted artist and curator. Active as a literary artist herself, she is building, in cooperation with Nelen Studios, a multi-disciplinary creative and performing arts center in Awka, Eastern Nigeria, which offers resources ranging from a recording and video-editing studio to a theater stage, dance studio, and exhibition space. Nelen Studios, where artists of all disciplines are encouraged to find their own artistic voices, has become a major hub for all kinds of creative sociopolitical events.

The contributors to this special issue have been working on a broad range of arts[1] and artistic practices, from music, theater, and film to literature, visual arts, and art curation, not to mention a variety of concepts related to "world," arts, and aesthetics; they draw on different conceptual genealogies and debates. This broad range of arts and interdisciplinary perspectives also characterizes the scope of the Arts and Aesthetics research section more generally, and the contributions to this special issue in particular.

More specifically, the discussions of worlds and artworks in the Arts and Aesthetics research section both draw inspiration from and contribute to the cluster's core concepts of multiplicity and relationality. Accordingly, artworks constantly emerge through and in relation to each other, as well as to the material and social conditions in which they take shape. The research section explores the concept of artworks and artistic practices as multilayered dynamic

[1] In the research section, we understand artworks, firstly, not as being restricted to visual or plastic arts, but to include all possible forms of artistic expression (including literature, music, dance, performance, etc.). This also means, secondly, that we do not understand artworks as fixed objects, but as flexible and always in the making. This flexibility is inherent in the performative arts as well as in the notion of the artwork as an artifact that continuously generates multiple and plural worlds of variegated interpretations of meanings.

configurations that are constantly in the remaking. In this sense, Africa Multiple's notions of relationality and multiplicity and the research section's takes on them build on previous notions of unstable categories, yet also seek to go beyond teleological notions of cultural contact, for instance hybridization. These imply a finite end product and initially distinct and stable identities or expressions that must first enter into a process of fusion. In a similar way, in Kumari Issur's contribution, the writer highlights this process with regard to "creolization," which reproduces the very categories it seeks to overcome. Furthermore, both the research section as well as the contributions in this special issue are particularly interested in the unique aesthetic quality of artworks to which a particular utopian or visionary potential has been ascribed: freed from notions of factuality or representationalism, these come with a visionary or utopian view. They can surpass constrained lifeworlds, language, and categories, hence "envisioning" the unspeakable: they make alternative existences sensorially perceptible and possible to imagine. In Chinelo Enemuo's essay, the "seldom slept-in guest room" becomes the set of an action "film," the imagined world of the seven-year-old "I" of the storyteller and her nine-year-old brother Nnanna. She only gradually comes to find the white Christmases, the scents of summer, the coffee shops lining both sides of the road—each part of the imagined landscape and enacted script—at odds with the Nigerian lifeworld that she eventually grew into as a writer.

It is this aesthetic aspect—this dimension of sensual perception and the imaginary that goes beyond the constraints of the here and now—as well as propositional language that are of particular concern to the research section, as is very much reflected in the contributions to this special issue: how do artworks, in their own way, construct and relate to worlds? How do changing worlds emerge in configurations of artworks? How do artworks reshape the political boundaries of worlds by conveying the experience of alternative worlds?

Further, "world" does not presuppose any fixed, coherent unit, a pristine and ontologically anchored reality that art can only comment on and respond to, providing a kind of secondary world mapped onto or critically reflecting it. Chinelo Enemuo renarrates the parable of the blind men and the elephant (which stands for "world" in her search for an analogy), where the men, describing the creature from different vantage points, come to different and contradictory conclusions. The world continuously comes into being, and artworks play an important role in this. For those of us in the Arts and Aesthetics research section, the notion of "world" had already become a focal point of discussion in the semester preceding the workshop, since it helped us not to presume "Africa" as a specific, well-defined, unquestionable "container"—which in turn enters into "relation" with other containers, like the West or other continents—but rather to examine how it comes into being through its relations. In Glissant's terms, relations allow us to move away from the "myth of origin," "not to a creation of world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" (see, for instance, Glissant, 1997, p. 143). For Heidegger, world is first of all "to world"; existence is being in the world. Worlding puts an emphasis on the constant performative construction of worlds. While the performative notion of "world" is already part of Heidegger's concept of existence

as "being in the world," as Michaela Ott surmises in her contribution, poststructuralist critics have explored Heidegger's worlding with an emphasis on entering into relations (rather than being).

There are some questions and concerns common to the contributions in this special issue, which one can also read as relating to and speaking to each other. In doing so, they instigate new and open questions.

The contributions bring to the fore the artists' **struggle** to be heard, seen, and read, which is at once a struggle to be recognized and to be allowed to speak in a world of brutal power imbalances. The contributions to this special issue emphasize critical views on the politics of definition, production, circulation, legitimation, and delegitimization of artworks in the broadest sense—also echoing Africa Multiple's concern with reflexivity and postcolonial views on worlding. Postcolonial scholars—for instance, Cheah, Said, and Ngũgĩ—have given a "critical twist" to worlding, laying emphasis on its material underpinnings: it is the world of inert power structures and market forces that has particularly marginalized Black people, their experiences, knowledges, and art practices, from music to literature and visual arts, that needs to be critiqued and "remade."[2] The "unequal and uneven" world, as highlighted by the Warwick Research Collective—as Elena Brugioni refers to in her contribution—is echoed in canonic notions of, for instance, world literature and world art (the latter of which is ever more closely linked to a capitalistic art world), as well as, in the latter case, heated debates about restitution.

In recent years, there has been an increasing and increasingly heard *global* articulation of Black resistance against the politics of silencing, which in many ways reevokes the **transnational** discourses of Black identity and liberation of the first half of the twentieth century—and again, artistic practices play a key role here. While Ute Fendler draws a connection between the installation and performance of the work *Quaseilhas* and Brazilian Black theater groups of the 1940s, Gilbert Shang Ndi portrays the poet Jorge Artel, a protagonist of the *negrista* literary movement in Columbia, questioning the dominance of a merely Iberian heritage that continues to silence Black identities. The *negrista* movement, as Gilbert Shang Ndi shows, has had a transnational perspective from the beginning. Not only was Jorge Artel influenced by Langston Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance, and jazz music, as Leopold Sédar Senghor was, but his poetry probes in search of a Black language, exploring rhapsodic lines and reference to drums. Artel celebrated Blackness, and hence difference (a different spirituality and epistemology), as a means to reverse the condescending views and categorizations of the subordinating white Eurocentric class. A world-spanning, transnational spirit of Black solidarity emerges in the search for this collective "possibility of remaking," not merely as a return to tradition, but also as a departure into modernity (as built on Black legacies): as Sophie Lembcke shows in her contribution, at the beginning of the twentieth

[2] See also Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's emphatic notion of world literature as "globalectical literature" (2012) that gives form to the "felt experience" of fundamental change related to the haunting colonial encounter ("world fiction as a theory of the colonial").

century, quite differently than in Europe, modern art and Africa art became synonymous in New York.

There is a forceful and determined element to how the arts—literature in Gilbert Ndi Shang's study, transmedial performance in Ute Fendler's—are in search of a new artistic "language" as a form of liberating expression, doing away with the previous alienation, the repression and violence of silence, as well as the coerciveness of established forms and genres. **Memory**, reconnecting with the past, is key to this departure for a new future: not only re-membering the traumatic Middle Passage, but also engaging with African ancestry and cultural heritage is the way to overcoming rupture and trauma; for instance, as Ute Fendler discusses, Afro-Brazilian author Diego Araújo's *Quaseilhas* has the audience join the performers in reenacting scattered, haunting, draining, and humiliating experiences. The tropes of Afrofuturism and Yoruba *oríkì* performances add liberating visions—a hope for reconnecting, but even more so, for a new beginning, echoed in the search for new, polyvocal forms and voices. Similarly, as Brugioni highlights in her reading of *Mosquito Coast*, Guillaume Bronn's photography project, the ruin—here, with reference to Stoler, the ruin of empire—is not a place of nostalgia, but of starting over.

There is also **hope for healing and reconciliation**. Thierry Boudjekeu reads Léonora Miano's *La Saison de l'ombre* from the point of view of trauma studies: the novel forces the victims, the African collaborators, and their descendants (in this case, in Cameroon) to confront the repressed trauma of slavery by articulating their memories in order to collectively overcome it. The arts hold a cathartic promise: communities can overcome the past by collectively sharing moments of pity and horror. Samuel Ndogo approaches this through a study of the subversive but self-deprecating and self-reflexive humor of Kenyan stand-up comedian MCA Tricky, who performs on the *Churchill Show*. Tricky's letter to the president and the futility of its delivery stages a breakdown of walls (however temporary) between worlds—i.e., the world of presidential power and the (under)world of the street—through a Bakhtinian approach to worlding that strips power of its official protocol while remaining skeptical and cynical of the intentions of those who pose as alternatives. For C. J. Odhiambo—who concentrates on Boris B. Diop's *Murambi*, Alex Mukulu's *Thirty Years of Bananas*, and director Nick Redding's film *Ni sisi*—by struggling with extreme forms of violence, namely genocide and ethnic clashes, worlding primarily offers a transformative experience and a means to overcome a world and a past that seem to lack any alternatives and defy all expression. Only the mimetic reevoking of the past seems to create the possibility of new futures. In the installation and performance piece *Quaseilhas*, on the one hand, the audience shares traumatic bodily experiences and is pained by its incapacity to understand the Yoruba recitation; on the other hand, the Yoruba sound, after so long a silencing of African languages, reconnects by projecting an ancestry back to the continent. Further, the Afrofuturist elements promise the invention of possible new worlds. While C. J. Odhiambo sees a "peace culture" as a desirable and achievable aim—a world in harmony—Gilbert Shang Ndi and Ute Fendler highlight the open-ended process set in motion: the sea that recurs in Artel's poetry conjures

absent worlds, but also, as he highlights—borrowing from the concept of tidalectics—implies the back-and-forth movement of waves between two continents: relations here are constantly in a mode of becoming. So even when an African identity is highlighted, any stable categories dissolve again, instigating the recurrence of the question both of identity and its very form.

It is the back-and-forth movement of the sea's waves, so prominent in Artel's poetry, that questions the **boundaries of Africa as a clearly delineated world** and defies an essential Africanness. What "Africa" is, was, and can be, how it is imagined, how it is inhabited by music, literature, and cinema, is never fixed and comes into being in relations. This is also evident in Peter Simatei's focus on the multiple diaspora of third- and fourth-generation South Asian writers who have left East Africa—where their ancestors had arrived in the nineteenth century—to migrate mostly to the US and Europe. The often painful experiences of multiple belonging are reflected, for instance, in the writings of Moyez Vassanji, whose characters feel increasingly estranged in the newly independent East African nation-states. After independence, essentializing concepts of the African nation—built on ideas of autochthony and, sometimes, Pan-Africanism—excluded many South Asian communities from East African nation-building. The novels *Vuta N'kuvute* and *By the Sea*—by Zanzibari writers Shafi Adam Shafi and Abdulrazak Gurnah, respectively—that Clarissa Vierke's contribution reads in relation to each other also hinge on the changing world of the 1960s, the political upheavals of the Zanzibari revolution in the aftermath of Tanganyika's independence. With nationalism growing amid the Cold War rhetoric of the 1960s, new boundaries were being negotiated: on the one hand, Yasmin, the Indian female protagonist in Shafi Adam Shafi's novel, experiences moments of freedom in *taarab* music, where relations become fluid and she too becomes "African." *Taarab*, which absorbed a variety of music styles from the Indian Ocean, becomes a potent metaphor: allowing for female self-fulfillment and a class- and race-transcending solidarity, it makes the emergence of new relations possible. On the other hand, Saleh Omar, the tragic "Arab" character of *By the Sea*—whose personal fate is inextricably intertwined with political turmoil as well as family feuds—ends up as a migrant in the UK, haunted by his past—not unlike characters in Miano's *La Saison de l'ombre*, who are haunted by the history of deportation and forced migration. Here, the Indian Ocean is but a world of debris, a ruined world, a perspective that Elena Brugoni argues for, as mentioned above. However, it is not nostalgia that she sees in Guillaume Bronn's photographs of the ruins of empires, like the Italian Baroque church in Mogadishu, but the chance for a layered consideration of history and, in echoing Mbembe, a bifurcation toward several futures. It is temporality rather than geography that is at stake for her, or rather: notions of space become flexible. And still, as Brugioni adds as a warning: the Indian Ocean remains peripheral in a capitalist world system that is characterized by uneven and combined development. Its marginalization, just like that of other marginalized places in this special issue, is materially grounded, and hence urges us to reconsider romanticist notions of creative encounter.

The horizonality or waves in Shang Ndi's contribution— a positive view of relations—recalls Glissant's *tout-monde*, to which Michaela Ott makes reference: a becoming all-world, **beyond all hierarchies in a composite-culture.** As she argues, drawing on Deleuze's reaccentuation of Heidegger's notion of being in the world, this concept essentially means to become and to

become in relations, which also implies "becoming imperceptible, undistinguishable, and impersonal" and "minorizing oneself." Deconstructing sacrosanct individualism, the human being becomes dividual and loses his and her boundaries; likewise, taxonomies dissolve, and the boundary between continents—so important to Glissant in conceiving of relations to Africa—becomes fuzzy and open. In the same vein, the boundary between humans and the material and animal world is ruptured, which plays a prominent role in Kumari Issur's readings of Mauritian literature—Ananda Devi's *La vie de Joséphin le fou,* Amal Sewtohul's *Made in Mauritius*—and Krishna Luchoomun's installation work entitled *Humanizing Nature*. For Kumari Issur, who interprets recent political debates about the boundaries of the "ocean state" of Mauritius (which extends over several islands, but also involves the sea), the artwork has the power to reframe ontologies. This view emerges from an analysis of three ecocritical novels, and a performance in which the human body fuses with plant and animal organisms and minerals. In Ananda Devi's *La vie de Joséphin le fou,* Joséphin is half-man, half-eel, and thus, in Kumari Issur's words, "a half-terrestrial, half-marine creature." Here, reworlding necessitates a view of the world's material foundations and an environmentalist perspective that, as such, entails rethinking binaries that are deeply entrenched in Western, Cartesian epistemologies: binaries between cultures, but also binaries between land and sea, animal and human being. With recourse to the Mauritian poet and visionary Malcolm de Chazal's concept of *l'unisme*, and in relation to yogic concepts of samsara, she argues for the recognition of an all-compassing "oneness" that is, however, constantly in a process of becoming—reminiscent to Torabully's "coral identities."

While oneness here is a call for empathy and the recognition of interdependence and multiple cultural belongings, Michaela Ott—after tracing the intellectual history of the concept of the dividual in Deleuze's thinking—adds a critical note that brings us back to Elena Brugioni's plea not to indulge the **powerful forces of marginalization** by celebrating a sugarcoated version of Indian Ocean diversity that, as one might add, only a privileged class, typically situated in the West, can afford to do. Drawing from Ulrich Beck, Michaela Ott sketches out an increasingly dystopian view of a capitalized dividual world (which is not part of the Deleuzian rhizomatic view) under constant economic and political control: where different inequalities intersect, boundary-making becomes more and more diffuse, and all-permeating market forces and digital technologies have the homogenizing and impoverishing effect of violence: in such a context, the loss of individual and specific positions that are not quantifiable seems alarming, and amounts to assimilation. Under capitalism and its technological conditions, on the one hand, repetition is inevitable, yet, on the other, has become an essential part of (post/modern) art production itself, which is conscious of **the impossibility of being independent and new.** Artistic positions thus entail a metacritical view of their own production: while C. J. Odhiambo reflects on the "violence porn" that mediatized depictions of mass atrocities have become, Sophie Lembcke begins her reflection with the parodic gesture of Damian Hirst's copies of the Ife Head, titled *Golden Head (Female)*, which is part of his fictional museum displaying "ancient" objects, the Treasures of the Wreck of the *Unbelievable*; meanwhile, in the films of Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-

Pierre Bekolo, Michaela Ott finds a mockery of generic filmic conventions as well as the stereotypical depiction of "Africa."

This brings us to another recurring question that appears in these articles, namely that of form and medium: the notion that art essentially emerges and becomes in a specific medium. Furthermore, given the above-described context of technology and homogenization, how is a **variety of media, genres, and languages** possible? In reflecting upon recent debates on how to decolonize ethnographic and art museums, typically constructed as binaries, Sophie Lembcke shows how practices of display—presenting African artwork in, for instance, theatrical dioramas typically found in natural history museums or on pedestals reserved for the unique artwork of the white cube—have played decisive roles in subordinating African art under Western epistemologies: on the one hand, by perpetuating its "otherness" and making it part of natural history, or on the other, by subsuming it under Western notions of art. Both forms of display do away with the historical and social context and the epistemologies of where the artworks originated. Apart from the debates on returning artworks to their places of origin, an equally prominent issue is how to create a form of global art history as well as to change museum practices. Both issues have been so greatly dominated by market forces, and hardly allow for various epistemologies of art. The troubling question of how to think art anew becomes particularly pertinent when the artwork as such is not considered unique—not iconically displayed on a pedestal, in isolation—but as part of a ritual context (Lembcke refers to the example of Mijikenda *vigango*, memorial effigies). How can one account for literature, performance, and music without subsuming them under narrow, Western-centered categories of art? How can one take various epistemologies and languages into consideration? Or, given the all-pervasiveness of the global system of capital and technology, is any alternative position possible at all? Is the reference to local culture and tradition not also a reaction to the same all-engulfing global system, so that, to echo Appiah (1992), it becomes a form of nativism, grounded in the same (Eurocentric and colonial) logic that it actually tries to refute? While Michaela Ott finds the recurrent "desire to situate itself in local tradition" with a distance "from any technological reach or very much outside of the art market," one still needs to wonder if such a distance is (still) possible at all.

On the one hand, self-reflexive artworks that reflect upon their own conditions of production, their composite cultural make-up as well as their blind spots, remain strong sites for the negotiation of worlds, pushing aesthetic boundaries. Michaela Ott adduces both Med Hongo's *Soleil O*—a film portraying African migrants in 1970s Paris, experimenting with a Nouvelle Vague style to create a "sarcastic portrayal" of French society—as well as Jean-Pierre Bekolo's abovementioned filmic resistance to perpetuating Africa along the lines of stereotypical tropes, a dividual oscillation between European and US dictates. On the other hand, the reflection upon and inclusion of a variety of epistemologies, languages, and practices has increasingly gained prominence against what Mufti, in *Forget English* (2016), called the "one-world empire" of English. Chinelo Enemuo argues for the inclusion of the diverse perspectives (including all the blind men's views on the elephant in the fable she reports), including an "aspirational, authentic and unapologetic assertion of self, of tradition … of essence." Leaving the rediscussion of an essential identity aside at this point, in the piece

Quaseilhas, centered on the first African-language performance in Brazil, the Yoruba *oríkì* is also seen to have a liberating potential since, as a praise-poetry genre evoking genealogies, it literally constructs African ancestry. For now, however, in an almost metaphorical sense, it remains a sound—unintelligible to its audience. While Elena Brugioni argues against the exclusion of Portuguese writers from most Indian Ocean literary debates— which, paradoxically, has followed mostly monolingual (English) trajectories in depicting a multilingual world—Clarissa Vierke juxtaposes the work of the prominent Zanzibari novelists Shafi Adam Shafi, writing in Swahili, and Abdulrazak Gurnah, writing in English, who, though both of the same generation and both writing Zanzibar amid wider Indian Ocean worlds, have never been compared: their works circulate in two different worlds and draw on partly overlapping literary traditions and concepts, but have never been discussed together.

In Indian Ocean literary debates, the notion of literature is largely defined from a Western point of view, in which multilingual heritages and the different concepts of literature in, for instance, Hindi, Malay, and Arabic, have hardly played a role, as if they belonged to different Indian Ocean worlds. How can one include "peripheral" literatures without subsuming them under the critical paradigms that enforce a homogenizing reading, which "blurs and deforms topical specificities" (Mazagora, 2015)? In describing "Zanzibari Poetic Worlds," Duncan Tarrant shows how Swahili poetry, so ubiquitous and highly valued in everyday life, exchanged on WhatsApp platforms, in spontaneous verbal duels on the street, and organized competitions, makes Zanzibar a literary world in its own right, with its "own interconnected positions," as Tarrant argues with recourse to Casanova's notion of "world literary space." The Zanzibari poetic networks, linked with other poetic networks all along the coast, is its own world, and draws on long-standing Indian Ocean literary ties while also incorporating new literary trends (mostly also through the academization of literature at school and universities). And still, differently from the highly canonized Indian Ocean literature valued by Western audiences and the Western book market, it is rarely translated, performed only in the context of local events rather than on the big stages of the prominent and heavily sponsored cultural institutions and festivals that celebrate the cosmopolitan Indian Ocean flavor of Zanzibar. It is this reference to a Western center, as Tarrant argues, that consecrates a literature as worldly.

It is hoped that this special issue will make a modest contribution in redressing the imbalance of a strongly hierarchical one-world by exploring the powerful creation of alternative worlds in artwork.

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