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Archive journal

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... he has produced films that unveil the political topicality of the African continent’s history and of its diaspora, and to this end has come up with charged imagery that scuttles all codification 2

What is Cinema for Us?

Med Hondo has persistently denounced African cinema’s lack of independence, calling for an own African cinema as well as an autonomous discourse on it. In Theo Eshetu’s video installation *Double Feature Picture Show*—the upshot of his interaction with Med Hondo’s work—moving images from diverse sources and angles converge so as to render the exhibition space an uncovered cinematic arrangement. Replicating cinema, Theo Eshetu creates a constellation of mutually facing and observing monitors. 11

Med Hondo’s films constitute escape routes from the ignorance of everyday racism, constraints, and prejudices; they open up a space for us, for anger, for powerful images, for pluriversal historiography, for stylistic autonomy, for differing physicalities, colours, and degrees of tension 2

I have established a national cinema, even though conceived and put together outside my country. For, if exile remains as the worst thing, what is essential, in the heart of that worst, is to be conscious of what has to be struggled against. And what is vital for us, here and now, is surely to struggle against capitalism under its different aspects and its multiple powers 6

This cinema has gradually imposed itself on a set of dominated peoples. With no means of protecting their own cultures, these peoples have been systematically invaded by diverse, cleverly articulated cinematographic products. The ideologies of these products never ‘represent’ their personality, their collective or private way of life, their cultural codes, or of course the least reflection of their specific ‘art’, their way of thinking, of communicating—in a word, their own history ... their civilisation 4

Due to the total lack of a global cultural policy, African and Arab cinema is relegated to being an exotic and episodic sub-product, limited to aesthetic reviews at festivals, which, although not negligible, are undoubtedly insufficient 4

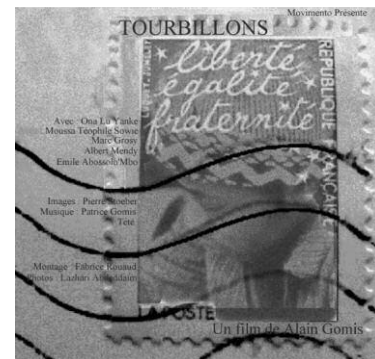
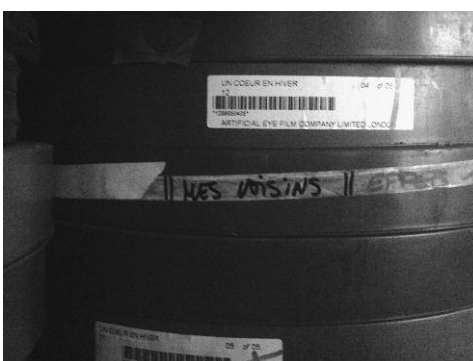
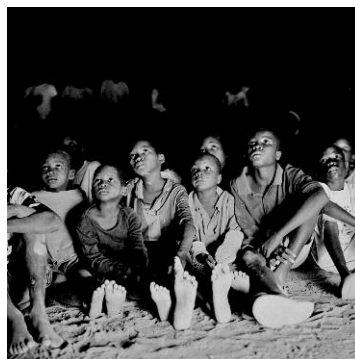
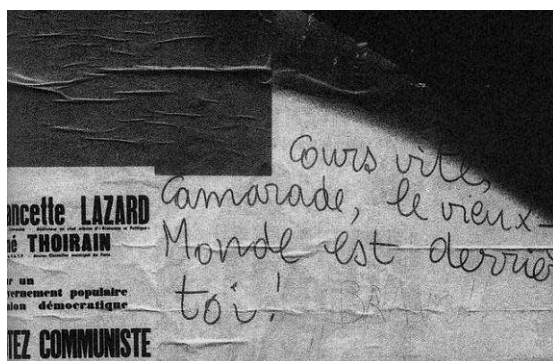
— Cours, cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi — Run, comrade, run, the old world is behind you — The Cinema of Med Hondo

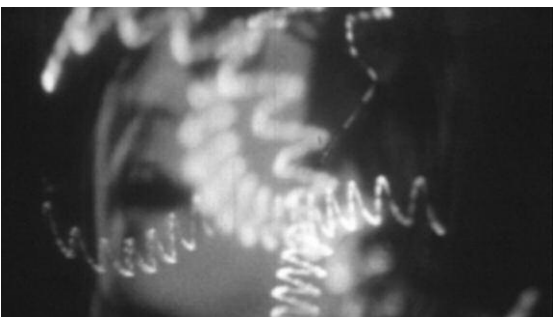
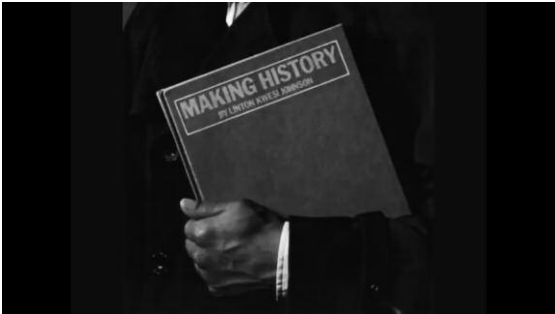
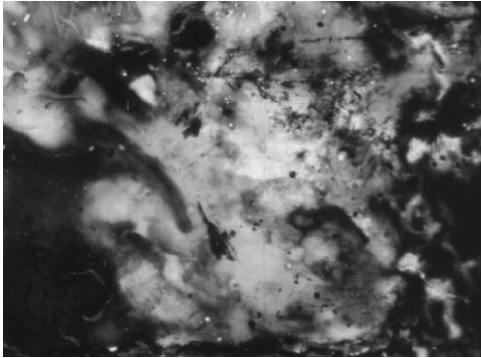
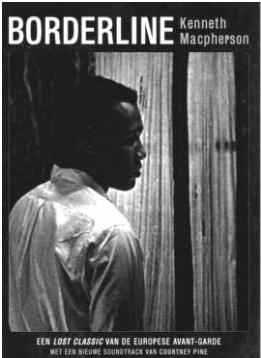
“Run comrade, the old world is behind you,” is one of the slogans hoisted by the French 1968 movement, which eventually found its way into *Soleil Ô* (1969), Med Hondo’s best-known film. Filmmaker, actor, and voice-actor, Med Hondo was born in Mauritania, subsequently emigrated to France where he has been living in the Parisian suburbs for more than fifty years.

A truly self-made man, Med Hondo began to work in theatre, uncompromisingly making his way toward filmmaking. As a director, he has produced films that unveil the political topicality of the African continent’s history and of its diaspora, and to this end has come up with charged imagery that scuttles all codification. At the same time he set out to shift cinema as a representative apparatus and to develop alternative models to European and American production and distribution structures. Med Hondo’s films constitute escape routes from the ignorance of everyday racism, constraints, and prejudices; they open up a space for us, for anger, for powerful images, for pluriversal historiography, for stylistic autonomy, for differing physicalities, colours, and degrees of tension.

His work forms the epicentre of a wide-ranging, research-based and discussion-intensive film and exhibition programme. Curated by Enoka Ayemba, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet, and Brigitta Kuster, the programme aims to raise awareness about Med Hondo’s extraordinary body of work, to stimulate its appreciation, and thus contribute to making it accessible for future generations as well.

1 *Cours vite camarade* (1968) © inventin & Lukas Stella; 2 *Cinématon N° 1780 Med Hondo* (1995) © Gérard Courant; 3 *Double Feature Picture Show* (2017) © Theo Eshetu; 4 *Menu* (2015) © Guy Wouété; 5 *wer spricht* (2017) © Sebastian Bodirsky; 6 Film cans *Mes voisins* (2015) Photo MH Gutberlet; 7 *Concerto pour un exil* (1967) © Désiré Ecaré; 8 *Räume* (1989) © Gunter Deller; 9 *Tourbillons* (1999) © Alain Gomis; 10 *Muna Moto* (1975) © Jean-Pierre Dikongué-Pipa; 11 *Tabataba* (1988) © Raymond Rajaonarivelo; 12 *La femme au couteau* (1969) © Timité Bassori; 13 *Shadows* (1959) © John Cassavetes; 14 *Cultural Nationalism* (1968) © Skip Norman & dffb; 15 *Polisario, un peuple en armes* (1978) © Med Hondo; 16 *Nine Muses* (2010) © John Akomfrah; 17 *West indies ou les nègres marrons de la liberté* (1979) © Med Hondo; 18 *Beatles électronique* (1966-69) © Jud Yalkut & Nam June Paik; 19 *L’homme sur les quais* (1993) © Raoul Peck; 20 *Handsworth Songs* (1986) © John Akomfrah; 21 *Night music* (1986) © Stan Brakhage; 22 *Lights* (1964-66) © Marie Menken; 23 *Lumière noire* (1994) © Med Hondo; 24 *Pourvu qu’on ait l’ivresse* (1957) © Boris Pollet; 25 *Borderline* (1930) © Kenneth Macpherson; 26 *Sambizanga* (1972) © Sarah Maldoror; 27 *Fatima, l’algérienne de Dakar* (2004) © Med Hondo; 28 *Making History* (1985) © Linton Kwesi Johnson & INA; 29 *Sarraounia* (1986) © Med Hondo; 30 *Med Hondo in Masculin Féminin* (1966) © Jean-Luc Godard





What is Cinema for Us?

Med Hondo

Throughout the world when people use the term *cinema* all refer more or less consciously to a single cinema, which for more than half a century has been created, produced, industrialised, programmed and then shown on the world's screens: *Euro-American cinema*.

This cinema has gradually imposed itself on a set of dominated peoples. With no means of protecting their own cultures, these peoples have been systematically invaded by diverse, cleverly articulated cinematographic products. The ideologies of these products never 'represent' their personality, their collective or private way of life, their cultural codes, or of course the least reflection of their specific 'art', their way of thinking, of communicating — in a word, their own history... their civilisation.

The images this cinema offers systematically exclude the African and the Arab.

It would be dangerous (and impossible) to reject this cinema as simply alien — the damage is done. We must get to know it, the better to analyse it and to understand that this cinema has never *really* concerned the African and Arab peoples. This seems paradoxical, since it fills all the cinemas, dominates the screens of all African and Arab cities and towns.

But do the masses have any other choice? 'Consuming' at least fifty films in a year, how many films does the average African see that really *talk to him*?

Is there a single one which evokes the least resonance, the least reflection of his people's life and history — past, present and future? — Is there a single image of the experiences of his forefathers, heroes of African and Arab history? Is there a single film inscribed in the new reality of co-operation, communication, support, and solidarity of Africans and Arabs?

In *Lawrence of Arabia* an image of *Lawrence* — not of the Arabs — is disseminated. In *Gentleman of Cocodie* a *European* is the gentleman hero, and not an Ivory Coast African.

This may seem exaggerated — some will say that at least one African country, Egypt, produces some relatively important films each year... that since independence in African countries a number of *cinéastes* have made a future for themselves. In the whole continent of Africa, Egypt is only one country, one cultural source, one sector of the market — and few African countries buy Egyptian films. They produce too few films, and the market within Egypt is still dominated by foreign films.

African and Arab film-makers have decided to produce their own films. But despite their undoubted quality they have no chance of being distributed normally, at home or in the dominant countries, except in marginalised circuits — the dead-end art cinemas.

Even a few dozen more film-makers producing films would only achieve a ratio of one to ten thousand. An everyday creative dynamic is necessary for a radical change in the relationship between the dominant Euro-American production and distribution networks and African and Arab production and distribution, which we must control.

Only in this way, in a spirit of creative and stimulating competition between African and Arab film-makers, can we make artistic progress and become 'competitive' on the world market. We must first control our own markets, satisfy our own peoples' desires to liberate their screens, then establish respectful relations with other peoples, and balanced exchange.

WE MUST CHANGE THE HUMILIATING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOMINATING AND DOMINATED, BETWEEN MASTERS AND SLAVES.

Some flee this catastrophic state of affairs, thinking cinema restricted for Western, Christian and capitalist elites... or throwing a cloak of fraternal paternalism over our film-makers, ignoring and discrediting their works, blaming them, in the short term forcing them to a formal and ethical 'mimesis' — imitating precisely those cinemas we denounce — in order to become known and be admitted into international cinema; in the end forcing them into submission, renouncing their own lives, their creativity and their militancy.

Since the independence of our countries a sizeable number of our film-makers have proved their abilities as *auteurs*. They encounter increasing difficulties in surviving and continuing to work, because their films are seldom distributed and no aid is forthcoming.

Due to the total lack of a global cultural policy, African and Arab cinema is relegated to being an exotic and episodic sub-product, limited to aesthetic reviews at festivals, which, although not negligible, are undoubtedly insufficient.

Each year millions of dollars are 'harvested' from our continents, taken back to the original countries, then used to produce new films which are again sent out onto our screens.

50% of the profits of multinational film companies accrue from the screens of the Third World. Thus each of our countries unknowingly contributes substantial finance to the production of films distributed in Paris, New York, London, Rome or Hong Kong. They have no control over them, and reap no financial or moral benefit, being involved in neither the production nor the distribution. In reality, however, they are coerced into being 'co-producers'. *Their resources are plundered.*



The United States allows less than 13% foreign films to enter its market — and most of these are produced by European subsidiaries controlled by the U.S. majors. They exercise an absolute protectionism.

Most important is the role of the cinema in the construction of peoples' consciousnesses.

Cinema is the mechanism *par excellence* for penetrating the minds of our peoples, influencing their everyday social behaviour, directing them, diverting them from their historic national responsibilities. It imposes alien and insidious models and references, and without *apparent* constraint enforces the adoption of modes of behaviour and communication of the *dominating* ideologies. This damages their own cultural development and blocks true communication between Africans and Arabs, brothers and friends who have been historically united for thousands of years.

This alienation disseminated through the image is all the more dangerous for being insidious, uncontroversial, 'accepted,' seemingly inoffensive and neutral. It needs no armed forces and no permanent programme of education by those seeking to maintain the division of the African and Arab peoples — their weakness, submission, servitude, their ignorance of each other and of their own history. They forget their positive heritage, united through their forefathers with all humanity. Above all they have no say in the progress of world history.

Dominant imperialism seeks to prevent the portrayal of African and Arab values to other nations; were they to appreciate our values and behaviour they might respond positively to us.

We are not proposing isolation, the closing of frontiers to all Western film, nor any protectionism separating us from the rest of the world. We wish to survive, develop, participate as sovereign peoples in our own specific cultural fields, and fulfil our responsibilities in a world from which we are now excluded.

The night of colonialism caused many quarrels among us; we have yet to assess the full consequences. It poisoned our potential communications with other peoples; we are forced into relations of colonial domination. We have only preconceived and false ideas of each other imprinted by racism. They believe themselves 'superior' to us; they are unaware of our peoples' roles in world history.

Having been colonised and then subjected to even more pernicious imperialist domination, if we are not entirely responsible for this state of affairs, some intellectuals, writers, film-makers, thinkers, our cultural leaders and policy-makers are also responsible for perpetuating this insatiable domination.

It has never been enough simply to denounce our domination, for they dictate the rules of their game to their own advantage. Some African and Arab film-makers realise that the cinema alone cannot change our disadvantaged position, but they know that it is the best means of education and information and thus of solidarity.

It is imperative to organise our forces, to reassert our different creative potentialities, and to fill the void in our national, regional and continental cinemas. We must establish relations of communication and co-operation between our peoples, in a spirit of equality, dignity and justice. We have the will, the means and the talent to undertake this great enterprise.

Without organisation of resources we cannot flourish at home, and dozens of African and Arab intellectuals, film-makers, technicians, writers, journalists and leaders have had to leave their countries, often despite themselves, to contribute to the development and overdevelopment of countries that don't need them, and that use their excesses to dominate us.

This will continue until we grasp the crucial importance of this cultural and economic strategy, and create our own networks of film production and distribution, liberating ourselves from all foreign monopolies.

"What is Cinema for Us?" was first published under the name Abid Mohamed Medoun Hondo in *Framework* (Issue 11, autumn 1979) in a translation by Greg Kahn and reprinted in a slightly edited version in *Jump Cut*, no. 31, March 1986, pp. 47–48. Reprint with friendly permission from the author.



The Cinema of Exile

Med Hondo

The person who lives in exile, not from choice but by obligation, by absolute necessity, is certainly cut off physically from his family, ethnic and cultural roots. This enforced exile is dramatic, and in the long term threatens to produce sclerosis and acculturation. Each year I feel more deeply how dangerous is the exiled person's situation. However, things and people have to be put back into their context. I want to say that, as an actor and film-maker, I do benefit from the relative privileges attached to the person of a known, self-taught intellectual. I live in France, I live after a fashion from the cinema, as I believe it is useful to make films, and I try to show my films — not just to the European public but also to the thousands of my brothers among whom I live, or rather, who simultaneously with me live in the situation of exile.

I maintain however that with *The Nigger-Arabs* (*Les Bicots-Nègres*) I have established a national cinema, even though conceived and put together outside my country. For, if exile remains as the worst thing, what is essential, in the heart of that worst, is to be conscious of what has to be struggled against. And what is vital for us, here and now, is surely to struggle against capitalism under its different aspects and its multiple powers. Even if the struggle is only a brush-fire, it is a fire which will spread. And we have to make sure the fire gets to the people who are in the middle of the situation, who are suffering too, who are fighting against the same phenomena of domination without anyone hearing them. They are not heard, because they do not make films — or they do so, but which of our African brothers see their films? They are well-nourished at the roots, but what they create is confiscated: the distribution of African films is zero, and if you want to make sure it happens, as in Upper Volta, for example, you run up against the monopolies' networks. Here in France I am obliged to seek out where my own people are, in the slums and the shantytowns, to work with them on a film which concerns us all; in Africa, where can films be seen which are made by Africans and concern Africans? In the present situation, whether I make a film in Paris or Nouakchott, it is pretty obvious that it is a film my country will not see. Over the long term, this situation becomes a latent suicide. The cinema as I practice it cannot be independent of social and political data, since it is a reflexion, a questioning of those data. If I had the chance to shoot in Mauritania, I would make a film different from the first two, since in Mauritania too everything is different.

Except that it would, once more, be a multinational film: because my country has multiple cultures and three or four languages are spoken there (I do mean languages, not dialects). The fact of there being ethnic groups and different languages in a nation complicates its realities. Undoubtedly, I think about that unconsciously; all the more so because I come from parents of diverse origins, and, what is more, slaves. I feel that inside myself as a fundamental reality.

Let us keep our diversity; let us be suspicious of the concept of universalism, which is a dangerous thing. I think we do not have to copy one another, whether amongst Africans or by continent. Above all, let us avoid copying the European and American cinema. We all have our specificity. Unfortunately, certain Africans are not always conscious of their culture and realities, but they are part of them, even unconsciously, the film-makers and the public alike. There is a problem of audience receptivity which is basic and also specific. Thus the physical time of an Arab or African film is different from a western film. Is the film too long? No, it's a matter of another mode of breathing, of another manner of telling a story. We Africans live with time, while the Westerners are always running along behind it. Here you are under pressure to tell a story in ninety minutes. There are stories which cannot be told in ninety minutes. And speeding up the narrative — notably by montage — in the "western" film, evinces the displacement of the real rhythm of social being in relation to our cinemas.

I do not believe that the same work can be received, favorably or not, in an identical way, nor can it be readable, that is to say, understood, decoded, in Senegal as in London, in Egypt as in Rome or Paris. Peoples are only known through being translated, not by having a travesty made of them: a cinema with a universal vocation would be the latter.

But words must not be allowed to deceive us either. If it is true that a film exposing realities, dealing with a people's aspirations, is by that fact a political film, it is not automatically a "revolutionary" film. This is an important demystification! When people talk about political cinema, the drama is that confusion is already being compounded. It is not pointless to repeat that a political film is not by necessity, purely, a film which deals with subjects defined as political. What is more, a political film is not necessarily a "revolutionary" film. What is a revolutionary film? A film unlike those already seen? A film calling for insurrection?

Which incites revolution? I have never heard of people running to look for rifles at the cinema exit, to overthrow the government or to chase out the village mayor. Revolutionary cinema without revolution: I do not understand what that means.

Let us say more simply that a committed cinema can struggle courageously and stubbornly, and also with a constant wish by the filmmakers to control their own discourse. You can say everything through film. But it is appropriate to know well to whom you can speak, and to whom you want to speak. To know (or not to pretend ignorance) that all cinema has a commitment and then to say "We are not involved in politics" is only a lie and dishonesty: flight into a dream-world, silence on everything troublesome, an evasion which gives a clear field to the forces of stagnation and subjugation. It is a political game because it works to the advantage of the existing capitalist structures — the only merit of reactionary cinema is that it can be easily recognized! On condition we do not allow ourselves to be seduced. Formally speaking, in plastic art terms, a photo, a speech, can be "revolutionary": but what do these formal "revolutions" serve? It is a question which needs asking. Maybe to give the illusion of a combative cinema? And from there to create a revolutionary dynamic... An illusion, to which we must add a widespread but false idea: "the public doesn't care for progressive films." A commonly accepted and maintained idea. It is a convenient pretext that you cannot suppress the public's alienation. In France, film-makers are seen willingly lining up behind this "screen" and, while still asserting leftwing ideas (elsewhere, at the dinner table), they put together a conventional and clearly comfortist cinema (and thus, a reactionary cinema).

So we return to the necessity of knowing what we want to say, and to whom we have to say it. For what public has learned to read, to decode a film? An elite public. But there are other publics. Film criticism does not play its role, or rather, it plays it too well. The handful of critics we know whom I will qualify as "progressive" must then fight in place of all the others. They have no right not to be present, they must reject demagoguery, paternalism, quasi-journalism. For if they desert, what remains? Criticism as practiced in the columns of the rightwing press does not interest me. My relations with progressive critics have never been negative. I must say it is thanks above all to the western press, especially the French press, that the films which have been seen have been available, and that Africans have been informed about them. For sure, with some inadequacies on some people's part, but without undue paternalism. Criticism's influence on the conscious public, on the distributors, is an essential and often decisive support. It is very encouraging and positive that our films are taken into consideration, that they are dealt with on an equal footing, and so with the same rigor as all the others. Sembene, Tawfiq Salah, I myself and many others have been put into the festivals and some theaters thanks to some critics, whose initial battles were sometimes with their own editors.

For me, the country where for over ten years film criticism has never yielded up its responsibilities, is France. I don't forget that *Soleil O* came out in a 64-seat theater because the critics fought to find a screening space when so many owners were indifferent or suspicious. Today, when an American distributor or journalist wants African films (a rare occurrence), he telephones or writes to a French journalist: it is significant, all the same.

That said, an African film criticism is indispensable. At the present time, very few critics can express themselves in our countries, and they only have a very relative power (to inform, that is) on their national, even local level. The lack of a film criticism is not Africa's special privilege. But it is a historical given that western film criticism is, today, the only one capable of reviewing our attempts; of informing the public and helping us; of studying and reflecting on African and Arab cinema. We, as African filmmakers, must ourselves invent, on our own, the film language to be spoken to be able to be understood, one day, by our brothers. You are witnesses. On this account, you must not make out that our actions are in accordance with our ideas when it is not true. I mean that one does not have the right when defending progressive intentions, when one is a creative artist, a theorist, a critic, to produce or defend a consumer cinema. The public has to be awakened, or re-awakened. That demands courage. A leftwing (or so-styled) film-maker or critic, then, is only doing his duty: we don't have to award ourselves "medals".

Since *Soleil O*, I have been trying to put into practice my own special bent, and to deepen it. I am not an enemy of a simple language to convey interesting ideas. I also believe, honestly, that to relate History in its complexity, in its contradictions, in order to approach an event, sometimes you have to move beyond the first level of simplicity and obviousness, for the risk at such a point is then a dangerous Manicheism. The more deeply you go into things, the more complex the analysis. The opposition of content and form is meaningless, the theme which is chosen determines form and conditions it; the public addressed — (a milieu, a country, a period, nothing is separated, everything is bound up together) — expects the language to be understandable, which does not mean conventional. I am not an enemy of aesthetic refinement if it is integrated into a context, if it is based on something — though present-day French cinema seems to me to be adrift, bereft of any driving force, stricken with chronic mimesis. The films I have done have been produced in a given milieu, at a precise period. Were I to make a film in Mauritania tomorrow, my film language would not be the same. I certainly would not make an oversimplified film, but it would be different, with less baggage attached. Maybe I would use video. And if I discovered that cinema is still a useless activity in Mauritania, then I would do something else.

When I showed *The Nigger-Arabs* (*Les Bicots-Nègres*) to Mauritians of different ethnic groups, who were immigrant workers here, I observed that they really took to the film. In their exile context, intellectual or manual workers, they reacted positively. Perhaps that was due to the fact that I did not agree to censor myself — any more than I would have done in my own country — in order to find a different level of interpretation. I did not wish to think in other people's stead. And if I am shooting in Mauritania, I would respect that as a fundamental principle, with even more vigilance: I would try to work on the film with them, in common, without putting them down by only granting them secondary status, that of a row of objects under analysis...

The immigrants' strong appreciation of the film is no doubt also linked to the fact that I simply began from my own situation to pose the key questions: Why independence? To do what? Why exile yourself? Why the cinema? I then overlapped various aspects of immigration, defining (by letting the migrants define for themselves) their relations to everyday life — right up to the final utopia showing the European economy paralyzed — as has happened at regular intervals, but in short random bursts, at Renault and elsewhere, for example — on the day when the immigrant workers all stop and leave for home again.

I also wanted to show that these workers aren't eating anyone else's food, and that they hardly get what is theirs by right. And to show how they live, what their problems are, their difficulties, their contradictions, all of them things that European workers know but poorly.

Contrary to the method I used while shooting *Soleil O*, I asked a certain number of these immigrant workers if they would agree to collaborate, to participate. This was not always easy. We talked, organized gatherings. Their confidence was necessary, and it could only be true confidence if I told them to start with that I was making a film whose purpose was neither my nor their pleasure. That when a question was asked, it would be necessary to try to answer it. Once their confidence was won, I then had to navigate between a series of reefs, the first being... a sort of hyper-realism, which would have pushed me into spectacle and demagoguery. My concern then was to avoid all revolutionary mysticism, all embroidery or prettification, where what was existing was filth and disease. I chained myself to the rigor of the image: not to let solidly established facts slip out of view simply for the benefit of a stylistic effect. But I hope at least to have written a well structured and readable film.

The second difficulty was bound up with the very nature of the method adopted. Even if I did not modify the entire structure of the film overall, I was led to change elements of the screenplay on several occasions. For example, I was shooting a scene with intellectual and manual migrant workers — on the level of the film, they were all in it together, I am no "workerist" and I am suspicious of categorizations.

After developing the film, I showed the rushes to the participants and we discussed them. As a result of new or complementary elements emerging from this examination, I used to shoot unforeseen takes. I believe in the effectiveness of this approach. Unfortunately, the conditions of work and the cost of film production are a limit on such experiments.

The approach in *Soleil O* had been constructed from a very elaborate script, and improvisations had remained limited and always under constraint. For *Les Bicots-Nègres*, it was appropriate from the beginning to define clearly the script's central points, the cause/effect/causal relations, knowing that in the open framework of a sequence, the actor-interpreters often drift "at will" far from the departure point, and not necessarily along the foreseen route. Shooting becomes an endless argument, complex, a passionate nightmare which is reinstated during the editing process. What do you choose, when you have the feeling that everything that is shown and spoken is essential, or important? It is a complex alchemy, which demands a lot of time, distance and reasonableness toward the people you are working with. It involves practically a second shooting parallel to the editing; which is enriching, and in my view fresher and truer, but much more risky than following a precise script.

Whatever the method adopted, I believe no image, no dialogue, no linkage, should be decided once and for all... It is good to leave a portion to objective chance, which can enrich the purpose and the intention. I must say that this practice was only in force to a relative extent: sheer time was lacking to explore deeply the possibilities in such a method. And then, filming is a costly discourse, very costly — above all when you are shooting on a low budget, where production stretches out over a very long period: a year and a half for shooting *Soleil O*; three and a half years for *Les Bicots-Nègres*! The average shooting time for a "normal" film takes between eight and twelve weeks... I did not have the choice: it was doing it like that, or doing nothing.

"The Cinema of Exile" is based on an conversation with Med Hondo from 1974, revised and first published in French in: Claude Michel Cluny, *Dictionnaire des nouveaux cinémas arabes*, Paris: Éditions Sindbad (La bibliothèque arabe), 1978, pp. 375-383, translated into English by John D. H. Downing and republished in his anthology *Film & Politics in the Third World*, New York: Autonomedia, 1987, pp. 69-76. Reprint with friendly permission from the author.





Exhibition

Med Hondo's short film *Mes voisins* (My Neighbours, 1971) is the starting point for a multi-faceted exhibition with moving pictures and sound productions from Theo Eshetu, Sebastian Bodirsky and Guy Woueté.

In strikingly contrasting forms and approaches, these artists question perspectives of self-determined media representation of the African continent and the African diaspora; they examine the impact and physicality of images, the history, and cultural codes attached to them.

Mes voisins is a miniature of Med Hondo's cinematic vision. Med Hondo interviews his migrant neighbours in Paris, migrants who live in hostels under catastrophic conditions and work in factories during the French post-war boom. He allows them share their view of the situation, to which he adds an edge by abruptly inserting drawings and political satire. Med Hondo speaks out from beyond the frame; we listen and see with him what he had witnessed more than forty years ago, forcing us to ask ourselves how we will now deal with these radical images. Med Hondo, his imagery, and the cast of his films, all insist upon a cinema that is aware of its reality-creating possibilities, and moreover that reflects about its working methods and power structures.

Every single one of Med Hondo's films specifically frames the question, what does cinema mean from an African perspective. In "What is Cinema for Us?" published in *Framework* in 1979, Med Hondo reworks this incisive question, which reverberates in the exhibition's video installations. Addressing structures and practices in which representations, cultural codes, art, history, and culture can be produced and questioned, the installations pick up on the reflective nature of cinema, rendering it inventive in a space outside cinema logic, thus interpreting affinities and frictions between languages, sound and image, between film and art.

Exhibition

20.08.2017–10.09.2017

Archives kabinett

20.08.2017–10.09.2017

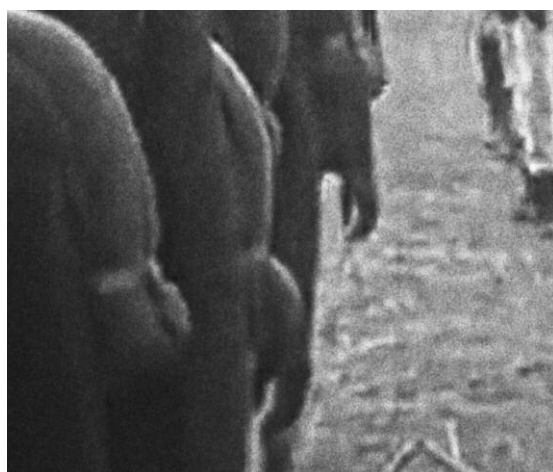
Theo Eshetu

SAVVY Contemporary

26.08.2017–3.9.2017

Guy Woueté,

Sebastian Bodirsky



Theo Eshetu Double Feature Picture Show

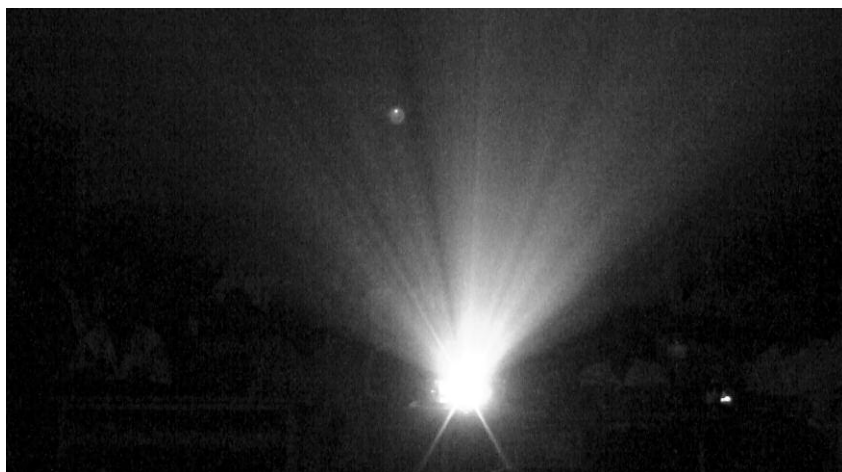
One of the overriding themes in Theo Eshetu's œuvre is how diverse cultural affinities intricately interlink into a multiple and heterogeneous whole. In terms of form and content, Theo Eshetu explores the space between formatted identities and certainties in ever-new variants and focal points, while at the same time calling to mind denied experiences and attachments. The image of the African continent and its representability, one linked with Theo Eshetu's own self-image, is a recurring motif.

Med Hondo has persistently denounced African cinema's lack of independence, calling for an own African cinema as well as an autonomous discourse on it. In Theo Eshetu's video installation *Double Feature Picture Show*—the upshot of his interaction with Med Hondo's work—moving images from diverse sources and angles converge so as to render the exhibition space an uncovered cinematic arrangement. Replicating cinema, Theo Eshetu creates a constellation of mutually facing and observing monitors.

A short film loop is screened on six identical monitors that have gone out of sync. Opposite, a monitor in the centre of the room shows children watching the film. On another monitor in an isolated and elevated third position, a spectator can be seen in the darkness of a movie theatre, scrutinising the arrangement from the last row. The people viewing the installation, in turn, inevitably create a fourth moment within the monitors' mute constellation.

In 2010 Theo Eshetu was invited by Bozar, Brussels' Centre for Fine Arts, to participate as an artist in the exhibition project *Visionary Africa* in Ouagadougou, home of the FESPACO film festival. *Double Feature Picture Show* elaborates on and deepens his approach to African cinema and the African audience and relates it to the understanding of working as a video artist and filmmaker. The work establishes a self-reflective meta-level that takes into consideration the yearning associated with cinema.

Theo Eshetu (b. in 1958 and currently residing in Berlin) is a visual artist. In addition to examining the function of societal conceptions, his widely acclaimed video works routinely explore the meaning of imagery. They reveal symbols and signs in their interplay with the perception of the complexity of cultural identities. In his œuvre, which has been constantly evolving for more than three decades, Theo Eshetu has developed a distinctive rhythmically edited visual vocabulary. Using contrasting media and genres, his work encompasses everything from experimental film to large format video installations and live performances. Imbued with a dreamlike quality, his videos interweave gesture, fragmented actions, and mirroring and multiplying images into kaleidoscopic patterns.



Exhibition
20.8.2017–10.9.2017
Archive Kabinett
Müllerstraße 133, 13349 Berlin
www.archivekabinett.org
Opening 20.8.2017, 7 pm
Opening hours:
Tuesday to Saturday, 2.30–7 pm

Double Feature Picture Show (2017) ©
Theo Eshetu. 8-channel video-installation.

Guy Woueté Présent

In his work, Guy Woueté seeks to confront emotional and ethical conflicts that are difficult to describe. Is it possible to look at pain? What if sentiments cannot be understood? What does it mean if they are disambiguated prematurely or if a response comes too late? Pain, empathy, rage, and despair obscure a number of far more ambiguous states of mind and their causes, which are also anchored in us socially and as experience. Woueté calls upon viewers to pursue the feelings and perceptions in their immense spectrum and imponderable codifications and to make them accessible.

Woueté presents three interrelated installations. In the video installation *Menu* (2008) he contrasts shoes with bare feet and broken glass; protection with vulnerability; perseverance with moving forward and walking in place. The notorious Timberland Boots give the setting a pop-hip-hop-neo-colonial-globalist air. The broken glass, according to Woueté, is “the ideological, actually destructive foundation of our time” (“le socle idéologique quasi destructeur des temps que nous vivons”).

Abîme (ne me quitte pas)—a farewell letter to his beloved—forms the transition to the third work. In *(Re)traite; African something ...* Woueté refers to the last letter that Patrice Lumumba wrote to his wife Pauline, only weeks before he was murdered on 17 January 1961. The text is an intimate letter and at the same time the last known utterance of the first Prime Minister of Congo. Woueté stages the letter performatively (26 Aug.) and makes the performance accessible as a video installation.

Guy Woueté (b. 1980) lives and works in Antwerp and Douala. His artistic work, which has been shown internationally, is a mixture of painting, sculpture, photography and video installation. Woueté sees art as a means of expressing social criticism. Many of his works revolve around everyday life in migration, questioning borders and the act of border demarcation. In response to the major ship disaster in Lampedusa in 2013, he undertook a foot march in memory of the more than 300 unnamed victims who lost their lives attempting to cross this border.

Exhibition
26.08.2017–3.09.2017
SAVVY Contemporary
Entrance Gerichtstraße 35,
13347 Berlin
www.savvy-contemporary.com
Opening 26.08.2017, 2 pm
Openings hours
27.08, 29.08–3.09, 2–7 pm



Menu (2008) © Guy Woueté.
3-channel video-installation.

Sebastian Bodirsky

wer spricht

Sebastian Bodirsky, who has collaborated on the post-production of numerous artistic video works and often contributed to films made by others, is specifically working in the installation developed for—*Cours, cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi*—*Run, comrade, run, the old world is behind you*—*The Cinema of Med Hondo* with Med Hondo's work in film synchronisation.

Throughout his career Med Hondo has not only been active as a stage and film director, but also a theatre and film actor. Moreover, he has specialised in lip dubbing. His distinctive voice can be heard in the French version of more than 250 American films, including for the roles played by Eddy Murphy, Morgan Freeman, Danny Glover, Laurence Fishburne, Yaphet Kotto, Richard Prior, and not forgetting the donkey in the computer-animated fantasy film *Shrek*.

The work *wer spricht* (who is speaking) approaches the cinematic treatment of speech, voices, and the embodiments they convey of written gaps, and unpredictable transpositions with the objective and an attitude that corresponds to Med Hondo's sense of urgency: What kind of setting is created through the voice's transmission? As spectators, what is our role here? The fulcrum of Sebastian Bodirsky's work is a cinema that aspires to create a space for impassioned encounters, and no mere apparatus that speaks for someone or something. Med Hondo criticised the French term of *doublage*, because lip-dubbings is by no means a matter of doubling, but rather involves exercising a profession, which consists in being an actor, having an incisive text, and complementing a character with the voice. *Faire les choses sérieusement et ne jamais se prendre au sérieux*—*wer spricht* (who is speaking) touches with the required seriousness and yet playfully the subcutaneous utterances of diverse national cinematic realities and their discriminatory effects.

Sebastian Bodirsky (b. 1981) lives in Berlin. He studied experimental design at Berlin's Universität der Künste and currently works as a video editor in the documentary and artistic field as well as a facilitator in various activist contexts. In 2012, together with Madeleine Bernstorff and in collaboration with Brigitta Kuster, he organised the film series René Vautier—*Militant Cinema, Internationalism, Anti-Colonial Struggles*. In 2017, he was involved in the production of 23 spots in support of the Tribunal NSU Komplex auflösen. (Tribunal Unraveling the NSU-Complex.)

His mama named him Clay, I'm gonna call him Clay. – That's right. – I say Clay. – Get outta here...

nnte ihn Clay, also nenne ich ihn auch Clay. – Das ist richtig. – Ich sage auch Clay. – Ach, dann tu's doch.

Sa maman l'appelait Clay, je l'appelle Clay aussi. – C'est Clay. – Moi, je dis Clay. – Vous êtes racistes.

The project has been organised in collaboration with Archive Kabinet (Berlin) & Editions Jimsaan (Dakar), Cinéma-thèque algérienne (Algiers), Encounters Documentary Festival (Cape Town & Johannesburg), Institut Français / Cinéma-thèque Afrique (Paris), Khasma (Les Lilas), OTHNI – Laboratoire de Théâtre de Yaoundé (Yaoundé), SAVVY Contemporary (Berlin), Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (Berlin).

Workshop**01–03.09.2017****What is Cinema for Us?**

In his essay “What is Cinema for Us?” (1979 / 1986; trans. Greg Kahn) Med Hondo raises the question as to a cinema that does not dominate the screens around the world to systematically exclude African and Arab perspectives of experience, history and culture—as European-American cinema does. In “The Cinema of Exile” (1987), he was one of the first to write about the consequences of this separation and the role that cinema assumes as an opportunity to express the experiences of exile.

What does “African cinema” mean as a (geo-)political, aesthetic and economic mark in the context of Med Hondo’s works? What does “African cinema” mean today? As Med Hondo would ask, what gaps and friction become visible from the perspective of an absent cinema? What strategies do filmmakers, archivists, cinema curators, critics and film scholars develop in view of these questions? The workshop is intended to bring together experts on Med Hondo’s cinematic landscapes and their impact on the present. In addition, it aims to serve as a space for reflection and exchanging ideas, in which observations and perspectives are brought into proximity with one another.

With Martin Ambarra, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Madeleine Bernstorff, Sebastian Bodirsky, Darryl Els, Ute Fendler, June Givanni, Astrid Kusser Ferreira, Olivier Marbœuf, Viktoria Metschl, Shaheen Merali, Pascale Obolo, Akin Omotoso, Cara Snyman, Abdoulaye Sounaye and Ibrahima Wane.

Public Sessions

1.09	5–9.30 pm	silent green Kulturquartier
2.09	3–6 pm	silent green Kulturquartier
3.09	3–6 pm	Archive Kabinett

Free admission

Les saignantes (2005)
© Jean-Pierre Bekolo

silent green Kulturquartier
Plantagenstraße 31,
13347 Berlin
www.silent-green.net

Archive Kabinett
Müllerstraße 133 (HH),
13349 Berlin
www.archivekabinett.org

—Cours, cours, camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi—Run, comrade, run, the old world is behind you—The Cinema of Med Hondo has been funded by the TURN fund of the German Federal Cultural Foundation and has been supported by the Goethe Institut Kamerun and the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (Berlin).

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Brigitta Kuster

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Marie-Hélène Gutberlet,
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Translations:
John Barrett
Allison Brown
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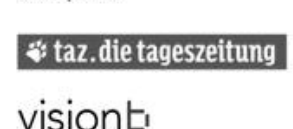
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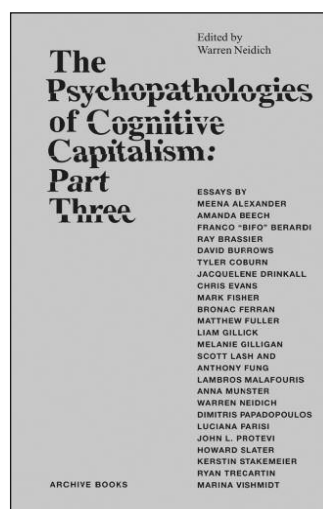


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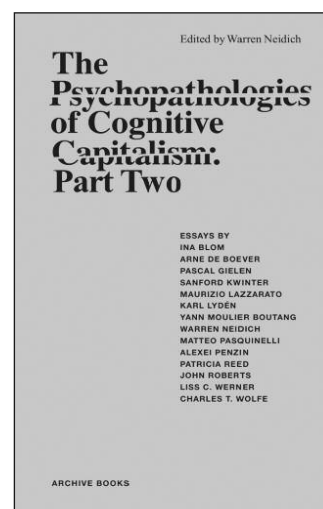
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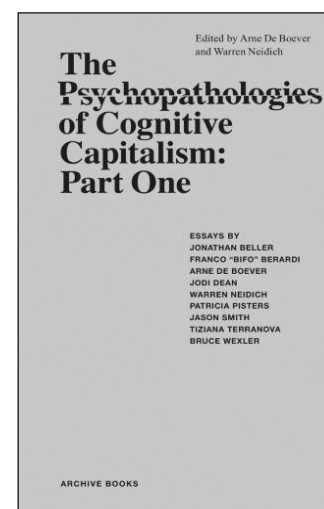
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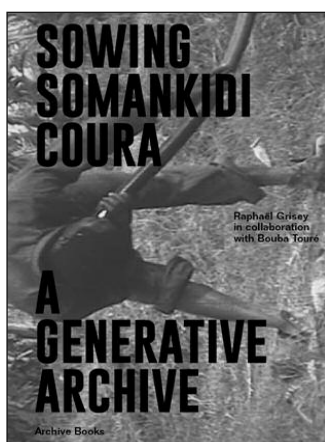
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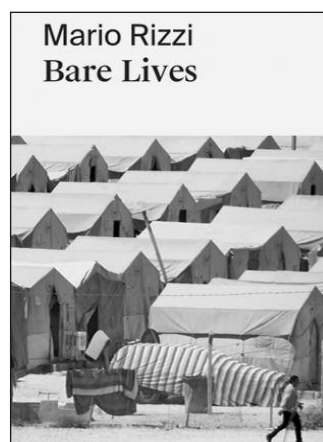
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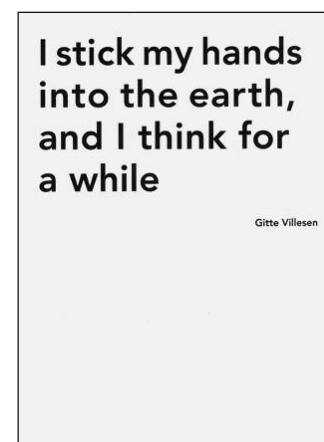
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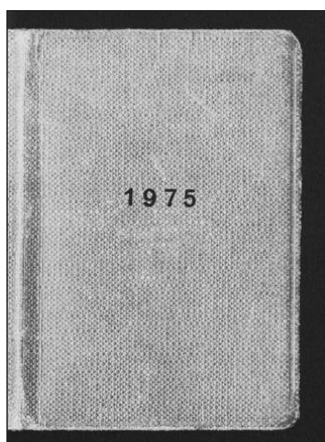
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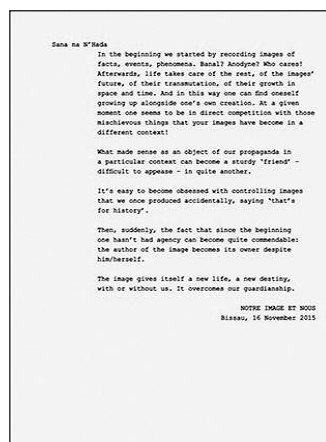
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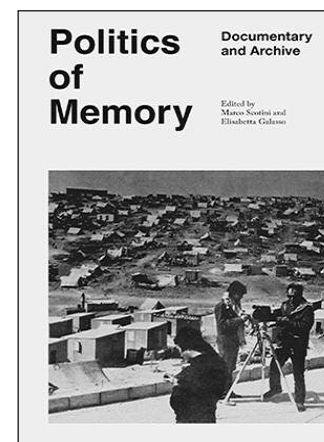
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