The Philatelic Imagination of Pan-African Independence under Platform Capitalism

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Abstract

Three main artworks - *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, 2013, *Statecraft*, 2014 and *WORLD 3, 2014* - and one adjacent artwork - *Sovereign Sisters*, 2014 - submitted for the degree of PhD by Public Works are analysed in the Context Statement in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD by Public Works. The works are linked by the argument that Ghana's army coup of 1966 can be understood as an attempt to limit the prospective ambition of the mid-century African political imaginary by delegitimising Kwame Nkrumah's project of Pan-African nationalism for future generations. Using the media of digital video, installation, bookwork and digital animation, the four works adopt the artistic methodology of visual study as defined by Nicole Brenez in order to question the Cold War-era consensus that continues to contain the contemporary imagination of the African political imaginary. By renarrating the theory and practice of Pan-African nationalism from the post-nationalist perspective of Afro-pessimism as defined by Kobena Mercer, the artworks situate their artistic reflection within an expanded lineage of Afro-pessimism redefined as the artistic critique of the limits of decolonisation understood as Okwui Enwezor's biography of Africa's modernity. The postage stamp is not treated as an image or an artefact but as an infrastructure of modernity that enacts 19th century imperialism's Pan-European desire for a universal network of communication and exemplifies the postcolonial state's desire for centralisation. Postally used stamps issued by the newly independent state of Ghana between 1957 to 1966 provide the opportunity to philatelically reimagine the 'official mind' of Ghana in the form of a historical timeline that narrates Ghana's infrastructural progress towards continental unification. The form of the timeline is adapted for the chronography of Independence of the new African states that constitute the contemporary African state system. By using stamps acquired from online auction websites to assemble the collections required for assembling these comparative chronologies, the digital platforms of the electronic market function as the technological precondition for the practice of visual study. To that extent, these works can be understood as investigations into the limitations placed upon the artistic imagination of the prospective African political imaginary by the enabling technologies of contemporary platform capitalism.

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The works submitted for the degree of PhD by Public Works and analysed for the Context Statement were conceived under the name of The Otolith Group in 2013 and 2014. The Otolith Group is the collective name for the artistic collaboration founded by myself and Anjalika Sagar in London in 2002. The practice of The Otolith Group is concerned with the formulation of speculations that draw on the histories and futures of diasporic internationalisms. Group exhibitions by The Otolith Group include Carnegie International, 57th Edition, Carnegie Museum of Art, 2018, 11th Gwangju Biennale, 2016, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2015, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2013, documenta (13), Kassel, 2012, Manifesta 8, Murcia, 2011, British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet, London, 2010 and 29th Sao Paulo Biennale, 2010. Solo exhibitions by The Otolith Group include Vanabbe Museum, Eindhoven, 2019, National

Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, 2016, Casco Art Institute, Utrecht, 2015, Serralves Museum, Porto, 2014, Bergen Kunsthall, 2013, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, 2012, and MACBA: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2011. In 2010, The Otolith Group was nominated for The Turner Prize. All works directed by The Otolith Group are publically authored under the name of The Otolith Group regardless of the specific contribution of, or by, the individual artists which varies from work to work according to concern, interest and circumstance. The role of Anjalika Sagar with regard to the works submitted for the degree of PhD by Public Works and analysed for the Context Statement was restricted to the provision of voiceover for the script of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*. Each of the works submitted for the degree of PhD by Public Works and eleborated for the Context Statement was conceptualised, researched and directed by myself with technical assistance provided for industrial digital scanning, editing and sound design from Summer 2013 to Spring 2014.

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1. Introduction: The Pan-African Political Imaginary

The new citizen must be made aware of the new socialist planning and understand his part and place in the new scheme of things. --George Padmore (Padmore,1959, p.234)

The Critical Biography of Africa's Modernity

The Context Statement provides a critical commentary on the artworks submitted for the degree of PhD by Public Works. The works are *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, digital video, sound, colour, 33 minutes, 2013, *Statecraft: A Timeline of Incomplete Independence Determined by Digital Auction*, lightboxes, laminated stamps, 55 metres, 2014 and *WORLD 3*, 180 pages, 2014. *Sovereign Sisters*, 3 minutes 43 seconds, loop, digital animation, 2014, is discussed as an adjacent work. Each work aims to provide what Enwezor calls a 'close look', or, more precisely, a 'visual study' of the ways in which 'African modernism accomplishes its modernity' (Enwezor, 2002, p.12). Visual study is defined by Nicole Brenez as:

a face to face meeting between a filmed image and a project designed to figure and observe visual representation, i.e. a study of the image using the techniques of the image itself' (Brenez, 2002, p.25).

In a subsequent essay, Brenez revised the formulation of visual study as a 'frontal encounter' that could be understood as:

a face to face encounter between an existing image and a figurative project dedicated to observing it - in other words a study of the image by means of the image itself (Brenez, 2010, p.129).

Brenez expanded the initial definition of visual study from the 'filmed image' to that of the 'existing image'. The video of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, the installation of *Statecraft* and the bookwork of *WORLD 3* adopted this reworked idea of visual study as the meeting between the 'existing image' of the commemorative postage stamp and the 'figurative project' by drawing upon the form of the timeline that was 'designed to figure and observe visual representation.' The role played by the timeline requires further elaboration. According to Rosenberg and Grafton, the historical form of the timeline emerged from the secular understanding of imperial temporality organised by Newtonian optics. The visual representation of chronology or 'chronography' was pioneered by Joseph Priestley's *A Description of a New Chart of History containing a view of the Principal Revolutions of Empire that have taken place in the world* in 1786. Priestley sought to demonstrate that:

'we have no distinct idea of length of time, til we have conceived it in the form of some sensible thing that has length, as of line…' (Rosenberg and Grafton, 2010, p.14).

By assigning one unit of time to one graphic unit, Priestley's *A Description of a New Chart of History* imposed an 'equality of time throughout the whole' of imperial history visualised according to the principle of the 'equisecular' grid. Looking back on *A Description of a New Chart of History* in 1810, writer Friedrich Strauss acknowledged that Priestley's 'assumption of abstract time' with 'the idea of a line' had succeeded in asserting an 'inseparable' linkage between 'the sensible and mental objects' that had become, fourteen years after its publication, a popular 'figurative method of speech'. In assigning an 'equal portion of paper' to 'every century from the Era of Creation', Priestley's chronography, warned Strauss, tended to 'distort in appearance' as it moved from the 'actual duration of empires' toward the 'symmetrical proportions of the present' (Rosenberg, 2007, p.101). What becomes visible in each Otolith artwork are the ways in which the timeline's principle of 'equisecularity' is subject to a distortion 'in appearance' imposed by the seriality of the 'long sets' of postally used stamps acquired from auction websites.

Each work can be understood as a visual study that uses the variable form of the timeline to draw attention towards the potentials specific to philatelic designs and the preconditions imposed by digital platforms. It is these historical potentialities and contemporary preconditions to which the works calls attention. Each work poses the 'vital question' that was formulated by Brenez; the question that 'each visual study aims to renew: What is an image capable of?' Such a question can be rephrased as follows: 'What is a philatelic image capable of?' The form of the question invites an understanding of visual study as a methodology that studies existing images, produces new images and enacts the preexisting capacities of historical images in the present.

In the Year of the Quiet Sun, *Statecraft: A Timeline of Incomplete Independence Determined by Digital Auction* and *WORLD 3* were conceived as interrelated enquiries into what Okwui Enwezor describes as the 'critical biography of Africa'. Each artwork can be understood as an engagement with what Enwezor characterises as the 'African systematization, deployment and usage of modern forms, values and structures' (Enwezor, 2001, p.10, p.12). Enwezor's formulation raises important questions. What kind of 'Africanity' is the object of the 'visual study' undertaken by these works? What kind of notion of 'modernity' is accomplished by what kind of 'modernism'? Responding to each of these questions requires an understanding of the ways in which each work complicates Enwezor's notion of 'African modernism's accomplishment of its 'modernity' (Enwezor, 2001, p.12). A substantive response entails attention to the means by which each artwork deploys theories and practices of African modernization that are elided by Enwezor's focus on 'modernism'. What characterises each artwork is the enquiry into the African imagination of modernity through the project of modernization. The notion of an 'African imagination of modernity' refers to Anderson's notion of an 'imagined political community' in order to formulate an understanding of 'Africanity' as that which:

is *imagined* because the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1983, p.11).

What each work shares is the aspiration to investigate African modernity's accomplishment of modernization through the infrastructural imagination of Independence. How is modernization understood by these projects? Modernization is defined as infrastructure's promise to deliver the future. According to M.A.K. Menon:

the official postal institution of Imperial Rome, known as 'cursus publicus' served as the model for subsequent postal services. After the fall of the Roman empire, the system spread to states in Western Europe and in the Near East. Even today, organisational and technical forms are based on cursus publicus. The very word 'post' is derived from the Latin *posita* meaning deposited. Mail was 'deposited' with relays of horses stationed at equal distances from each other (Menon, 1964, p.4).

If imperialism's infrastructure began with ancient Rome's cursus publicus, then it accelerated with imperialist capitalism's design of the metric system, the electric telegraph and the postal system during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These 'networks of universalization' deployed Enlightenment ideals of the 'internationalisation of communication' in the interests of capitalism's 'free flow' of information, goods and labour. The generational belief that 'the communication network is an eternal promise symbolizing a world that is better because it is united' (Mattelart, 2000, pp. viii-6) begins to explain 'why the provision of infrastructures is so intimately caught up with the sense of shaping modern society and realizing the future' (Larkin, 2012, p.332). Brian Larkin points to colonial cinema in Northern Nigeria in the 1950s that projected newsreels of road and bridge construction and was, in itself, infrastructure that conjoined 'scientific rationality with spectacle'. According to Larkin:

the tie between the representational logic of infrastructure and the state was not loosened with the end of colonialism but intensified, only now infrastructure came to represent the promise of independent rule rather than colonial supremacy. Government after government in sub-Saharan Africa came to Independence with the ambition of building a modern African nation (Larkin, 2008, p.8).

The funding of television stations, such as City Television Kano or the building of factories or the laying of telephone lines can be understood as examples of:

the promise a state made to its citizenry. In return for political support, the state claimed to provide citizens with the infrastructural path to the future. Modernization has too often been analysed as a political or economic doctrine, a false theory of history rather than a form of congealed desire. It is easy to point out its failures and the corruption inherent in its operation but to move too quickly is to miss out on the affectual, fantastic side of modernization. Bridges, factories and television are as much objects of fantasy and imagination as are forms of fashion, literature and film (Larkin, 2016, pp.47-8).

Each Otolith artwork demonstrates a concern with the 'affectual, fantastic side of modernization' understood as an 'object of fantasy and imagination'. Each work adopts Larkin's understanding of infrastructure as 'the promise a state made to its citizenry'. Where they diverge from Larkin is in their reconsideration of the scale of infrastructure that does not illustrate as much as it reconfigures Larkin's idea of promise. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun, Statecraft* and *WORLD 3* indicate the ways in which 'the infrastructural path to the future' that was pursued by new African states need not entail a postcolonial sublime that emulates the dimensions of Larkin's 'colonial sublime' (Larkin, 2008, p.7, pp.18- 21). Instead of the infrastructure of heavy industry, each artwork focuses on the stamp designs that circulated throughout postal networks. Rather than emphasising the monumental scale of postcolonial infrastructure, each project works with the historical artefacts of 'postally used' stamp collections.

How does a contemporary art practice work with stamp collections that were once active infrastructures but are now inactive artefacts traded on online auctions? What is the infrastructural imagination of the historical postage stamp? How does African modernity accomplish its modernization through postal infrastructures? Answering such questions requires an understanding of the postage stamp as a 'reproducible image'. Wangui Mwangi's analysis of the aesthetics of banknote design in colonial Kenya of the late 1950s provides an account of the mechanical conditions of the reproducible image

shared by stamp design and currency design. Mwangi argues that it is ‘reproduction as such’ that allows ‘images to be seen in multiple and changing places and contexts’ (Mwangi, 2002, pp.47-8). It is the technology of photogravure print that allows stamps to become public in changing contexts and available for artistic reinterpretation in multiple places. Unlike singular works of ‘art’ whose meaning derives as much from the ‘stability of their context in a museum or a gallery or a church as from their content’, postage stamps are ‘porous’ in the possibilities of indeterminate meaning and ‘mobile by virtue of reproduction’. They possess a ‘contingency of iconographic import’ and a ‘possibility of symbolic ambiguity’ that is designed to be ‘optically absorbed without necessarily being remarked upon’ (Mwangi, 2002, p.48, p.33, p.35). In travelling from fingertips to tongues to envelopes, stamps can be understood as ‘images in motion’ as opposed to ‘moving images’ (Mwangi, 2002, p.33, p.35, p.52).

As ‘publicity images’ or ‘cross-border images’, stamp designs cannot be understood as ‘art’ as such (Berger et al., 1972, pp.129-155,; Didi-Huberman, 2018, p.186). In promoting statehood, publicising nationhood and idealising sovereignty, they borrow from existing conventions to fashion iconographies of floriography and aesthetics of ornithology that forms ‘a sort of pictorial census of the state’s patrimony’ reusable by and for artistic analysis (Anderson, 2006, p.182). The use-value of this ‘pictorial census’ invites the question of the impetus at work in the turn to the philatelic. Beyond strategies of appropriation or methods of détournement, what is at stake in the turn towards these philatelic images? For an artist concerned with investigating the African systematization, deployment and usage of modern forms, values and structures, postally used stamps turn out to be eminently suitable historical material. It is as if they were expressly designed for analysing the ways in which forms are systematised, values are deployed and structures are used. Working with postage stamps suggests five methods for investigating the systematisation of forms, the deployment of values and the use of structures.

Firstly, stamp designs announce the promises made by Africa’s new states to its citizens. They are standardised state fictions that publicise the civic ideals promoted by

newly formed governments. Their moral language of sacrifice and discipline offers a powerful lens through which to study the ‘infrastructural path to the future’ promised by new ruling parties. What preoccupies me is the opportunity to scrutinise these official promises from the ‘top down’ rather than the ‘bottom up’. What appeals is the possibility that stamps offer to attend to the ‘official mind’ of the new nation-states. The ‘official mind’ can be defined more precisely as the ‘African political imaginary’. Imaginary does not refer here to the ‘fictional’ or to the ‘imagination’ or the ‘imagined’. Instead, it refers to ‘imaginary creation’ defined by Cornelius Castoriadis as ‘the positing of new forms’ that is not ‘determined’ but is ‘determining’ in the sense that it is an ‘unmotivated positing’ that ‘no causal, functional or even rational explanation can account for’ (Castoriadis 1993, p.102). The imaginary is that which exceeds determination; the postally used stamp, by contrast, is nothing but determination.

The desire to make artworks from these historical artefacts speaks, secondly, of my identification with newly independent states understood as historically inactive artefacts in themselves. This, in turn, speaks of my identification with the political imaginaries of African polities as they sought to appear, to themselves, and to other states. It hints at an unspoken desire on my part to make artworks as artificial as statehood itself. My focus on stamps issued to commemorate Independence indicates a specific fascination with the process by which the symbolic ‘birth’ of the nation is imagined (Zeruvabel, 2003, p.322). There is, thirdly, a pleasure to be gained from directing attention towards the face of stamp designs. Such surface scrutiny aims to prevent access to the everyday structures of feeling of citizens. What each work shares is the refusal to descend below the face of the stamp. There is no desire to ‘recover’ the subaltern history of Independence ‘from below’. Staying with the surface of the stamp frustrates the ethnographic or archaeological imperative that is expected of artistic practice in its engagement with historical materials from the era of decolonization. There is a desire, on my part, to confound the expectation of retrieving the ‘unheard voices’ of working women or listening to the ‘hidden speech’ of working men suppressed by an overbearing state system. Instead of attending to the voices oppressed by Africa’s state

system, my guiding principle is to stay on the surface of the stamp in order to subject its historical ideals to the contemporary inquiry of visual study.

Sustained engagement with stamps demonstrates, fourthly, that stamp designs illustrate infrastructure and are, in themselves, infrastructure. The social fact of their existence presupposes their normative operation as infrastructure. Stamps bring contemporary spectators face to face with the historical existence of the norm presupposed by infrastructure. The existing norm suggests that new African states achieved their modernity through the 'postal ontology of the state' (Bratton, 2015, p.132). What stamps presume is the 'control of the postal address code' that is 'essential to how states, real and imagined, can see and manage both territory and the territorialized' (Bratton, 2015, pp.194-5). The existence of postage stamps announces and publicises each African state's entrance into the African state system which participates, in turn, in the international state system of the post-war world order. It demonstrates the extent to which each nation-state has been recognised and accepted into the system of 'nationalist internationalism' guaranteed by Articles 2.1 and 2.4 of the United Nations Charter of 1945 and secured by the passage of General Assembly resolution 1514 titled 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' in 1960 (Wilder, 2015, p.93).

Taken together, these presuppositions suggest the historical outlines of African statehood, nationhood and sovereignty during the Global Cold War. What remains to be articulated is the contemporary motivation for working with these inactive capacities. If the artistic turn towards these historical collections defined by Baudrillard as the 'reducing' of 'time to a fixed set of terms navigable in either direction' indicates a contemporary crisis that cannot be directly confronted, what, then, is the problematic of the present that provokes a sustained engagement with these inactive images of African sovereignty (Baudrillard,1996, p. 95)? What compels artistic practice towards these material documents? What specific methods does art adopt for working with stamp designs? And what objects can it invent from these philatelic images?

I see before my mind's eye a great monolithic party growing up out of this process, united and strong, spreading its protective wings over the whole of Africa - from Algiers in the north to Cape Town in the south; from Cape Guardafui in the east to in the west. -
-Kwame Nkrumah (Nkrumah, 1973, p.169)

A Pilot Project for the New Africa

A substantial response to these questions requires refocusing the analytic frame of postal politics from the consideration of African modernization's infrastructural path towards the aims of self-government practised by the independent nation-state of Ghana from 1957 to 1966. More precisely, the ideals of self-rule advanced by Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana during these years provides the vehicle for the investigation of Africa's modernity. Focusing upon the stamps issued by the Nkrumaist state of Ghana offers an entry into the critical biography of the African continent as it was written during these years. What is important for the conceptualisation of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* is not the exceptionalist claim of Ghana's position as the first so-called 'sub-Saharan colony' to win its freedom from British imperialism in 1957. What is more critical is taking account of Richard Wright's assertion that the 'new progressive State of Ghana' led by Kwame Nkrumah's Convention Peoples Party understood itself, and was interpreted by allies and critics alike, as 'a kind of pilot project of the new Africa' (Nkrumah, 1973, p.132,; Ahlman, 2017, p.213). What rendered Ghana a 'pilot project' was Nkrumah's insistence that 'its independence will be incomplete, however, unless it is linked up with the liberation of other territories in Africa' (Nkrumah, 1959, p.viii). What made Ghana a 'guide territory', to use Fanon's term, from 1957 to 1966, was its emphasis upon the continental implications of independence (Fanon, 1967, p.145). To achieve 'full nationhood' meant exceeding the territorial limits of the nation. Working for an 'Emergent African Nationalism' meant 'pulling together' to achieve the total liberation of the continent in order to come together for the 'greater good' of the United States of Africa (Nkrumah, 1973, p.132). As Nkrumah declared at the conclusion of his welcoming Speech to the delegates assembled for the Opening Session of the All-African Peoples Conference in Accra on 8 December 1958:

Fellow African Freedom Fighters still carrying the burden of Imperialism, pull together. We who have won our freedom stand uncompromisingly behind you in your struggle. Take heart. Unite your forces. Organisation and discipline shall command your victory. All Africa shall be free in this, our lifetime. For this mid-twentieth century is Africa's. This

decade is the decade of African independence. Forward then to independence. To independence now. Tomorrow, the United States of Africa (Grant, 1973, pp.283-4).

Nkrumah situated independence within the expanded of a ‘general historical world pattern’. African Revolution that scaled from the achievement of Independence towards the total liberation of the continent towards the unification of ‘the Africa that must be’. Nkrumah asserted that:

I have never regarded the struggle for the Independence of sovereignty of the Gold Coast as an isolated objective but always as part of a general historical world pattern. The African in every territory of this vast continent has been awakened and the struggle for freedom will go on. It is our duty as the vanguard force to offer what assistance we can to those now engaged in the battles that we ourselves have fought and won (Nkrumah 1959, p.240).

The bitter political struggle for power against elites in the Gold Coast and against the British were to be understood in the shifting context of the ‘general historical world pattern’. Nkrumah understood Ghana’s role as the ‘vanguard force’ within the ongoing African revolution in a parallel with that of the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Ghana’s Independence enabled it to provide a national base from which to support revolutionary movements in their struggles for the liberation of the continent. This, in turn, provided the preconditions required for the unification of the continent that was Pan-Africanism’s ultimate goal. In *Pan-Africanism or Communism: The Coming Struggle for Africa*, George Padmore theorised the past, present and future for Pan-Africanism. Padmore concluded his history with the prospect of a future African Union whose:

vision stretches beyond the limited frontiers of the nation-state. Its perspective embraces the federation of regional self-governing countries and their ultimate amalgamation into a United States of Africa. In such a commonwealth, all men, regardless of tribe, race, colour or creed, shall be free and equal and all the national

units comprising the regional federations shall be autonomous in all matters regional, yet united in all matters of common interest to the African Union. This is our vision of the Africa of Tomorrow - the goal of Pan Africanism (Padmore, 1956, p.379).

Padmore envisaged ‘regional federations’ composed from ‘national units’ whose ‘common interests’ brought them together under the terms of a new ‘African Union’. Padmore’s formulation was developed by Nkrumah into the proposal for Union Government in *Africa Must Unite*:

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 (Nkrumah, 1963, p.221).

The prospect of a ‘United Africa’ determined the debates and the disputes over the direction of Pan-Africanism throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the borderless future envisioned by Padmore and Nkrumah, national boundaries would ‘become obsolete and superfluous’, replaced by the United Africa that deterritorialized territorial unity and supplanted national sovereignty for the greater goal of continental jurisdiction. What was at stake in ‘the Ghana Revolution’, according to C.L.R. James, was a revolution intended ‘to initiate a new Africa’ (James, 1992, p.9). From their position within the Ghana Revolution, Padmore and Nkrumah sought to develop an interscalar theory of what Fanon called the ‘African Revolution’ in which independence was an initial phase in the eventual realisation of an All-African Common Market within an All-African Union.

There is no escaping Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana today. Ghanaian stamps bear his portrait. At night his name flickers in neon lights over Kwame Nkrumah Circle.
--(The New York Times, May 3, 1964)

Legitimation Crises of the African State System

What C.L.R. James analysed was the extent to which the global implications of Nkrumah's 'conception' of 'the Ghana Revolution' were blocked by the reportage produced by the American and British dominated media that sought to interpret the time of decolonisation (James, 1992, p.8). From the formation of the Convention Peoples Party in 1949, what was evident to James was that 'the thousands of reports, articles, speeches, that I have read about events in Ghana' refused to think through the reflexive ramifications of the Ghana Revolution. The effort undertaken to separate the analysis of 'anything which took place there' in Ghana from what 'could instruct or inspire the peoples of the advanced countries in their own management of their own affairs' amounted to the political containment of the epistemological implications of Ghana's Revolution. Such strategies amounted to the defensive refusal to decolonise socialism that was observable, as James noted acerbically, that was 'as true of friends of Ghana as of its enemies' (James, 1992, p.38). The tendency to subordinate Ghana's Revolution to preexisting European norms was exemplified by David Apter's *The Gold Coast in Transition*. According to James, Apter's meticulous analysis of 'political institutional transfer' signally failed to demonstrate how Ghana's Revolution 'matters to him personally' or to elucidate the ways in which:

'it imposes upon him a revaluation and reorganisation of his own political ideas and perspectives, as every great political experience must do' (James,1992, p.60, p.61).

Apter's refusal to allow his study of Ghana's Revolution to revolutionise 'his own political ideas and perspectives' exemplified the ways in which area studies and modernization theories sought to circumscribe the ramifications of decolonisation. According to James:

I doubt if, with the single exception of the Hungarian revolution, any event since the end of the second world war has been so charged with symbolic significance for the future of Europe and America as what took place in the Gold Coast between November 1947 and February 1951 (James, 1992, p. 38).

Thinking through the implications of the Ghana Revolution within the wider context of world revolution required a critical attention to the theoretical vocabulary employed by post-war political science. *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* examined the ways in which Ghana's revolution transformed existing understandings of leadership, peoples and revolution. As Mathieu Renault writes, James' writing redrew 'the geography of struggles for emancipation' in order to decolonize 'revolution as a concept and an object of historical enquiry' (Renault, 2016, p.35). The artistic implications of redrawing the 'geography of struggles for emancipation' guided the thinking that informed the three artworks developed in 2013 and 2014. Thinking through the geographies of struggle of the Ghana Revolution implied changing the scales of enquiry within and between each work. Each work required a shift in scale from the level of national independence to the terrain of international liberation to the conjuncture of continental unification. Each work entailed the construction of a vocabulary volatile enough to account for the assassinations and army coups that interrupted the movement from independence to emancipation to unification.

What is critical for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* is the way in which James conceptualised the Ghana Revolution at the point of its destruction. Two undated and unlocated scenes from the historical moment of counterrevolution were critical for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*.

The first occurs at 27: 06. Ghana Television's film cameras tilt towards the ground on which is heaped piles of *World Marxist Review*, *Marxism Today*, *Introduction to Marxism*, *V. I. Lenin* and *Karl Marx*'s *Capital*.

Figure 1. The Otolith Group, *In the Year of the Quiet Sun,* 2013. [High Definition Digital File].

The second is at 27:12. Young men, perhaps students, many wearing white headbands, dressed in white shirts and black shorts can be seen, standing on a sliding heap of white papers outside a white building whose slim tilted roof resembles the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute at Winneba. The date must be February or March 1966.

Figure 2. The Otolith Group, *In the Year of the Quiet Sun,* 2013. [High Definition Digital File].

These scenes are extracted from a sustained sequence of pyropolitical purgation that appears in Black Audio Film Collective's *Testament* directed by John Akomfrah in 1988 (Marder, 2015, pp. 41-64). It is necessary to turn towards the archival sequence as it appears in *Testament* in order to understand what happens after the scenes depicted in *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*.

The camera picks out one young man in a white shirt with rolled sleeves with what seems to be a white scarf wrapped around his neck. The man takes a match and lights the end of a dark wooden stick held in his right hand. Around him can be seen a crowd of thirteen or more men, all dressed in white shirts, several of whom are wearing white headbands. The young man steps forward. He lifts the stick**.**

Figure 3. John Akomfrah, *Testament,* 1988 [MP4]

The man pauses, speaks muted words with the formality of a rehearsed speech and carefully lowers the makeshift torch to the stack of Marxist papers, journals and books.

Figure 4. John Akomfrah, *Testament,* 1988 [MP4]

Fire leaps into the sky. The crowd backs off. The cameraman moves back to catch the ferocity of the purge.

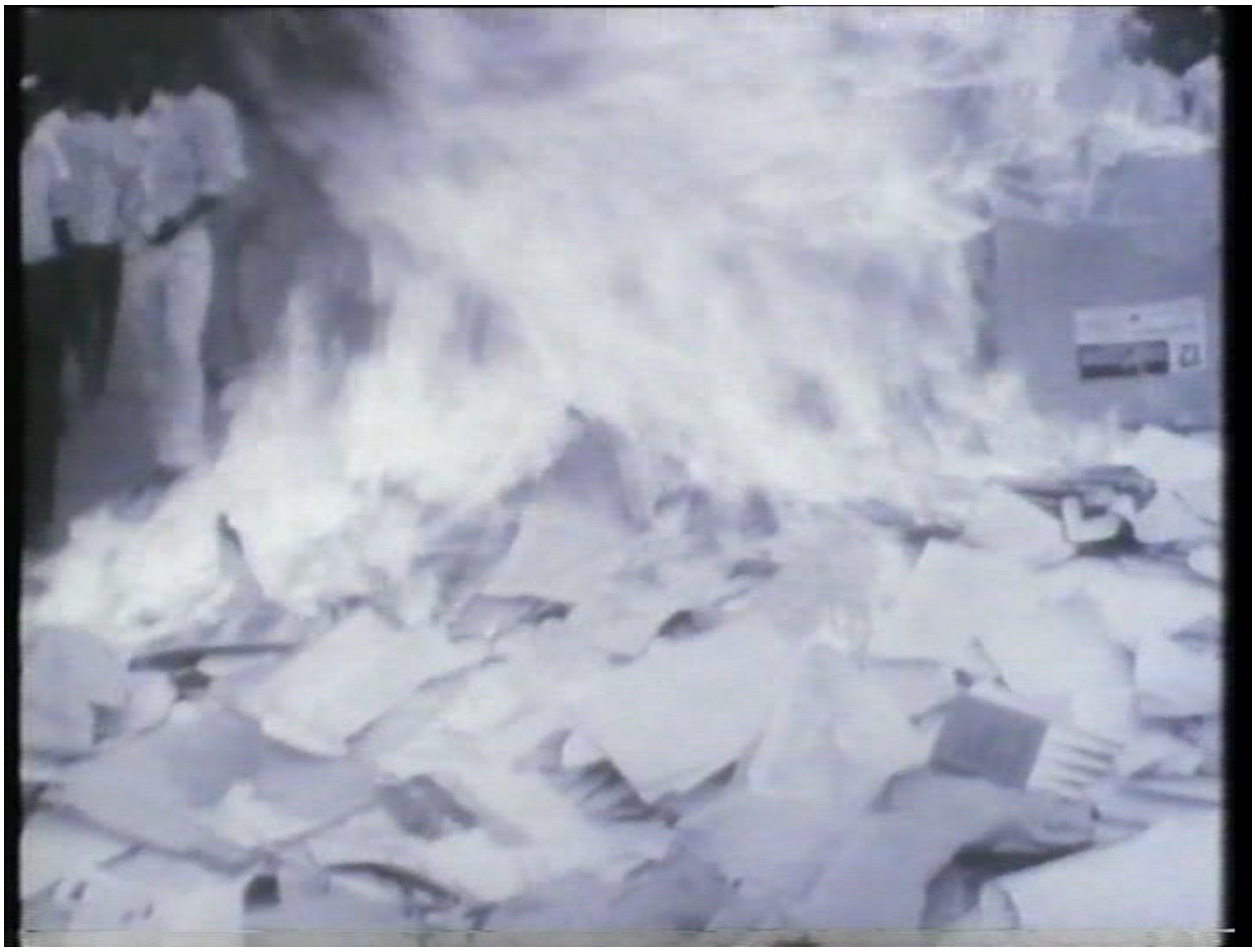

Figure 5 John Akomfrah, *Testament,* 1988 [MP4]

What this archive demonstrates is the theatre of the military coup of 24 February 1966 performed in a ceremonial ritual of purification by immolation. The coup launched against Nkrumah's administration by the new military regime that named itself the National Liberation Council or NLC announced the end of Ghana's first Republic. It proscribed the Convention Peoples Party, imprisoned its activists, deported its revolutionaries, imposed a curfew and declared a national state of emergency. The NLC dedicated themselves to destroying the visual culture of the Nkrumaist state by discrediting its ideals and delegitimising its existence. The coup's leaders appealed to

the youth of Ghana to step forward and join the anti-Communist crusade. In doing so, they aimed to dictate the terms under which prospective generations would imagine and interpret the life and death of Ghana's First Republic. As James wrote in 1966:

the fall of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is one of the greatest catastrophes that has befallen the minds of Africans in Africa, of people of African descent, and all who are interested in the development and progress of independent Africa (James, 1992, p.355).

For those born after the coup of 24 February 1966, the event constitutes a rupture whose impact persists into the present. Reverberations of a catastrophe not experienced directly, but nonetheless transmitted. Those born after February 1966, such as myself, are separated by the rupture that differentiates us from those born before the coup. Those born after the coup are its children. We carry its rupture with us into the present even as each subsequent generation becomes ever more chronologically distanced from the events of 1966. We are confronted with the necessity to work through its meanings in order to come to terms with its implications. The coup marked the limits of the Ghana Revolution. It interrupted the progressive belief in independence as a phase in the movement towards a United Africa. It evoked the yearning for a pre-Independence restoration in the form of post-nationalist order. The latter part of such yearning was theorised by Kobena Mercer in 1995 as the condition and the aesthetic of 'Afro-pessimism' that evoked the aftermath of African self-determination (Mercer, 2000, p.147).

The object of symbolism is the enhancement of the importance of what is symbolized.---

Alfred North Whitehead. (Whitehead, 1958, pp. 62-63)

The Political Calendar of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*

Chapter 2 focuses upon *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* which aims to think with and through the implications of Mercer's Afro-pessimist condition. The rationale for working with postage stamps can be situated in those scenes of conflagration. The NLC's mission to incinerate the material culture of the Nkrumaist state converted all existing Independence stamps into survivable images. It rendered them fugitive. Their value does not come from their rarity but, on the contrary, from their imperilled normality. What is needed is an artistic strategy that renders this endangered norm comprehensible. If the social fact of the postage stamp presupposes the functional norm of infrastructure then existing infrastructure in turn indicates the accomplishment of modernization as a norm. Working with Independence-era stamps suggests a way to reconstitute this jeopardised norm. Stamps offer the possibility of reimagining the ideals of the Nkrumaist state in their destroyed state. Stamps cannot repair the damage incurred by the military's coup. Instead they can act as material for reimagining the 'official mind' of the People's Democracy of Ghana's First Republic. This does not entail a speculation on the structures of feeling of citizens addressed by the state. It entails directing attention at the vignettes of stamp design so as to subject the historical ideals of Independence to the contemporary scrutiny of visual study.

The values of the Nkrumaist state appear in the designs of the stamps issued for national holidays. From these philatelic designs can be discerned the institutionalised outline of the nation's 'annual cycle of remembrance.' A 'calendro-commemorative' cycle that begins on the 'Anniversary of Independence' on 6th March that commemorates 'the nation's symbolic birth as sovereign polity' (Zerubavel, 2003, p.317, p.322, p.326). *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* embeds the Nkrumaist state's 'cycle of remembrance' in the fictional timeline that begins at the Ambassador Hotel, Accra, on 6 March 1957 and concludes with the inauguration of the Volta River Project on 21 January 1966. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* describes its timeline as a 'political calendar' that provides a 'plot structure' for watching 'existing images' that become

‘comprehensible’ as a ‘story of a particular kind’ (White, 1986, p.58). It emplots stamps as events in a narrative of political movement towards the formation of the United States of Africa. ‘In this period’, as Robert J. C. Young stated:

Pan-Africanism was effectively being put into practice in the extraordinary series of international African conferences of which Fanon himself attended at least five in 1960 alone (in less than eight years, between December 1957 and October 1965, there were over fifty) (Young, 2005, pp.37- 38).

From the postage stamps issued by Ghana between 1957 and 1966 emerges the structure of the timeline that emplots the debates and the disputes over the direction of the Pan-African future.

What is shown by the flames, stars, crescent moons, knives, lions, birds, and flowers that can be found on the flags of certain African states?
--Jean-Godefroy Bidima (Bidima, 2014, pp.72-73)

Statecraft or the Reconstruction of the African State System in the Technological Age

Chapter 3 focuses on *Statecraft: A Timeline of Independence Determined by Digital Auction*. Conceiving and producing *Statecraft* offers the opportunity to test Aby Warburg's hypothesis on philatelic reconstruction. According to a report in the Hamburger Nachrichten on Warburg's evening lecture on *The Stamp as Document* in August 15 1927, Warburg defined postage stamps as 'the pictorial language of global communication thereby indicating the great significance that attaches to them' (Esposito, 2015, p. 69). In his subsequent lecture *The Function of the Stamp Image in Intellectual Discourse*, Warburg argued that:

If all documents were to be lost, a complete stamp collection would suffice for the total reconstruction of world culture in the technological age (Edelman 2015 pp.68-70).

In making *Statecraft: A Timeline of Independence Determined by Digital Auction*, what becomes clear is the extent to which Warburg's hypothesis could only be tested under conditions of platform capitalism. Chapter 3 studies the methods employed by *Statecraft* for assessing Warburg's hypothesis through its use of stamps to reconstruct the formation of the African state system in the twentieth century. By assembling the Independence stamps issued by each new African nation state, *Statecraft* extends the form of the timeline developed by *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* beyond Ghana's Pan-Africanist public sphere to include the stamp designs issued by Africa's new states as they join the international state system. This state system is arranged in a fifty-five metre timeline that opens with stamps issued by the Republic of Liberia to commemorate its Centenary in 1947 and concludes with stamps issued by the Republic of South Sudan to mark its first anniversary in 2012. *Statecraft* models an incomplete chronography of independence that can be understood as a chromatic skyline inspired by Benjamin's 'colour sequences of the long sets' that 'perhaps refract the light of a strange sun' or as an 'ideological planetarium' that confronts spectators with the African state system illuminated by the quiet sun of neon tube lights (Benjamin, 2016,

p. 81,; Staal, 2018-19).

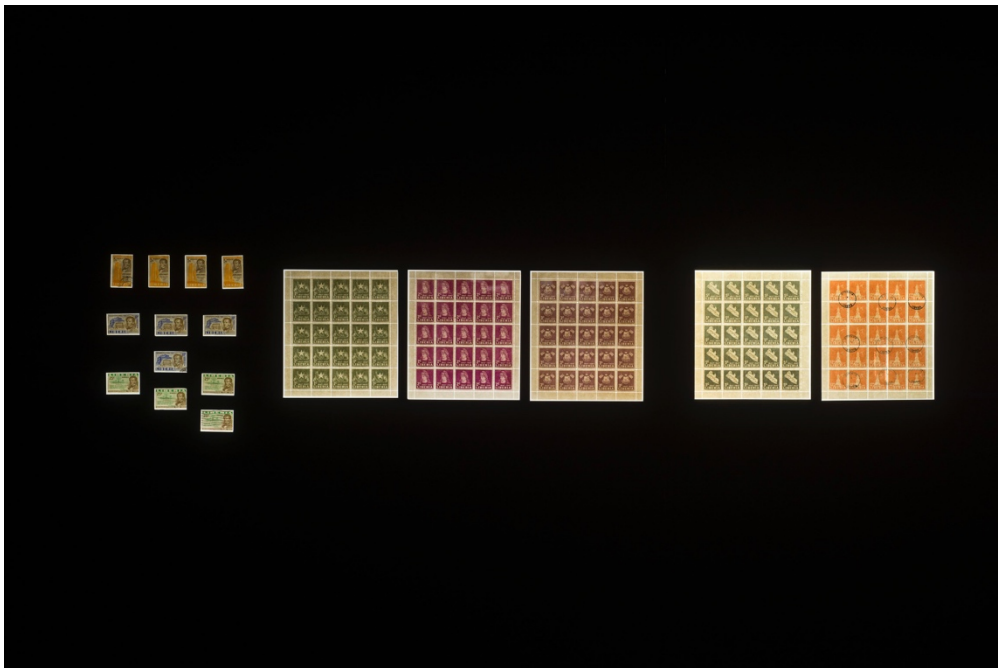

Figure 6. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft*, 2014. [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Liberia Centenary of Independence December 22 1947.

Figure 7. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft*, 2014. [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen.

Republic of South Sudan First Anniversary of Independence, 9th July 2012.

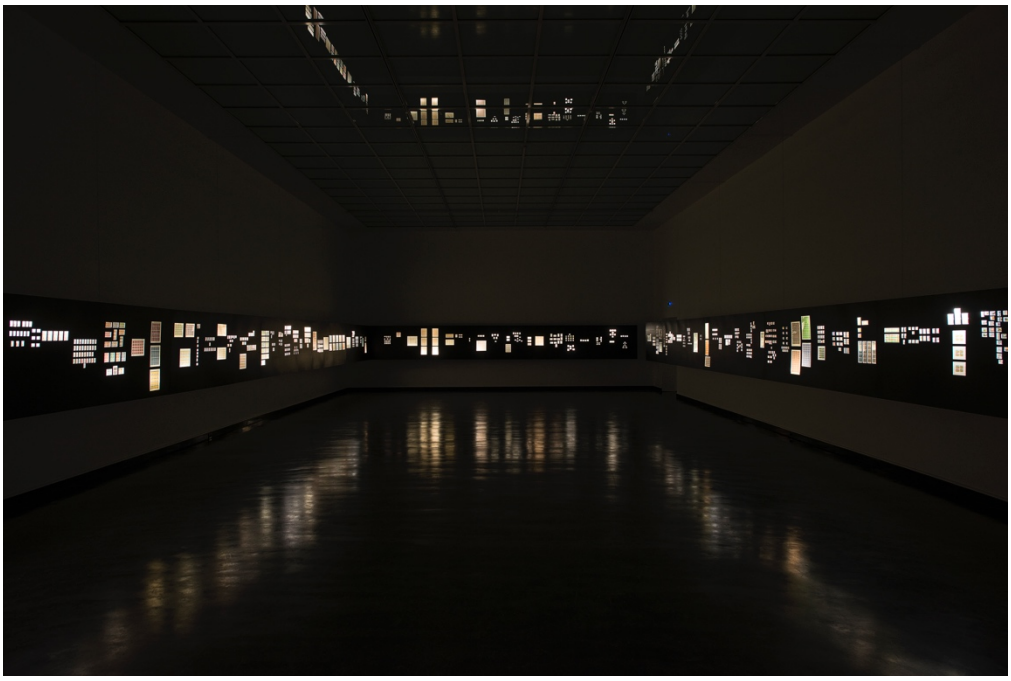

Figure 8. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft*, 2014. [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen.

What or who is the monster I am talking about? Do I mean the Post Master? Post Office clerks? Do I mean the Minister of Communications? Or do I mean the technology they use and control? Do I mean those little, colourful pieces of glued paper that we must buy every time we post something? --Ulises Carrion (Carrion, 1980, p.44)

The Disenchantment of *WORLD 3*

Chapter 4 focuses on *WORLD 3*'s reconfiguration of the form of the timeline according to the logic of the printed page. Each page can be read as a succession of postally used philatelic envelopes or 'First day covers' issued on the first day of Independence. Each page contrasts the historical artefact of the First day cover with the contemporary envelope used for its delivery. Both of these are juxtaposed in turn with a quotation that provides commentary or critique. *WORLD 3*'s timeline begins with a First day cover stamped MONROVIA, LIBERIA JULY 29 1940 illustrated by a so-called 'cachet' of

Liberia that draws attention to its exceptional status as a settler colony through its design. Inside the cachet is printed FIRST DAY OF ISSUE July 29th1940 100th ANNIVERSARY FOUNDING OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF LIBERIA. Above the envelope addressed to Emil Brocker 12505 E. Nine Mile Road Route No 1. Van Dyke, Michigan, U. S. A. is a contemporary envelope unmarked except for its address, its postmark and the single stamp of the Queen's profile from the so-called 'Machin series'. Below is the quotation selected from Saidiya V. Hartman that reads:

However, suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one's suffering but rather of intensifying it? (Hartman, 1997, p.5)

Figure 9. The Otolith Group, *WORLD 3* [Bookwork], 2014. 100th Anniversary Founding of the Commonwealth of Liberia.

WORLD 3's timeline concludes with a First day cover that declares "24 MAY" 10th ANNIVERSARY OF ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE 23 May 2001. It features an illustration of the national flag of Eritrea at midnight from which bursts forth fireworks. At the envelope's base can be read *Issued by ERITREAN POSTAL SERVICE*. To its right are four commemorative stamps. Below the cover is the contemporary envelope filled with six stamps issued by Egypt Post, three of which feature the deposed President Hosni Mubarak. Between is the quotation extracted from Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines: Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship: Truth versus Untruth* that reads:

The mosaic: the collage, the parts from which a hero or heroine can be assembled like a machine have been imported from a foreign country that specializes in consignment orders of the required product after painful research into local conditions (Farah, 1981, p. 41).

Figure 10. The Otolith Group, *WORLD 3* [Bookwork], 2014. 24 MAY- 10th Anniversary of Eritrean Independence 23 May 2001.

Coming face to face with *WORLD 3* confronts the reader with the comparative chronography of decolonisation that persists beyond the ceremonies of Independence and the military coup d'états into the present. Subject to reversals, interruptions and impasses, Fanon's Third World speaks in tones of demoralisation. Emplotting the unfinished process of decolonisation calls for a mode of disjuncture and discrepancy that complicates the linearity of chronology. *WORLD 3'*s one hundred and seventy-six quotations qualify the First day covers' obligatory optimism. Each citation situates itself in the time after Independence but before liberation when the invocation of the future no longer requites the misery of the present. These modes of address 'crystallize' the 'post-nationalist structures of feeling' evoked by films such as *Testament* in 1989. Like Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of A Prophet*, 1991, or David Achkar's *Allah Tantou*, 1991, *Testament* locates the aftermath of independence in the durée of decolonisation in order to 'give shape' to what Mercer calls Afro-pessimism. These quotations demonstrate the extent of artistic reflection unleashed by the 'collapse of nationalist legitimation narratives' promoted by the First day covers. *WORLD 3* summons the names of poets, novelists and memoirists in order to attest to the full scope of Afro-pessimism's critical enquiry into the limits of self-rule. According to C.L. R. James, Nkrumah's fall terminated the belief in 'development and progress' held by the 'minds of Africans in Africa, of people of African descent and all who interested' in participating in the liberation or 'redemption' of Africa (James, 1992, p.354). *WORLD 3* assembles texts that seek to come to terms with the implications of the coup of 1966 that constituted an attack upon the project of Pan-Africanism.

WORLD 3 begins in 1940 and concludes in 2001 because its starting point and its conclusion is enabled and constrained by the envelopes available for acquisition on online markets. Online auction websites such as eBay.com make these designs acquirable for art making in the present. It is not so much that the form of *WORLD 3* or *Statecraft* is determined by digital auction. It is more that their conditions of possibility are predetermined by digital platforms such as eBay that promotes itself as 'the world's largest marketplace'. eBay's market price is the technological apriori for *WORLD 3* and *Statecraft*. Both of these works might be described as experiments in platform formalism

or, more precisely, as experiments in ‘platformalism’ in which the platforms that provide their conditions of possibility are made visible and legible as formalism.

The ‘life of a concept is its meaning, and the allegorical body is filled with that ‘life’’ when it can be named, ‘identified’. --Marina Warner (Warner, 1985, p.263)

***Sovereign Sisters* or The Point Cloud of the Universal Monument**

Sovereign Sisters is analysed as a work adjacent to the works submitted for consideration. It is not concerned with platformalism but rather with the demonstration of the post-lens based practice of digital animation. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* announces the project of *Sovereign Sisters.* From 02. 58 to 03: 26, four stamp designs can be seen each bearing the name of the Universal Postal Union. The stamps honour the fiftieth anniversary of the Union. The decelerated soundtrack draws attention away from the fourth stamp design at 03: 23 that reveals the Monument to the Universal Postal Union in Kleine Schanze Park in Bern, Switzerland. Both the Monument and its organisation continue to exist. The Universal Postal Union, which predates the formation of the United Nations, operates from within the United Nations. Why, then, does *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* depict the Universal Postal Union as a forgotten archaism when it is neither forgotten nor archaic? Responding to these questions requires a historical reframing of contemporary spectatorship. The postally used stamp elicits a contemporary condescension. Understanding the role played by the Universal Postal Union within *Sovereign Sisters* requires an engagement with texts produced in the second half of the nineteenth century that reveal the extent to which postage stamps promised the path to the future. What becomes apparent is the extent to which postal networks were understood as infrastructure of modernity.

European imperialism praised the postal system as a ‘network of universalization’ that conclusively demonstrated its civilizational achievement. Nothing demonstrated imperial Europe’s ideal of the ‘internationalisation of communication’ better than the General Postal Union. The male signatories from the twenty-two nation states that gathered at the Diet in Bern to found the Postal Congress in 1874 abolished ‘the maze of conflicting administrations’ that previously defined postal communication between imperial nation-states. The Treaty of Bern of 1875 replaced this existing labyrinth with one ‘single postal territory’ within which ‘all political boundaries completely vanished with regard to the postal exchange of letters’ (Siegert, 1999, p.140). This borderless philatelic territory was to be known as the ‘General Postal Union’ or the GPU. In 1879, the Congress renamed the GPU as the Universal Postal Union or UPU. The change from the ‘general’ to the

‘universal’ signalled the extent to which the Union administrators believed they had finally achieved a ‘network of universalization’ that would internationalise communication. In treating existing imperial borders as one ‘single postal district’, the white men of the Universal Postal Union imagined that they had accomplished Enlightenment’s ‘eternal promise’ of a communication network’ that symbolized ‘a world that is better because it is united’ (Mattelart, 2000, p.viii, p.6). The members of the Postal Congress believed in an enlightened imperialism. The Universal Postal Union epitomised the dream of Pan-Europeanism that embraced the world’s colonies in its global embrace. Commemorating its twenty-fifth anniversary offered the UPU’s members an opportunity to celebrate what could be described as communicative colonialism. The proposal ‘to erect an artistic monument in honor of this great international work offered the opportunity to memorialise the ‘great international work’ undertaken by the Postal Union (Unveiling of the Monument Commemorating the Foundation of the Universal Postal Union, 1910, p. 185). On his first encounter with Rene de Saint-Marceaux’s sculpture *Autour du monde* on 4 October 1909, M. Deucher, President of the Swiss Federation, was moved to describe:

The five genii which surround the globe represent the universal importance of the Union and attest the power gained by a great idea, for the realization of which nations went hand in hand, regardless of the difference of race, language and religion, political and economic interests - a triumph of civilization and culture, a bond of union between the nations (Unveiling of the Monument Commemorating the Foundation of the Universal Postal Union, 1910, p. 186).

Looking at the naked and clothed letter bearing-female genii that personified Africa, Asia, America, Europe and Oceania, I began to understand the racial allegory that animated the Postal Union’s imagination. As I walked through the gate into Kleine Schanze Park at 7am on the morning of 10 December 2013, the Monument appeared to illustrate Deucher’s description of ‘the universal importance of the Union’. I began to see why the UPU’s administrator Eugéne Ruffy is supposed to have told Saint-Marceaux that:

With your globe revolving in space, and your chain of graceful forms advancing even more rapidly in their airy flight, you have well depicted the activity of the universal post (John, 2018, p.67).

In using words such as ‘revolving’, ‘advancing’ and ‘flight’, Ruffy appeared to be animating the patriarchitectural allegory of the Monument. In some ways, Ruffy’s ekphrastic fantasy of animation inadvertently prefigured my proposal to animate Saint-Marceaux’s Monument through the technique of 3D laser scanning. As Matthew Shaw and William Trossell of ScanLAB Projects explained in *Digital Doppelgangers: Future Scanscapes*, large scale 3D laser or Lidar scanning can be situated within the technological tradition of mechanical observation that constantly remaps ‘the surface of the earth and the depths of space’ (Shaw and Trossell, 2014, p.23). Traditional surveying techniques rely upon human investigators that access a space by ‘measuring the dimensions of its volumes’ and the lengths ‘of the ‘important features’ in order to produce the ‘clear, organised, but limited picture’ of ‘the survey drawing’. By contrast, the laser scan is a ‘non-contact’ technology that ‘records the surfaces’ through an ‘expanding sphere of laser pulses.’ From first light at 7am until night fall at 6pm, Shaw physically scanned the Monument from different directions using a 3D scanner whose scan head slowly rotated around the axis of its tripod. The scanner ‘read’ the dimensions of Monument benchmarked by special spheres. These individual scans ‘occupy’ their subject, establishing ‘a grid of temporary and permanent references that calibrate the space’. By linking these ‘individual scans together’, what emerges is not a high definition video but captured spatial data that ‘freezes the dimensional properties of an object, space or event into a cloud of precisely measured full-colour points in space which can be revisited and inspected digitally, remotely and at any time’ (Shaw and Trossell, 2014, p.23).

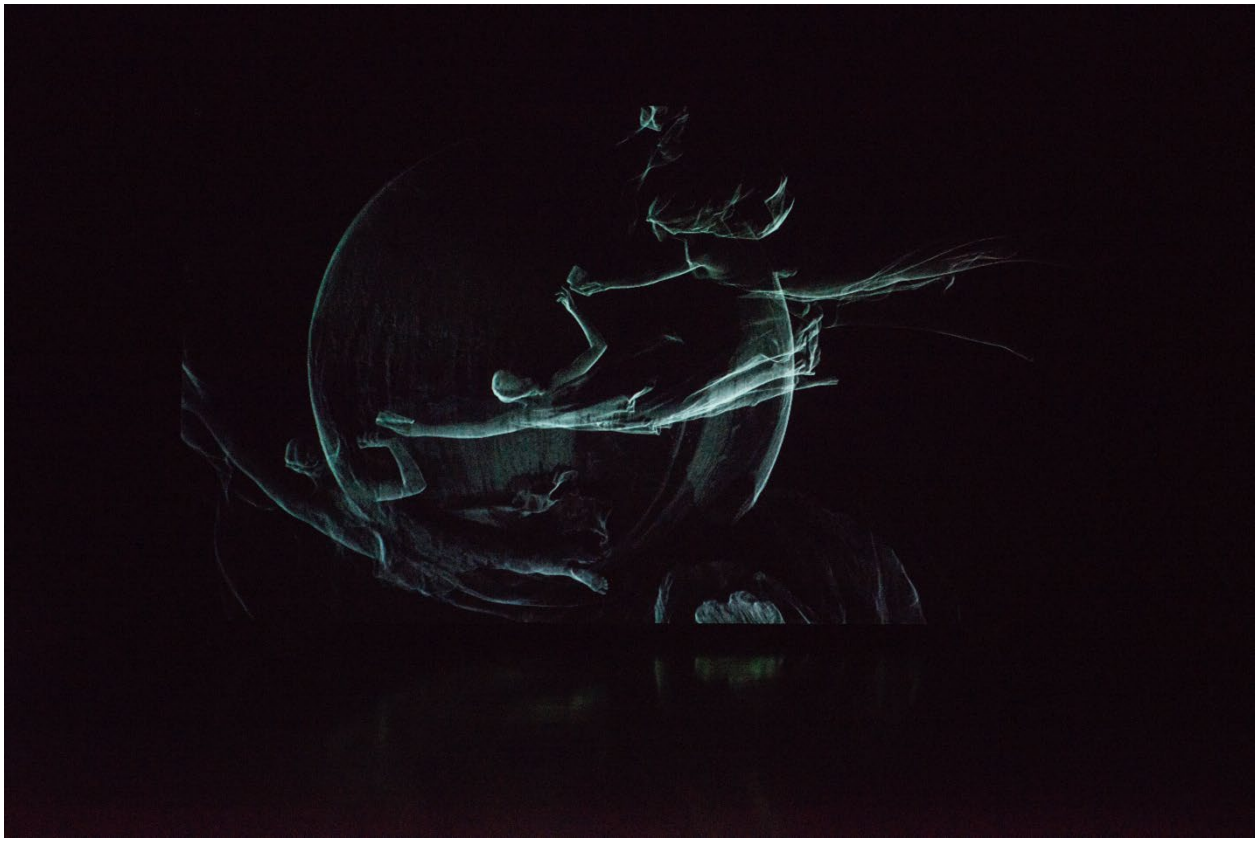

Figure 11. The Otolith Group, *Sovereign Sisters*, 2014. [Digital Animation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen.

Sovereign Sisters freezes the ‘dimensional properties’ of the monument into a ‘cloud of precisely measured points in space’. Instead of wrapping full colour photographs around these points, it retains the point cloud that renders the solid mass of granite rocks and clouds and the bronze mass of the sphere and the genii as dimensional clouds. The properties of shape, line and form collapse into each other, engendering transparencies that move in and out of legibility. Animation is achieved by plotting a virtual camera that orbits the globe in a slow motion that dissolves dimensions into spatial shapes of superimposed data.

The Monument can be understood as an attempt to imagine the process of globalisation through a nineteenth century discourse of enlightened imperialism realised in an eighteenth-century vocabulary of civilisational allegory. *Sovereign Sisters* in contrast might be understood as a post-lens project that subjects the imperialist traditions of

civilisational allegory, racial hierarchy and gendered personification to the new imperatives of the digital survey. Under the lens-less eye of the 3D laser scanner, *Sovereign Sisters* disintegrates neoclassical allegory into a new pattern that demands a new mode of attention. Saint-Marceaux's *Autour du monde* attempted to give shape to a Pan-European vision of Eurafrica. As Peo Hansen and Steffan Jonson demonstrate in *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, the idea of Europe's commonly administered colonisation of the African continent affirmed the value system of Pan-European projects such as the Universal Postal Union, the League of Nations and the European Economic Community. In signing the Treaties of Rome that brought the European Economic Community into existence at the Palazzo dei Conservatori on Capitoline Hill in Rome on 25 March 1957, nineteen days after Ghana's Independence, the EEC aimed to turn the Pan-European movement's long held desire for the common colonial management of Africa into reality (Hansen and Jonson, 2014, pp. 234-278). For Pan-Europeanism to succeed, Pan-Africanism must be contained. *Sovereign Sisters* reveals the geo-piety of Pan-Europeanism's belief that to 'save Africa for Europe, is to save Europe by way of Africa' (Hansen and Jonson, 2014, p.234). Its unending animation enacts Europe's eternal concert of pan-global harmony performed by the goddesses of the Union that binds the planet. The post-lens and platformalist production processes adopted by these works are connected by visual study that investigates the infrastructural imagination of African statehood in the context of the Global Cold War. These communicative networks aimed to build national paths towards continental futures. Each work seeks to fabricate a contemporary project capable of paying attention to the unfinished process of decolonisation that persists into the present. What is at stake is formulating works of art capable of studying the values, norms and ideals of the African prospective imaginary visualised in stamp designs.

2.

In the Year of the Quiet Sun

And, snatching a torch of freedom from its master, it took to its wings and flew, perhaps never to be caught again. And now the slogan everywhere in Africa is either 'freedom', 'independence' or 'self-government now'. --Kofi Antubam (Antubam, 1963)

Africa must create and assert her own personality and speak for herself. She cannot be a projection of Europe nor any longer permit herself to be interpreted or spoken for by self-appointed interpreters --Tom Mboya (Mboya, 1970)

African Unity in the World System

In the Year of the Quiet Sun's vision of Pan-African nationalism was informed by my reading of Kenneth Wilburn's *Africa to the World! Nkrumah-era Philatelic Images of Emerging Ghana and Pan-Africanism 1957-1966* in the Summer of 2013. Wilburn's essay began with the claim that Ghanaian stamps:

reveal many of Nkrumah's ambitious goals, including his quest for independence, economic development, social justice, Ghanaian culture, and the unification of Africa. The semiotics of Nkrumah-era Ghanaian stamps between 1957 and 1966 display an optimism and purpose that are directed not only to Ghanaians but also to all humans-to global Africans across time and place' (Wilburn, 2012, p. 23).

The conclusion of this quotation indicates the naïvete that pervades Wilburn's account of Ghana's Pan-Africanist policy. What is useful, however, is the attention paid by Wilburn to the 'optimism and purpose' displayed in the 'semiotics of Nkrumah-era stamps between 1957 and 1966'. The stamp designs issued by the government appealed to their citizens to play their part in building the new nation. They addressed civilians in the iconographies of moral sacrifice and developmental promise. This kind of civic vocabulary was also mobilised by militant nation-states such as the Republic of Guinea from the late 1950s. What was distinctive about Ghana's stamp designs, then, was not merely their recourse to exhortation. Nor was it the fact that Ghana was the first so-called 'sub-Saharan colony' to win its freedom from British imperialism in 1957. What

was singular was the role played by stamps in promoting the theory and practice of what Nkrumah called ‘African political emancipation’. By insisting that Ghana’s ‘independence will be incomplete, however, unless it is linked up with the liberation of other territories in Africa’ (Nkrumah 1959, p.viii, p. 240), Nkrumah situated Ghana’s national independence within the wider context of Pan-Africanism’s interscalar struggle for the total liberation of the continent from colonial rule. In doing so, Nkrumah expanded the scale and the scope of what he called ‘African political consciousness’ (Nkrumah, 1959, p.240). Pan-Africanism’s political imagination was defined by the movement towards the unification of the continent in the form of the United States of Africa. This goal provided a vision that oriented disputes and debates over the direction towards Africa’s future. It was Nkrumah’s projection of African modernity towards continental unity that prompted critics and allies to think of Ghana, in the words of Richard Wright as ‘a kind of pilot project of the new Africa’ (Ahlman, 2017, p.3).

Even as Wilburn’s attention to Ghana’s stamp designs drew my attention, his account failed to account for the specific temporality of their importance. *Africa to the World* paid insufficient attention to the full implications of the army coup of 1966. The coup d’état not only sought to destroy the visual, material and public cultures of the Nkrumah era in its effort to terminate the movement of ‘African unity in the world context’ envisioned by Padmore, Nkrumah, Azikiwe and others from the 1940s onwards (Wallerstein, 1967, p.237). It sought to close the horizon of the African political imaginary. The significance of the coup lay in the limits it placed on the national and continental imagination of African freedom in the twentieth century (Ahlman, 2017, p.207,; First, 1970). This entailed foreclosing future generations’ access to the histories of the movement for African unity. The ultimate ambition of the ‘soldier-rulers’ of the National Liberation Council was to dictate the terms under which successive generations would imagine and interpret Ghana’s self- determination (First, 1970, p.465). By eluding the purge directed at Nkrumah-era material culture, the postage stamps suggested the prospect of reimagining Ghana’s movement towards African unity beyond the limits imposed by the military’s neoliberal imagination. They suggested the possibility of confronting the implications of those limits on terms other than those imposed by the military. It is this

capacity for investigating the conditions of possibility of Africa's modernity that gave Ghana's stamps an importance beyond that of the antiquarian. It is this potential for the prospective imagination of the historical that drew me towards Ghana's stamps. The possibilty of reimagining the 'official mind' of the Gold Coast in 1955 as it transformed itself from the Dominion of Ghana in 1957 to the Republic of Ghana in 1960 and the Peoples Democracy of 1964.

So it should be easy to take the rot of the promise. –
Ayi Kwei Armah (Armah, 1968, p.90)

Ghana?
Just a
Tiny piece of beautiful territory in
Africa- had
Greatness thrust upon her
Once.
--Ama Ata Aidoo (Aidoo, 1973, p.53)

At the Very Edge of Semantic Availability

The opening scene of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* situates its subsequent images and sounds in the past's foreclosed future. From 00: 00 to 00: 42 appear the following three sentences divided into clauses of four words:

'Between 1957 and 1966, the new state of Ghana led by the Convention Peoples Party issues a sequence of stamps that constitute a political calendar. A calendar that commemorates the progress of the nation towards the liberation of the continent. The military coup of 1966 destroys this Pan-Africanist programme.'

These sentences introduce the 'principle of representation' for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* (Ranciere, 2006, pp.143-4). They announce the principle for understanding the role played by images and sounds within *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*. This principle can be characterised as Afro-pessimist. The term Afro-pessimism adopted here should be differentiated from the philosophical project of Afro-Pessimism advanced by Frank B. Wilderson III and Jared Sexton and the sensationalist reportage of Robert D. Kaplan.

In the context of the argument for this Chapter, the term refers specifically to the lesser known formulation of Afro-pessimism proposed by Kobena Mercer in 2000. In the context of a response to film critic Clyde Taylor's notion of Afro-modernism, Mercer elaborated upon Taylor's reading of Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyenas*, 1992, as an artistic reflection on 'violence and disenchantment' that, according to Kwame Anthony Appiah, emerged from the 'collapse of nationalist legitimization narratives'. Mercer extended Appiah's interpretation of the novels of Ouologuem and Mudimbe in his analysis of three contemporary films that described 'postcolonial and post-nationalist structures of feeling' (Mercer, 2000, pp.146-7). Mercer's reading focused on Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet*, 1991, David Achkar's *Allah Tantou*, 1991 and most importantly, John Akomfrah's *Testament*, which he described as follows:

In Akomfrah's *Testament*, after years of exile in Britain following the 1966 coup against Nkrumah, the fictional character Abena returns to Ghana to confront the experience of loss, abandonment and mourning that arise once the utopian promises of pan-African decolonisation give way to what Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris would call 'the ruined fabric of the shattered human'. In each instance, the films employ a range of aesthetic strategies to explore complex structures of feeling which, however unpleasant or unpopular, are nonetheless universally human. Hence, in a signifying riff on Taylor's concept of Afro-modernism, I would suggest that such films give shape to what might be called Afro-pessimism (Mercer, 2000, p.147).

Mercer understood Afro-pessimism as 'a range of artistic strategies' motivated by the pressing need to explore the 'structures of feelings' that arose from the destruction of Nkrumah's grand narrative of Pan-African nationalism. In doing so, he drew on the formulation of 'structures of feeling' defined by Raymond Williams as 'social experiences in *solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available (Williams, 1977, pp.133-134). Afro-pessimism could be understood as the name for the social experiences of 'loss, abandonment and mourning' that emerged in Ghana 'at the very edge of semantic availability' in the wake of the cancellation of Pan-Africanism's futures

(Williams, 1977, p.134). Those ‘social experiences in *solution*’ were articulated in the form of ‘aesthetic strategies’ or ‘new semantic figures’ that envisioned an exile from the future terminated by the coup of 1966 (Williams, 1977, p.134). *Testament* envisioned the 1990s as a deserted landscape of memory through which the figure of Abena wandered. Tormented by painful memories of detention and betrayal, Abena embodied the psychic malaise of experience after the end of the future (Williams, 1977, p.134).

What emerged from Mercer’s account was the sense that Afro-pessimism could not be located within the singular event of Ghana’s military coup. The sense of an ending seemed to begin at differing times and locations. It moved from the time before the end of the coup to the time of the coup to the aftermath of the coup. It was as if the ending had always begun and would never end. If the coup of 1966 expressed public discontent with Ghana’s socialist experiment, then it presupposed an ongoing history of dissatisfaction. It is in the novel that the artistic reflection on the dissatisfaction with self-determination makes its first appearance. I argue that the history of anti-Nkrumaist sentiment was articulated by Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautyful Ones are not Yet Born* in 1968. Armah’s novel traced the intricacies of the ‘rot of the promise’ made by the Convention Peoples Party to the people through the spread of an amoral economy of ‘possessing’ and ‘getting’ that left no one uncorrupted. The allure of ‘possessing’ enmeshed the citizenry in a widening network of perverse aspiration and duplicitous ambition. Armah traced the ‘rot of the promise’ all the way back to 1957, immediately after independence, when Nkrumah moved into Christiansborg Castle, formerly occupied by Britain’s Governor-Generals. In an article in The Daily Sketch of 20 June 1957 titled Why the Queen’s Head is Coming Off Our Coins reprinted in The Daily Graphic on 21 June 1957 under the title of Nkrumah: I Am No Dictator, Nkrumah explained his decision to the British public:

I am sure that the Queen will understand that many of my people still do not believe we are truly independent. Some of them even expected the Queen to come and crown me. To my people it is the seat of Government. The Governors have lived there for

centuries. Now it is logical that the Prime Minister should live there (Adedze, 2008,p.5,; Fuller, 2015, p.39).

Wallerstein analysed Nkrumah's decision in terms of separation from Ghana's masses:

the first things Nkrumah did after Independence was to move to the Castle. This had the immediate effect of making him less accessible and less visible. There was a wall around the Castle and Nkrumah had it built even higher' (Wallerstein, 1964, p.161).

For Armah, Nkrumah's occupation of the seat of colonial authority, now renamed Government House, announced his government's continuation of, rather than its break with, imperial rule. Such a move, according to Armah, constituted the betrayal of the promise of the Gold Coast's Revolution. The opening scene of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* shows Nkrumah emerging from the entrance of Government House. Armah's pessimism preceded and extended beyond the event of the coup. He refused to believe that the coup of 1966 would purge the nation of the 'rot of the promise' of Nkrumahism. According to Armah, the advent of the National Liberation Council served to perpetuate the 'rot' initiated by the bourgeois lawyers of the United Gold Coast Convention that ruled the Gold Coast, with the British, before the CPP had came to power. Those same lawyers reemerged after the destruction of the CPP in order to share power with the NLC. Ama Ata Aido described this cycle of promise and betrayal as the 'dance of the masquerades called Independence' in *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (Aidoo, 1977, p.95).

Located within this ongoing critique that extended from Armah and Aidoo's novels to Appiah's analysis of Ouoluguem and Mudimbe's fiction and to Mercer's account of Akomfrah, Peck, Achkar and Mambety, the Otolith artworks can be understood as 'translational' practice that aims to resume and renew the ongoing artistic confrontation with the limits of African self-rule and self-determination. Mercer's theorisation offered three propositions for my work. Firstly, it suggested a vocabulary that I could use to contextualise *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* within an artistic trajectory inaugurated by

Armah. Secondly, it offered a vocabulary that I could use to differentiate the strategies and the stakes of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* from the earlier generation of 'translational diaspora film culture' epitomised by the work of Akomfrah, Peck, Achkar and Mambety. Thirdly, it hinted at a method for clarifying my relationship to subsequent theorisations of Afro-Pessimism that followed in the wake of, but without the knowledge of Mercer's critical formulation of 1995 (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003,; Wilderson, 2010,; Sexton, 2011).

The soldiers illuminate the foundations and the failures of the new states of Africa.
--Ruth First (First, 1970, p.465)

Pan-Africanism without Guarantees

One way to draw these modes of contextualisation together is to approach the question of Afro-pessimism from the artistic decisions that I made for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*. What did it mean to study images of Pan-Africanist nationalism from a perspective informed by post-nationalism? How can a critical position formulated after the coup of 1966 operate as a guideline for interpreting images designed before the coup? How is a post-nationalist position distinct from an anti-nationalist position? How does an Afro-pessimist mode of address operate at the level of point of view or tone of voice? David Scott pointed to the all too common tendency to 'read Fanon as though we were about to join him in the trenches of the anticolonial liberation struggle' (Scott, 1999, p.199). *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, I would argue, proposed a visual study based on a 'reading practice', to use Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's term, of Nkrumah's texts that tried not to align itself with his struggle for liberation or to give into the temptation to prosecute Nkrumah in a court of critical judgement (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 2003, p. 127). What I wanted was a 'reading practice' that proceeded with an awareness of the existing discourses that attempted to capture the space of interpretation in order to close the space of African modern imaginary. Undertaking interpretation in solidarity with Nkrumah's project would entail practising reading as hagiography. Undertaking interpretation as critique, by contrast, would require positioning reading within the dominant tradition of Pan-Africanist scepticism diagnosed by Wallerstein (Wallerstein, 1967, pp. 3-4). Both positions emerged from American modernization theory of the 1950s that was preoccupied with drawing up what it called a 'balance-sheet' for Ghana's experiment with Pan-African socialism. The accounts produced by American-Africanists such as David E. Apter, Willard Scott Thomson or Aristide Zolberg enacted American political science's desire to contain the space of possibility of the African political imaginary. By conducting an account of African modernization according to a so-called balance sheet of deficit and surplus, political science sought to prosecute Pan-Africanism according to its own moral economy of judgment (Gilman, 2003,; Apter, 1972,; Thomson, 1969,; Zolberg, 1967,; Padmore, 1964,; Davis, 1962).

In his project of 'unthinking' inherited categories of decolonisation, Gary Wilder argues that contemporary historical scholarship tends to presuppose a 'methodological

nationalism' that assumes that 'national independence is the necessary form of colonial emancipation.' According to Wilder, these histories mistake the 'product of decolonization for an optic through which to study it' (Wilder, 2015, p.4). Methodological nationalism, as formulated by Wilder, is informed by Frederick Cooper's earlier argument that:

the most difficult problem in writing the history of decolonization is the temptation to write it backwards. We know that almost all African colonies eventually became independent African states, hence a tendency to relate the triumph of nationalism, of an African conquest of the colonial state. We know now that the fruits of independence have often turned bitter, hence a temptation to write the history of disappointment, of the continued subordination of Africa to Western powers. Neither the triumphalist history nor the story of frustrated aspirations is sufficient. If instead of writing history from the present to the past, we watch it run forward, the history of Africa from the 1940s onwards opens up to a much wider range of actions, aspirations and possibilities (Cooper, 1999, p.571).

Instead of writing from the present to the past, Cooper suggests that historians should 'watch' the past as it runs forward towards the future, as if the history of Africa could be understood as a DVD on fast-forward. By contrast, *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* aims to write from the present to the past in order to come to terms with the process by which the past's futures were interrupted. What is at stake is not only the attempt to rethink the direction of the historical process of decolonisation or to restore contingency to historiography. It is the attempt to rethink the space of the African political imaginary outside of the Cold War consensus that continues to organise the presuppositions of political science's Africanist narratives. To problematize such assumptions, my script for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* drew on Paulin J. Houtondji's argument that:

To read Nkrumah today, then, is to rediscover the unfinished text of a thought in search of itself beneath the system in which it has been trapped, willingly, for a while. It is to restore to the work its hesitations, its internal contradictions, its life, avoid smoothing the

rough edges or blurring the contradictions and to recognize, where necessary, both that the text may not always work on the same level but may pass from one to another and that it is essential for us to identify and define these levels with accuracy (Houtondji, 1996, p.134).

To ‘rediscover the unfinished text of a thought in search of itself’ suggests reading Nkrumah without the guarantees that appear to be provided by the text itself. It is matter of reading what Houtondji calls Nkrumah’s ‘often enthusiastic, even euphoric’ expressions of ‘certainty about a victory to come’ with the understanding that neither ‘certainty’ nor ‘victory to come’ were guaranteed, then, or now. It is a matter of fashioning a reading practice that approaches Nkrumah’s expressions of ‘certainty’ and ‘victory to come’ as contingent expressions of enthusiasm and euphoria that provoked antipathy as much as assent (Houtondji, 1996, p.134). In 1986, Stuart Hall proposed a Marxism without guarantees that rejected ‘the absolute predictability of particular outcomes’ as the only basis of a “marxism without final guarantees”. (Hall, 1986, p.43). I would argue that *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* adopts the arguments advanced by Hall and Houtondji in order to advance an Afro-pessimist reading practice that engenders an understanding of ‘Pan-Africanism without final guarantees’. What this means for an artistic practice, however, requires further clarification. Reading Pan-Africanism ‘without guaranteed closure’ produces an affective tone that I would characterise as ‘quiet’ (Hall, 1986, p.43). The word ‘Quiet’ in the title of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* speaks to a range of aesthetic strategies that were not necessarily present in the postage stamps or the footage used in its composition. The idea of the ‘Quiet Sun’ suggests the astronomical calendar of the eleven-year solar cycle that intersects with Ghana’s political calendar in 1964. It alludes to a tendency towards introspection that, in turn, hints at ideas of political ‘quietism’ which operate in a register distinct from the ‘sweeping assertions’ associated with Nkrumah’s writings (Quashie, 2009,; Houtondji, 1996, p.134). The tonality of ‘quiet’ suggests that Nkrumah’s anti-colonial ‘certainty’ need not determine the stance adopted by a contemporary artistic strategy that engages with Nkrumah’s theories. What happens when expressions of ‘certainty about a victory to come’ invoke feelings of ‘certainty’ about ‘victory to come’ under conditions

in which neither ‘certainty’ nor ‘victory’ is assured or guaranteed? In *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* captures a temporal dimension in which Ghana’s stamps retain their ‘optimism’ and ‘purpose’ under conditions that suspend both ‘optimism’ and ‘purpose’. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*’s affective tone emerges from the ways in which it approaches political emotions of ‘triumph’ and ‘defeat’ in ways that are neither triumphant nor defeated but are instead, quiet. Such quietness cannot help but allude to ideas of quietude, quietism, defeatism or fatalism. Such emotions exist ‘at the very edge of semantic availability’ in the narratives of African political modernity circulated by political sciences; narrating them therefore requires a reading practice without guarantees.

At 00: 43 to 00: 50, Nkrumah can be seen, descending the white steps of Government House. The scene is tinted blue and muted. By his side, a second politician points towards a stationary black car beside which stands a chauffeur. A synthesiser chord slowly sustains as the frame turns to black. At 00: 52 to 00: 59, the voice of Anjalika Sagar reads from the voiceover script:

‘Each stamp becomes a date without a day. A year that no longer commemorates.’

The two sentences create the context of attention for the ensuing montage. They announce the contemporary condition of the postage stamps that will appear throughout the digital video. The stamps can be understood as inoperative historical artefacts that no longer function within a calendrical system. They no longer synchronise the mass memories of peoples within or beyond Ghana. This condition of ‘decommemoration’ is not merely a matter of the passing of time. It is the intended outcome of the mnemonic purge instigated by the army coup of 1966. To construct a contemporary narration requires a methodology that emplots the destroyed linkages between specific days and specific dates. It requires a rationale that provides the necessity for rebuilding these destroyed connections. The stamps themselves provide the rationale. Their existence suggests that it is possible to assemble a timeline whose chronology has been destroyed by the coup of 1966. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* arranges meetings

between fictional and historical figures at different points along this timeline. It uses the structure of chronology to reimagine a ‘political calendar’ for the movement of ‘African political consciousness’. The notion of the ‘political calendar’ is adapted from Susan Sontag’s account of Cuba’s revolutionary political posters that commemorated days of martyrdom and promote days of solidarity in the 1960s:

Equal in importance on the political calendar to the days commemorating the martyrdom in Cuba’s own history are the days of solidarity with other peoples, for each of which a poster is designed (Sontag, 1970, p.xvi).

The political calendar, as used here, refers to the days composed of the images and sounds of international conferences located within the ‘political geography of Africa’ that ‘has been transformed’ in the words of Walter Rodney, ‘by the rise of some forty constitutionally independent political units presided over by Africans’ (Rodney, 1974/1975, p. 256*). In the Year of the Quiet Sun* uses these images to renarrate the movement towards continental unity. Pan-African conferences were often criticised by activists for their unnecessary luxury (Young, 2005, pp.37-38). As Rodney argued, however, they emerged from ‘a tradition of conferences which grew out of the response of Africans to their oppression in the first half of this century.’ Such ‘political conferences of the oppressed’, he continued:

invariably attract a variety of responses - varying from cynical conviction that they are an utter waste of time to naïve optimism that they will change the face of the world. In actuality, popular struggle continues from day to day at many different and more profound levels; and its intensity at any given time primarily determines the relevance and utility of the conference as a technique of co-ordination (Rodney, 1974/1975, p.256).

In the Year of the Quiet Sun is composed through post-lens based production process. It is not composed of moving images captured on video. It is made from digitally scanned images in motion (Mwangi, 2002, p.59). If stamps, like currency, circulate,

firstly, as signs of prepayment, some enjoy a subsequent, second life as ‘collectables’ auctioned on online platforms. What is required is an artistic method that mediates the trajectory of the former via the movement of the latter. What is needed is a visual study that actualises the trajectories travelled by postally used stamps.

Each will bear the head of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana.
--The Daily Graphic (Adedze, 2008, p. 5)

After lunch I visited the Philatelic Museum at Temple University, which I thoroughly enjoyed, as I was not only interested in philately but had a strong passion for museums of any kind.
--Kwame Nkrumah (Nkrumah, 1959, p.132).

Civitatis Ghaniensis Conditor: Founder of the State of Ghana

At 01: 41 to 02:41 can be seen the first stamps to be issued by the ‘free and sovereign state of Ghana’ on the occasion of Ghana’s Independence. On first viewing, these so-

called Independence Commemoratives appear modest. An untitled ‘vignette’ of Prime Minister Nkrumah is paired with a Vulturine Fish Eagle that takes flight against an ‘outline map of Africa’ that highlights Ghana’s location and name (Fuller 2010, 130). The words ‘Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957’ can be read. The high resolution of the digital scan draws attention to the sobriety of these inaugural designs. What accounts, then, for the political furore that greeted their announcement in 1957? This question informs the opening sequence of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun.*

Figure 12. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 Postmark, 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

Figure 13. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 Postmark, 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

Figure 14. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 Postmark, 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

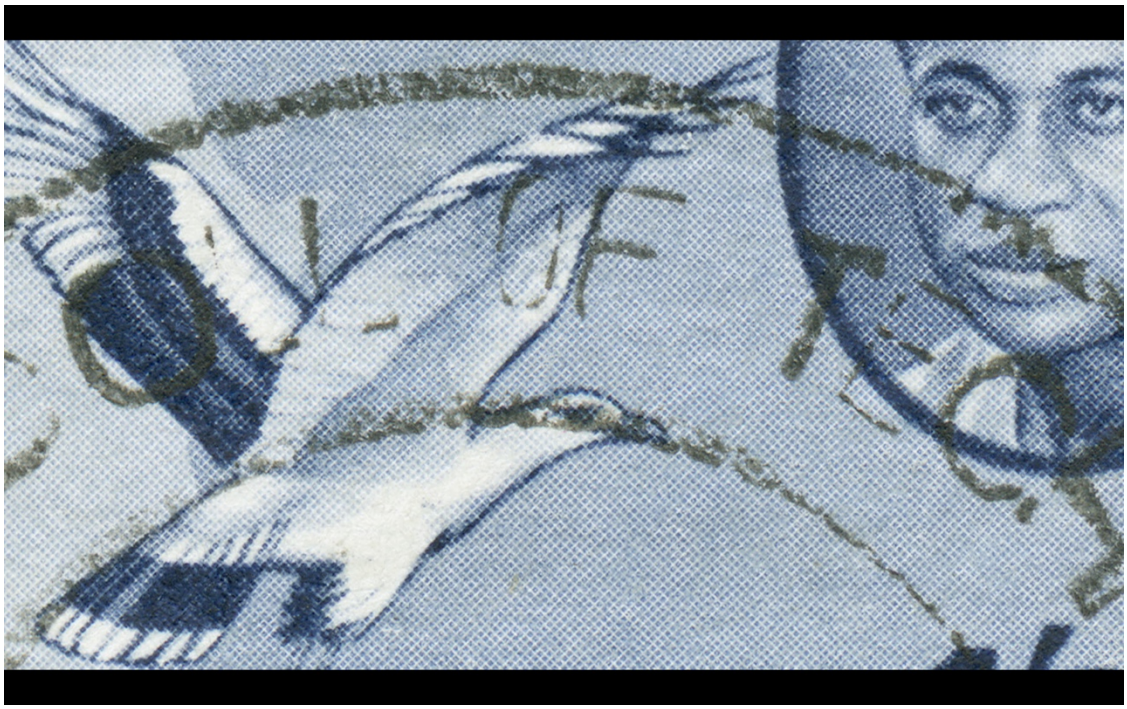

Figure 15. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 Postmark, 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

Figure 16. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 [Postage Stamp]

Figure 17. Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 [Postage Stamp]

Figure 18. Effigy of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

Figure 19: Effigy of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

Figure 20. Effigy of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah Ghana Independence Commemoration 6th March 1957 [Detail, Postage Stamp]

What does the visual study of these stamps make visible? The working peoples of the Gold Coast that formed Africa's largest political movement towards Independence are not commemorated by the Independence Commemoratives. The urban masses that urged Nkrumah to found the Convention Peoples Party in 1949 are absent. The peoples that led the CPP's 'Positive Action' campaign against the British state analysed by George Padmore in *The Gold Coast Revolution: The struggle of an African people from slavery to freedom* in 1953 and CLR James's *Ghana and the Nkrumah Revolution* in 1977 are missing. Padmore and James analysed the process by which the CPP mobilised the mass movement 'from slavery to freedom'. The CPP ruled the new state of Ghana in the name of the authority entrusted to it by Ghana's people. An authority sanctioned by its victories over the opposition in the general elections of 1951, 1954 and 1956.

Instead of visually representing the mass movement or the mass party or the electoral victories, the new stamps designed the symbolic 'birth' of the new nation by the new state governed by the ruling party led by its male founder. Faced with the problem of designing sovereignty within the context of the state system, the stamps issued by the postal services of Ghana centralised the problem of design by treating statehood as a question of authority. The stamps visualised the new government's leader in a 'vignette' or 'effigy' that presided over the political unit of the country located within the outline map of the continent. Opposite the Prime Minister's portrait was an eagle that was understood as an icon of freedom. The eagle's flight symbolised the achievement of constitutional independence by the ruling party. It enacted the symbolic birth of the new nation. It embodied the free and sovereign state that had liberated itself from the shackles of empire by its own efforts. It stood in for the masses that moved from slavery to freedom under the party's guidance. The eagle mediated between the missing images of the people and the party within the image of the nation within the political geography of the continent.

Because post-independence leaders such as Nkrumah, Togo's Sylvanus Olympio and Guinea's Ahmed Sekou Touré 'did not come from royal families', these 'successor

states' created a new 'aura of authority' by substituting colonial portraits with those of the ruling leaders. The solution proposed by Ghana's stamp designs set the pattern that was subsequently imitated by independent states such as Guinea or Togo. Adedze argued that the images that were:

represented on the stamps convey the symbolic image of the master narrative of the ruling elite with the hope that the masses of people will rally behind these narratives and thereby suppress alternative interpretations of history. In order to have a complete understanding of the politics of representing certain chiefs on stamps and ignoring others, one has to comprehend the symbolic value of the postage stamp as a preeminent tool of government propaganda showing the metamorphosis of a historical event into an object worthy of remembrance and ultimate commemoration (Adedze, 2004, p.69).

Propaganda can be understood, according to Jonas Staal, not as a singular term, but as 'propaganda struggle' in which performances of propaganda compete to manufacture consent. Adedze's idea of the postage stamp as a 'preeminent tool of government propaganda' should be understood in the plural as manufactured serial 'tools' that sought to modulate the 'master narrative of the ruling elite'. In Staal's terms, these tools aimed to construct reality according to their interests, resulting in 'overlapping claims that shape the arena of the contemporary' (Staal 2018, p.1). As Mwangi points out, postage stamps, like currency, can be understood as publicity images that are 'mobile by virtue of reproduction.' They are viewed in situations that are 'infinitely contingent' in contexts that are 'inherently unstable' (Mwangi, 2002, p.35). According to Fuller, the propagandistic power of the stamp, which I would describe as its postal politics, lies in its 'metamorphosis of a historical event into an object worthy of remembrance' hat serves the 'master narrative of the ruling elite' (Adedze, 2004, p. 69). This begins to explain how and why the Stamp Advisory Committee of the Gold Coast recommended the image of Kwame Nkrumah to be placed on the Independence Commemoratives. The Convention People Party's success in the 'historical event of resisting British colonialism and winning independence for the Gold Coast' became the 'master

narrative' that was worthy of commemoration. In Fuller's words, this historical narrative was meant to 'become the undisputed national narrative of the population for which it was (re)written' (Fuller, 2010, pp.125-126).

How did the metamorphosis of commemoration work at this critical moment in the invention of Ghana? The four 'Nkrumah stamps', as they were popularly known, were issued on 6th March 1957. The first day of issue was synchronised with the formal ceremony of Independence otherwise known as 'Flag Day'. From a 'calendro-commemorative standpoint', observes Zerubavel, the date of Independence can be understood as 'the birth of the nation' as a 'sovereign polity' that will be 'engraved on national calendars in the form of commemorative holidays'. As the date that announces the nation's 'most spectacular conventional historical beginning', the commemoration of Independence can be understood to be the 'most significant political event' to be preserved in the nation's 'collective memory' (Zerubavel, 2003, p.317, p.322, p.326). In renarrating the moment of the nation's symbolic birth, *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* provides an opportunity to study the process by which the political imagination of the state seeks to guide the formation of the 'collective memory' of the nation as such. In the process of state formation, postage stamps participate in the co-memorialisation of this 'most significant political event'. Through the work of co-mmemoratiom, stamps aim to narrate 'the undisputed national narrative of the population for which it was (re)written' (Fuller, 2010, pp.125-6). They act to reproduce the conditions for the future to repeat the national narrative. They produce an iconographic normativity of and for the nation that exists at an ambient level. It is this normative nationhood that the National Liberation Council sought to extinguish. Fuller and Adedze's critique of the 'master narrative of the ruling elite' proceeds as if the 'ruling elite' of the Nkrumah administration responsible for the symbolic images of Ghana's Independence still existed and required critique in the present. Fuller and Adedze's critique suggests the ongoing 'symbolic value' of Ghana's historic stamp designs even after the destruction of the value system of the First Republic. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, by contrast proceeds from the assumption that the destruction of the memory of Pan-Africanism in action provides the reason for imaginatively reconstituting the 'official mind' of the Nkrumaist state.

Ghana's The Daily Graphic newspaper announced the Independence Commemorative issues on 16 February 1957:

All current issues of Gold Coast stamps will be withdrawn from circulation after the close of business on March 5, reliable sources disclosed. Special stamps of different denominations, commemorating the achievement of independence, will be issued on March 6. The commemorative issue will comprise stamps in 2d, 2½d, 4d, and 1s 3d denominations. There will be all together 22 millions of all four denominations. That is about four stamps for each member of Ghana's population. Each will bear the head of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana. A commemorative folder, containing a set of those four denominations will be on sale as from March 6 at 2s 6d each. The 2d stamp is red in colour, the 2½d green, the 4d brown, and the 1s 3d blue. They are intended to be in circulation for at least one year. Then, it is likely that new stamps will be issued. With the commemorative stamps will be issued six millions of what is termed "overprinted stamps" of various denominations. The word "Gold Coast" will remain on stamps in this issue. Over each of them will be printed the words "Ghana Independence March 6, 1957" (Adedze, 2008, p.3).

I encountered this announcement in Agbenyega Adedze's *Ghana at Fifty: A Review of Ghana's Official History through Postage Stamps*. My script for *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* edited The Daily Graphic's thirteen sentences to three sentences that staged an encounter between the historical newspaper and a fictional character from 01: 16 to 02: 40:

Ambassador Hotel 6 March 1957.
Countess Koblonska opens The Daily Graphic.
'Gold Coast stamps will be withdrawn from circulation on the 5th of March.
Special stamps commemorating Independence will be issued on the 6th of March.
Each will bear the head of Kwame Nkrumah, Prime Minister of Ghana.

Dr K. A. Busia, leader of the main opposition party, claims that the stamps are disrespectful to the Queen.'
The Countess closes the paper.
Is this the first step towards dictatorship?
Or the next stage in its decapitation?

Instead of depicting the Gold Coast masses, I attempted to dramatise the moment of Independence through a figure that might stand in for the missing peoples. I adopted the name of Countess Koblonska from a figure named in the script for *Handsworth Songs* by Black Audio Film Collective in 1986. I envisaged Countess Koblonska as an upper-class Jamaican woman. As she reads The Daily Graphic, she smokes a Benson and Hedges cigarette. A plate of herrings sits on a table on her verandah in her apartment in downtown Accra. It is early morning on 16th February 1957. The montage of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* integrates a number of scenes of anonymous Ghanaian women. One is seen smoking while sitting under a hair dryer. A second talks to Ghana Airways passengers. A third waits to cross a busy road. A fourth leans towards a mirror to apply her lipstick. Countess Koblonska could be any of those women. She is an avatar of Commonwealth Independence that personifies the Ghana Revolution.

In *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism,* 2014, Harcourt Fuller reconstructed the two-year process that resulted in the Independence Commemoratives of 1957 (Fuller, 2015, pp.34- 52; 2010, pp.106-156,; Adedze, 2008, pp.1-14). On 24th September 1955, the advisory board of the newly formed Postage Stamp Committee met in the Conference Room of the Ministry of Communications in Accra to consider the urgent 'Issue of the Commemorative Postage Stamp' for the 'Attainment of Full Self-Government' (Fuller, 2010, pp.110-113). Fuller revealed that the figure responsible for designing the Independence Commemoratives was artist Kofi Antubam. In his designs for the political symbols of the new state such as the Mace of Parliament and the Presidential Coat of Arms, Antubam effectively translated Nkrumah's theories of 'the African Personality' into designs are still in use in 2018. In *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*, 1963, Antubam outlined his theories for the 'crusade for

the being in existence of the African' that allowed him to operate as Nkrumah's state artist:

One argument that is often used as a weapon against the establishment of an African personality is that of the existence of parochial barriers presented by the seeming non-existence of well-defined characteristics of an all-African distinctive identity. But those who dwell hard on this pernicious argument do admit that there are many Communities in Africa sharing common cultures, and, that only these make for a rich variety of differentiated personalities and not one definite African personality as such. Perhaps it lends more vitality to the virtue of honesty to say that there exists a great degree of truth in this. But surely, is this not all the more reason why Africans and their brothers of African descent should seek to bring themselves together into one whole, now that there is general desire for such a thing as an All-African Union? And, if the answer to this question is "yes", as it really is, then it is incumbent upon every African state to do its part. This means that within every African state today there should be serious researches into whatever the people themselves can salvage from their indigenous way of life. It is a crusade for the being in existence of the African, and Ghana must play her fair part (Antubam, 1963, p.24).

Antubam's notion of 'African Personality' is not so much an essentialist proposition as a proposal to launch an enquiry into the aesthetic implications of Nkrumah's reformulation of Edward Blyden's 19th Century notion of African Personality in the volatile context of demands for All-African Union. Throughout 1955 to 1956, the Gold Coast Cabinet and the Reconstituted Stamp Advisory Committee held ten meetings on the urgent 'Issue of the Commemorative Postage Stamp'. The critical moment occurred at the Cabinet meeting in October 1955. According to Fuller, Nkrumah stated that:

he did not endorse the idea of his head being depicted on a commemorative postage stamp. However, the Ministerial Secretary in the Ministry of Communications and Chairman of the Stamp Advisory Committee, A.R. Boakye persuaded him that a number of people were of the opinion that the Prime Minister's head should be represented on

the independence commemoration postage stamp and he consequently agreed. The Committee therefore decided to draft a design for the commemorative stamp bearing Nkrumah's head and submit it to him for approval (Fuller, 2010, p.126).

Without more information, it is difficult to speculate upon the names of the 'number of people' that were 'of the opinion that the Prime Minister's head should be represented on the independence commemoration'. Invoking the 'opinion' of those 'people' appears to have been enough to have persuaded Nkrumah. After further revisions by Nkrumah that removed the CPP's party colours from the proposed design, Antubam's designs were finally approved in March 1956 (Fuller, 2010, p.130). Five days after the Daily Graphic's announcement, the Gold Coast's Opposition leader Dr Kofi Busia's outraged cablegram to Alan Lennox-Boyd, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was published in The Daily Graphic on 21st February 1957. Busia argued that the Commemorative stamps represented a 'breach of faith'. Because the Nkrumah administration had acknowledged the Queen as Head of Independent Ghana, replacing the head of 'Her Majesty' with the head of Nkrumah breached the protocols of the British Commonwealth. As the 'first such act of its kind in the British Commonwealth', it announced a 'first step towards dictatorship' (Adedze, 2008, p.4).

What did Busia mean by these assertions? It is this reprinted cablegram that provides the reference for the questions posed by Countess Koblonska:

The Countess closes the paper.
Is this the first step towards dictatorship?
Or the next stage in its decapitation?

As a Dominion in the British Commonwealth, Ghana's head of state was still the Crown represented by the Queen of England. Only in 1960 would Ghana finally become a 'free and sovereign' Republic. Replacing the Queen's head with Nkrumah transgressed its de facto status of Dominion under the rules of the Commonwealth. The presence of Nkrumah's head made Ghana look like a Republic when it was not. The Nkrumah

stamps appeared to make a claim to statehood that other nations, according to Busia, might follow (Fuller, 2010, pp.146-148). Busia's cablegram, however, was incorrect. The 'first such act of its kind in the British Commonwealth' was not undertaken by the Dominion of Ghana but by the Dominion of Ceylon in 1948. Indeed, it was the precedent set by the appearance of Prime Minister Don Stephen Senanayake on Ceylon's Independence commemoration issue in 1948 that provided the rationale for Ghana to become the second state to break with protocol in 1957 (Fuller, 2010,pp.114-5,;Lentz, 2017, p.167). What, exactly, was the relationship between the 'breach of faith' in the Crown and the fear of imminent dictatorship? It was not clear why the fear of the latter was consequential on the fear of the former. Indeed, the two claims were distinct. As Jean Marie Allman demonstrates in *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana*, the latter assertion preceded the issue of the Nkrumah stamp by several years. In its ongoing conflict with the Nkrumah administration, the Opposition opportunistically characterised the 'breach of faith' as a usurpation of the Crown that demonstrated Nkrumah's 'first step towards dictatorship'. From its moment of formation in 1954, the National Liberation Movement or NLM, however, habitually denounced Nkrumah, like its Tory allies in Westminster and throughout the British conservative news media, routinely denounced Nkrumah as a 'dictator' and the Convention Peoples Party as a 'dictatorship' (Padmore, 1953, p.254,; Allman, 1993). This claim persisted, in spite of, or rather because of, the CPP's victory over the NLM in Ghana's general elections of 1951, 1954 and 1956.

What Busia's fear of dictatorship referred to was neither a specific promise by Nkrumah nor a specific threat by the CPP. The dictatorship referred to the idea of Ghana as a unitary state. The National Liberation Movement wanted to liberate themselves from the state of Ghana before it had constituted itself as a 'constitutionally independent political unit'. What the NLM wanted was a federal system that enshrined their regional autonomy in the form of the Asante Nation with its own flag, its own economy, its own gods and its own chieftaincy. The idea of a unitary nation-state administered by a government along Parliamentary lines constituted the unbearable dictatorship that had to be resisted. From this perspective, the CPP was the enemy and its government was

illegitimate. The Asante Nation had the right to threaten secession and to detonate bombs in the hope of assassinating the CPP leadership (Allman, 1993,; Rathbone, 2000). What made the Nkrumah stamps intolerable to Busia was their surface effects of centralisation, unification and statism (Pinney, 2014, pp. 451-458). The stamps created the visual effect of national unity They appeared as if Ghana was already united behind the head of Nkrumah. It was as if Ghana was born as a unified entity that excluded an opposition that had never existed. Indeed, the format of the stamp, regardless of its design, appeared to insist upon a pre-existing unity. The dimension of the stamps left no room for opposition. Their simplification, stylization, serialization and standardisation seemed tailor made for centralisation, unification and statism. It was as if stamps were made to measure for Africa's one party governments before they came into existence. As David Scott has argued, the difficulty of semiotically differentiating between the stamp as a pictorial sign or 'icon' and the stamp as a conventional sign or 'symbol' can be resolved with reference to the primary function of the stamp as a 'pointer sign' or index. According to Scott, the stamp's 'primary function' is to visually 'point to' or indexically represent the 'country as a national unit'. Scott does not pursue the implications of the idea of the 'national unit'. For the stamp to represent 'the country as a national unit' presupposes the already existing 'unity' of the 'national' (Scott, 1995, p.14,; Becker and Lenz, 2013, p.6,; Meyer, 2009, pp.2-9). Stamps continually invent the effects of national unity that emerge from their primary function. They imagine 'national unity-effects' that produce the appearance of political process of unification. It is as if state centralisation has already taken place. This retroactive capacity confirms the existence of the 'state' as the entity that has already undertaken the work of 'unifying' the nation through the process of centralisation (Mitchell, 1991, pp.77-95,; Penrose, 2011, pp.430-439,; Fuller, 2008, pp.525- 534;, Mwangi, 2002, pp.31- 62). Stamps are state fictions that produce state effects. To the proud patriots of the Asante Nation, it was humiliating to read the Directory of the Republic of Ghana's assertion that:

The Independence commemorative issue of 4 values each bear a portrait of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, then Prime Minister (now President of the Republic), to bring the great significance of Independence to the minds of the people of Ghana, as well as

proclaiming the fact of Independence to other people throughout the world (*The Directory of the Republic of Ghana 1961- 62 including Trade Index and Biographical Section*, 1961, p.116).

What made the Nkrumah stamps unbearable for Busia was their implication that Ghana's Independence required the sacrifice of Asante self-determination. The presence of millions of stamps multiplied this humiliation. From the perspective of the NLM, the Nkrumah stamps were more dictatorial than the CPP itself. There were, however, possibilities of philatelic opposition by two distinct operations of iconoclasm. Iconoclasm emerged in the intentional iconoclasm of the overprint and the inadvertent iconoclasm of the postmark. For the first to occur, the NLM would have to become the ruling party, as they did after 1966. The second, however, was more important because it was built into the infrastructure of Ghana's postal system. All postal systems, regardless of location, function on the precondition of cancellation of the prepaid token of the postage stamp in order to ensure the latter cannot be reused. This cancellation required workers at the postal offices of Cape Coast and Accra to mechanically 'frank' or disfigure the head of Nkrumah thousands of times each day (Gibbons 2009, p.241). To standardise 'uniform postage' meant systematically defacing Nkrumah's vignette. Ghana's postal system automatically cancelled its newly fashioned head of state. Each time a Ghanaian citizen sent a letter, she handled mutilated effigies of the father of the nation. The postal system sanctioned an obligatory iconoclasm that was protected by its necessarily 'anonymous media economy' (Siegert 1999, p.114). Ghanaians were supposed to overlook the ongoing iconoclasm inflicted on the head of Nkrumah by the postal system's 'discursive sovereignty' (Siegert, 1999, pp.114). It is this intimate familiarity with images of mechanical decapitation that prompts Countess Koblonska to ask her second question:

Is this the first step towards dictatorship?
Or the next stage in its decapitation?

The Countess' questions are addressed to the daily inattention of iconic decapitation through mechanical cancellation. Such habitual disregard could be said to constitute the 'infrastructural unconscious' of Ghana's modernity. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* can be understood as a study of the structure of feeling engendered by living with images that promote an iconoclasm directed at Nkrumah even as they idealise Nkrumah as the nation's founding father.

3.

***Statecraft*: An Incomplete Timeline of Independence determined by Digital Auction**

It is the invention of the post that has produced politics.
--Montesquieu

A Chronography of African Independence

Statecraft: An Incomplete Timeline of Independence determined by Digital Auction henceforth referred to as *Statecraft* can be described, initially, as a chronological, or more precisely, as a chronographic chart of postage stamps issued before and after the formal ceremonies of Independence hosted by Africa's newly independent nation-states. *Statecraft* was premiered at the solo exhibition by The Otolith Group titled *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* at Bergen Kunsthall from 17 January to 9 March 2014.

Figure 21. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Left Side.

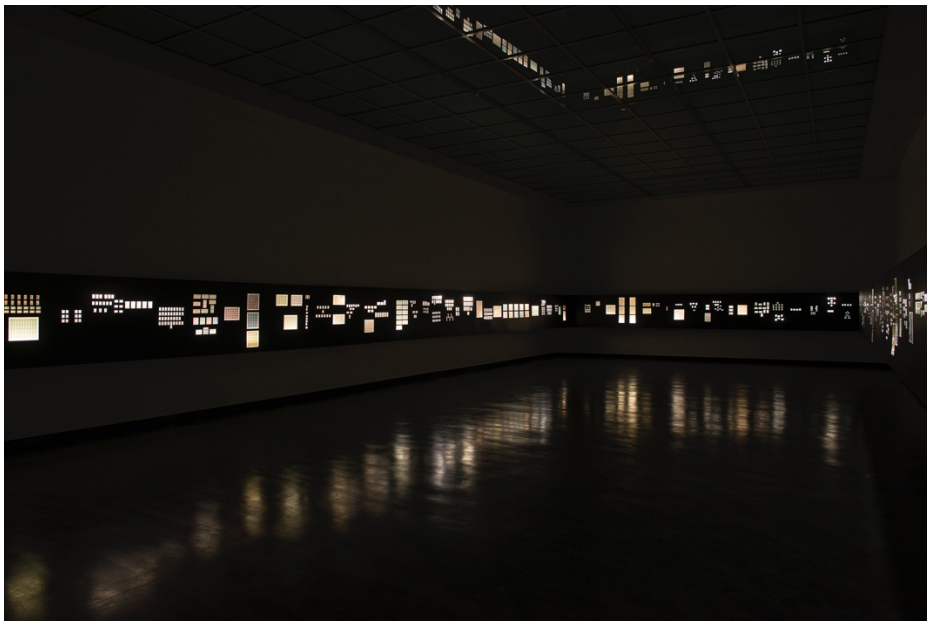

Figure 22. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Left Side and Centre

Figure 23. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen.

Figure 24. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Right Side.

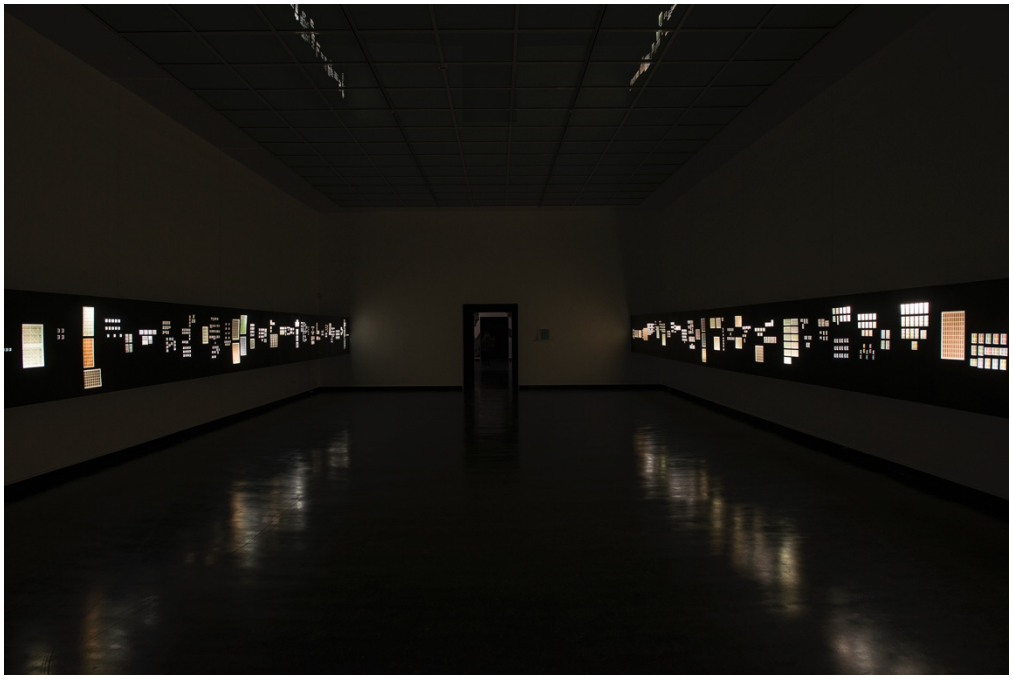

Figure 25. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Entrance.

Its second version was installed at In *the Year of the Quiet Sun* at CASCO- Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, in partnership with Artsonje Center, Seoul, from 15 November 2014 to 20 January 2015.

Figure 26. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Panel for Republic of Congo, CASCO Art Institute: Office for Art, Design and Theory Utrecht.

The third version was installed in the group exhibition *After Year Zero: Geographies of Collaboration* at Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw from June 12 to August 23 2015. The increased number of stamps extended the work from 45 metres to 50 metres to 53 metres.

Figure 27. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Perspective from Republic of Liberia, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2015

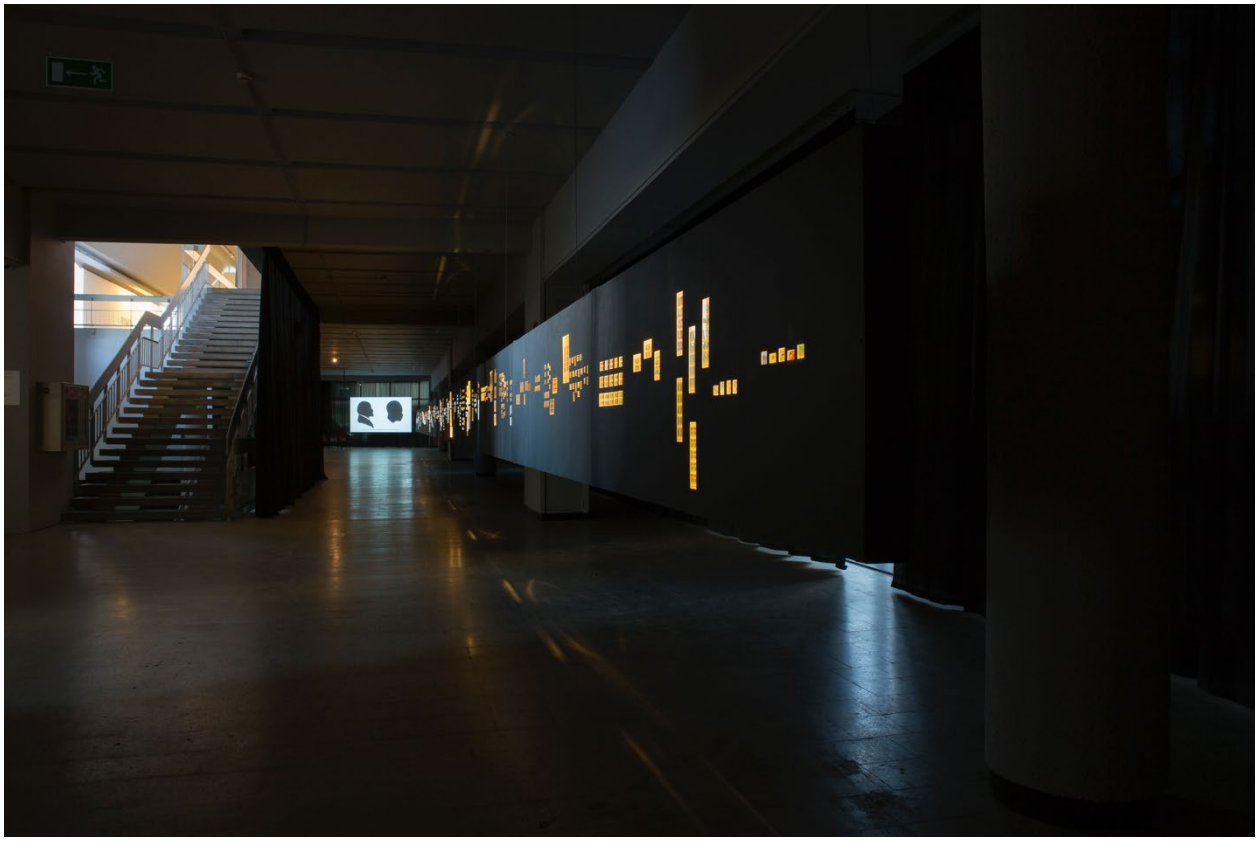

Figure 28. The Otolith Group*, Statecraft,* 2014 [Installation]. Perspective from Republic of South Sudan, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2015

Postage stamps exist in two types: definitive and commemorative. Definitive postage stamps are issued for letters and remain in permanent circulation. Commemorative stamps are issued to honour the anniversaries of historical occasions and are withdrawn from circulation after one year. *Statecraft* uses postmarked definitive and commemorative stamps that exist as decommodified artefacts traded on specialist auction sites. *Statecraft* works with 'long sets' of stamps that have crossed the 'putative boundaries between the domestic context of the owned possession and the public remit of the commodity for sale' (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2009, pp. 306-7). To understand the role played by commemorative stamp designs, it is necessary to turn towards historical accounts of Independence ceremonies. In *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology*, Nkrumah recalled the ceremony of 6 March 1957:

From the House I drove the short distance to the Polo Ground where a crowd estimated at 100,000 was waiting to hear the midnight pronouncement of Independence. As I mounted the rostrum, together with senior members of my Government, a great cry of welcome arose. I looked around over the vast crowds and waited for a few moments until the stroke of midnight. Slowly the Union Jack was lowered, and amid terrific excitement the red, green and gold flag of Ghana was raised. Then I began to speak (Nkrumah, 1961, p.107, pp.120 -1).

The ‘midnight pronouncements of Independence’ uttered by Nkrumah before thousands of people gathered in national stadiums to witness the lowering of the colonial flag, the raising of the national flag and the playing of the new national anthem constitute the social choreography of ceremony that brought the new nation into existence. Since the 1960s, such so-called ‘Independence ceremonials’ have come under increasing criticism from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, among others, as examples of mere ‘flag independence’. From the disillusioned perspective of the late 1960s when one party states and military dictatorships dominated Africa’s political landscape, ‘Flag Independence’ appeared as a ‘dance of the masquerades called Independence for Africa’ designed to hoodwink gullible audiences (Aidoo, 1977, p.95,; Thiong'o, 1981, pp.119-20). As Walter Rodney argued however, the formal transfer of power enacted by so-called ‘Flag Days’ should not be dismissed, even, or especially, when it was tempting to do so. Flag Days instead needed to be situated within the broader historical context of decolonization. From this perspective, flag independence appears as a ‘positive development out of colonialism’. Understood as the effort to secure the ‘attributes of sovereignty’, it can be appreciated as ‘one stage in the process of regaining African independence’ from the legal structure of extractive capitalism formalised by the General Act of the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1885 (Hertslet, 1885, p.43,; Förster, Mommsen and Robinson, 1988;, Mieville, 2005, pp.230-256,; Craven, 2015, pp.31-59).

By 1885, argued Rodney:

when Africa was politically and juridically partitioned, the peoples and polities had already lost a great deal of freedom. In its relations with the external world, Africa had lost a considerable amount of control over its own economy, ever since the fifteenth century. However, the loss of political sovereignty at the time of the Scramble was decisive. By the same reasoning, it is clear that the regaining of political sovereignty by the 1960s constitutes an inescapable first step in regaining maximum freedom to choose and to develop in all spheres (Rodney, 1981, p.205).

What *Statecraft* attends to are the ways in which stamps visually represented Independence, defined by Rodney as 'the regaining of political sovereignty' and understood as 'an inescapable first step in regaining maximum freedom.' *Statecraft* studies the ways in which the Independence ceremonial is simplified, stylised and standardised by the historical postage stamp design. The meanings of simplification and standardisation are not dismissed as propaganda but are taken seriously as practices of statecraft (Scott, 1998, pp.1-83). In paying attention to the stylised social fact of the postage stamp, *Statecraft* uses the instrumental visuality of stamp design to speculate on the modes of address made by the ruling parties that formed new governments. The mass manufactured artefact of the postage stamp provides tools for studying the postal politics of the new African polities. Analysing how *Statecraft* works entails adopting the curious juridical language of legal personification. The designers, governmental committees, departments, Cabinets and security printers that carried out the backstage work of commissioning, designing and printing postage stamps in the Gold Coast and Britain are personified in the juridical fiction of the state as an 'international personality' that 'acts' upon the 'world stage.'

Studying *Statecraft* entails a focus upon the ways in which Africa's newly independent nation-states visually represented the meanings of 'Africa', the 'new', 'independence', 'the 'nation' and the 'state' to their newly internationalized citizens. The postage stamp pictorially resolved the irresolvable political problems of 'independence', the 'nation' and the 'state' faced by each new government by unifying the image of the 'nation' with the

centralised idea of the ‘state’ and simplifying the idea of the ‘people’ with the abbreviated idea of ‘territory’. In doing so, stamps designs standardised mass produced, metonymic, miniaturist, idealized, normative iconographies that presented the incomplete processes of decolonisation as accomplished social facts. The labour of converting the contingency of the present into the achieved image of the present was the most representational and consequential work of the postage stamp’s postal politics. In his project of ‘unthinking’ the habitual categories of decolonisation, Gary Wilder has argued that historical scholarship tends to presuppose a ‘methodological nationalism’ which assumes that ‘national independence is the necessary form of colonial emancipation.’ Such histories, asserts Wilder, mistakes the ‘product of decolonization (sic) for an optic through which to study it (Wilder, 2015, p.4). What *Statecraft* suggests is that stamps systematically commit Wilder’s ‘mistake’ of methodological nationalism. Stamp designs treat the outcome of decolonisation as an aesthetic operation of representation. Given the independent African state’s monopoly over its conception, design, printing, distribution and receipt, postage stamps’ aesthetic affirmation of methodological nationalism can be understood not so much as a ‘mistake’ but as its fundamental tool of statecraft. The ongoing work of graphic ‘stampcraft’ renders the stamp an ambiguous historical material for artistic research and an ambivalent critical object for visual study that works by staging a ‘face to face encounter between an existing image and a figurative project dedicated to observing it.’ In *Statecraft*, Brenez’s general formulation of the ‘study of the image by means of the image itself’ takes on the precise spatial form of a confrontation between the ‘long sets’ of Independence stamps and the timeline dedicated to its observation (Brenez, 2002, p.25, 2009, p.129, 2011, pp.162- 3).

Platforms provide an armature and induce processes to conform to it.
--Benjamin Bratton (Bratton, 215, p.42)

Determination by Digital Auction

Statecraft's four thousand stamps attempt to form a timeline of Independence that begins in 1947 with stamps issued by the Republic of Liberia to commemorate its Centenary (Kazanjian, 2016, p.35, p.38) and concludes in 2011 with stamps issued by the Republic of South Sudan to mark its first anniversary. This beginning and ending prompts the question of why *Statecraft* begins its study of Independence in 1947 and concludes in 2011. The answer is that its starting point and its conclusion are enabled and constrained by the stamp collections available for acquisition on existing online markets. What *Statecraft* makes visible is the extent to which online collections exist within market parameters set by availability and price. The form of *Statecraft* is not determined by Digital Auction. Rather, its conditions of its existence are predetermined by the 'electronic auction market' pioneered by eBay in 1997 (Cohen, 2002, p.20,; Epley, 2006, pp.151- 167,; Chircu and Hoffman, 2001, pp.45-66,; Viegas, 2007). eBay promotes itself as 'the world's largest marketplace' traded by amateur and professional collectors (van der Grip, 2012, pp.42-3). Understanding *Statecraft* therefore requires a preliminary understanding of the digital marketplace. Adam Cohen explains how Pierre Omidyar programmed the 'free web auction' of AuctionWeb in 1995 which he renamed eBay in 1997. eBay emerged from Omidyar's disagreement with the format of the Initial public offering or IPO that sold stock at an inflated price:

Omidyar's solution was an online auction. He had never attended an auction himself and did not know much about how auctions worked. He just thought of them as 'interesting market mechanisms' that would naturally produce a fair and correct price for stocks, or for anything anyone wanted to sell (Cohen, 2002, p.20).

As Omidyar explained to Cohen:

Instead of posting a classified ad saying ‘I have this object for sale, give me a hundred dollars’, you post it and say ‘Here’s a minimum price’. If there’s more than one person interested, let them fight it out. When the fighting was done, the seller would by definition get the market price for the item, whatever that might be on a particular day (Cohen, 2002, p.20).

The online auctions take on the appearance of spontaneous order that changes each day as collectors post their collections to interfaces of pages arranged in grids of clickable jpegs. Low-res jpegs of stamp collections provide the portal for acquisition on the auction. Historically speaking, the auction has taken the forms of the English auction, the Dutch auction, the first-price sealed bid and the second-price sealed bid. In the second-price sealed bid, the buyers:

write down a bid and seal it in an envelope. The envelopes are opened and the item is awarded to the highest bidder at the second-highest price. This auction was used by stamp collectors in the 19th century to sell stamps by mail’ (Varian, 2008, pp.9-11).

According to Varian, the auction used by eBay is a ‘form of second-price auction in which ‘the bidder who programs his or her bidding agent with the highest value wins, but only has to pay the second highest bid’. Dewan and Hsu argue, however, that eBay’s auction method appears to be an ascending-bid English auction that functions as:

a ‘proxy bidding’ format, wherein bidders submit a proxy bid, or the maximum amount they are willing to pay for the item. eBay software automatically adjusts the high bid, so that the bidder with the highest proxy bid remains the high bidder. This process continues until the end of the auction duration, with the high bidder at that point obtaining the item at the second highest proxy bid, plus one bid increment. eBay does not collect any fees from bidders or buyers. Fees are only charged to sellers, and they

consist of insertion fees and a final value fee that is proportional to the ending bid (Dewan and Hsu, 2004, pp.500-501).

What links these distinct types of auction is the idea of ‘fighting’ between buyers understood as a ‘tournament of value’ set by price (Appadurai,1988, p.21). The mechanism for market pricing does not emerge from nor does it constitute the so-called ‘invisible hand’ of the market imagined by Adam Smith. According to Matteo Pasquinelli, the topos of the ‘invisible hand’:

has been repeated to describe the virtues of the free market, but the expression ‘invisible mind’ would be more accurate for framing such a distributed and spontaneous coordination of prices. In Hayek’s vision the market seems to be run by an invisible general intellect that cannot be objectified in any machinery, but only in commodity prices (Pasquinelli, 2016, p.8).

Friedrich Hayek insisted that the market’s ‘invisible mind’ should be understood as:

more than a metaphor to describe the price system as a kind of machinery for registering change, or a system of telecommunications which enables individual producers to watch merely the movement of a few pointers, as an engineer might watch the hands of a few dials, in order to adjust their activities to changes of which they may never know more than is reflected in the price movement (Hayek, 1945, p.527).

Hayek believed that prices were ‘the best signals for condensing and transmitting all necessary economic information’. Prices worked like ‘a collective computer’ or what he called a ‘system of telecommunications’ (Pasquinelli, 2016, p.8). This vision of the market as a system operated by producers or engineers seemed to prefigure Omidyar’s idea of an electronic auction market composed of continuous competition between prices. If the market price is the technological apriori for the existence of *Statecraft* then *Statecraft* could be described as an experiment in market formalism in which the system of pricing acts as the apriori of its content and the precondition of its form. If content and

form are defined by Hayek's distribution of prices coordinated by Omidyar's digital platforms, then the platform becomes the technological apriori for *Statecraft* which can be understood as a study in platform formalism or, more precisely, as an experiment in 'platformalism.' Understanding how platforms shape electronic markets not only entails an insight into the ways the online auction, the online collection and online payment transfer work together to constitute a single platform. It presupposes a more general theory of the platform. At its simplest, the digital platform can be defined as a 'digital infrastructure that enables two or more groups to interact' (Srnicek, 2017, p.43). According to Srnicek:

platforms position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, suppliers, and even physical objects (Srnicek, 2017, p.43).

The intermediary draws in collectors, specialists, buyers and sellers, operating as a common infrastructure that treats each 'user' as one out of 'many actors'. Systems and social processes tend to:

transform themselves according to the needs of the platforms that might serve and support them, both in advance of their participation with that platform and as a result of that participation (Bratton, 2015, p. 46).

The collection understood as 'the continual recommencement of a controlled cycle' transforms itself according to the needs of platforms that serves it (Baudrillard,1996, p. 95). How do platforms such as eBay induce collections to conform to them? How, and in which ways, are collections configured by platforms? Thinking through such questions entails an awareness of the pre-existing classification systems used to organise Independence stamps as collections. *Statecraft* dos not restrict itself to stamps issued to honour Independence ceremonials. It integrates stamps that celebrate the military coup d'états that claim to liberate the people from the ruling party, stamps that display the flowers that constitute the floriography of the state and stamps that

announce the newly born nation's admission to the General Assembly of the United Nations. It situates this 'pictorial census of the state's patrimony' within the context of the world historical process of decolonisation (Anderson, 2006, p.182,; Nkrumah, 1961, pp.95-110,; Powell, 1984, pp.103-116,; Rathbone, 2008, pp.705- 718,; Cannadine, 2008, p.661,; Shipway, 2008, pp.747-759,; Smith and Jeppeson, 2017,; Holland, Williams and Barringer, 2010,; Steinbrugge, 2011, pp.9- 20).

Under decolonisation, the meanings of 'world', 'history' and 'process' undergo profound changes that require governments depict with the iconologies and iconographies of stamp design. Decolonisation is obliged to enter into the broad 'field of recognition that sought active political, social, cultural and economic integration of Africa into the international system' (Enwezor, 2012, p.13). But what kind of recognition was enabled and constrained by what kind of integration into what kind of system? Underlying the act of recognition is the process of 'juristic baptism' of an entity as a state by other states that operate along distinct and conflictual theories of constitutive and declaratory recognition. The former states that the act of recognition alone 'confers international personality on an entity purporting to be a state.' The latter, by contrast, argues that recognition rests upon an entity that 'meets the criteria for statehood set out under international law' (Mutua, 1995, p. 1125,; Miéville, 2004, pp.235-240). *Statecraft* suggests that each new nation is obliged to seek recognition within the existing system of 'nationalist internationalism' It is as if the international format of the 'nation form' established by the United Nations is enacted by the serial form of the postage stamp which works to reify 'the common-sense belief that self-determination required an independent national state' (Balibar, 1990, p.345,; Smith, 2004, p.405). The format of the postage stamp allegorises the constraints imposed upon the process of decolonisation by the legally enforced forms of nationhood and statehood that attempt to organise the futures of African political life according to predetermined designs (Vasko, 2017, p.178,; James and Leake, 2015,; Allmann, 2013, pp.225- 246,; Westad, 2007).

One man rule is further buttressed by mechanical means in the modern sector as well: President Nkrumah appears on his country's coins, while President Houphouet-Boigny adorns postage stamps: a square is named after the first, a bridge after the second.
--Aristide R. Zolberg (Zolberg, 1962, p.6)

Do the colour sequences of the long sets perhaps refract the light of a strange sun?
--Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2016, p. 81).

The Interscalar Imagination of Infrastructure

Statecraft sensitises the spectator in the shifting complexities of Africa's Independence. These changes entail an understanding of the changing scale of stamps as infrastructure. Stamps can be seen as the visible face of infrastructure for the exchange of the ideals of Independence. *Statecraft,* however, is not in itself infrastructure. It is an interscalar vehicle that models infrastructure at the scale of the installation. It brings spectators face to face with the interscalar imagination of nations linked by infrastructural networks. As Gabrielle Hecht writes in *Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence*, the practice of scalemaking is not only a question of monumental size or granular detail. Scale has to do with:

categories: what they reveal or hide, the ways in which they do (or do not) nest. And it is about orientation: how we position ourselves, what we position ourselves against, and what comparisons such locations do (or do not) authorize (Hecht, 2018, p.114).

Scale can be understood in two ways: as a 'category of analysis' for understanding what is at stake in *Statecraft* and as a 'category of practice' that is practised by *Statecraft* itself (Hecht, 2018, p.114). *Statecraft* can be understood as an interscalar vehicle that can be defined as a 'tool or object of analysis' that moves between 'spatial and temporal scales'. It is to be understood, not as an essence, but by 'its deployment and uptake, its potential to make political claims, craft social relationships, or simply open our

imaginations' (Hecht, 2018, p.115). According to Brian Larkin in *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, infrastructure can be defined as built networks that:

facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms, they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life (Larkin, 2013, p.328).

Larkin argues that infrastructure played a critical role in the colonial system in British West Africa by functioning as 'connecting tissue linking disparate territories into a state and facilitating the rise of centralized political administration' while simultaneously representing the visual 'evidence of the civilising promise of colonial technical superiority' (Larkin 2008, p.8). Larkin pointed to the examples of colonial radio and colonial cinema in Northern Nigeria that broadcast infrastructural projects and were themselves infrastructures that conjoined 'scientific rationality with spectacle'. What is important to note is that:

the tie between the representational logic of infrastructure and the state was not loosened with the end of colonialism but intensified, only now infrastructure came to represent the promise of independent rule rather than colonial supremacy' (Larkin, 2008, p.8).

If Infrastructure represents Independence's promise of modernisation, Larkin tends to emphasise its monumental scale. What *Statecraft* demonstrates is the extent to which postal system, understood as infrastructure, neither entailed nor required the epic scale of Larkin's 'colonial sublime' (Larkin, 2008, p.7, pp. 16-47). Stamps were neither hard infrastructure nor heavy industry. They could be defined instead as the tactile face of the soft network. They functioned as the touchpoint of communicative colonialism or as an intensive, intrusive serial net or sieve of communicative nationhood. In the words of

Ayn Rand, postage stamps functioned as the ‘concrete, visible symbols of an enormous abstraction: of the communications net embracing the world’ (Rand, 1971, p.5). Stamps diffused their value systems throughout the capillaries of daily life. They slipped under the threshold of critical attention, saturating the urban fabric of everyday life. They promoted the obligations of citizenship at the level of the ambient, the osmotic and the banal. They took advantage of their seriality to insinuate their ideals between fingertips and tongues. In the process of routinizing the nation’s new norms, they necessarily trivialised those norms. It was as if the new states had decided that the derision that flowed from the banalization of its values was a price worth paying for fostering a ‘serial intimacy’ with state sovereignty (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 88). As Michael Kevane asked of the postage stamps issued by the newly independent Republic of Sudan:

Does the image of the President in leopard skin fez instill fear and abjection, or a derisive and dismissive grunt in the ordinary citizen? (Kevane, 2008, p.91,; Siegert, 1999, p.114).

Kevane’s question pointed to the ambivalence aroused by the ubiquity of stamps. The responses of fear, abjection, derision and dismissiveness presuppose a familiarity that indicate the extent to which the simplification, stylization, serialization and standardisation of postage stamps seemed tailor made for the unity demanded from citizens by the one-party governments that ruled the majority of Africa’s ‘party-states’ throughout its decade of Independence and beyond (Zolberg, 1966). The format of the postage stamp *qua* postage stamp seemed to argue for national unity irrespective of its design. Its reduced surface area seemed to leave no room for difference or division. Its restricted size admitted only one figure or face: the founding father that personified the Party that unified the state in the name of the nation. In bringing spectators into contact with the means by which new states legitimated themselves, *Statecraft* aimed to exhibit stamps as an infrastructural norm rather than an exception. More precisely, *Statecraft* aimed to bring spectators face to face with the norm presupposed by infrastructure. A norm that indicated African states had already achieved modernisation. The process of modernisation was presupposed by the existence of the state fictions known as postage

stamps. The stamps' existence presupposed an infrastructure that required the interoperable media of the letter, the adhesive envelope, the mailbox or the 'pillar letterbox', the mail slot or the 'letter-box' cut into the front door and the labouring body of the postal workers that worked as 'Letter Carriers'. This media system in its turn required a territorial grid that organised houses, streets, cities, villages, districts, regions and nations according to a the political geography of addressability (Hill, 1837, p. 22, p.30,; Derrida, 1987, pp.54-56,pp.64-7, pp.101-108, pp.112-113, pp.123-4, pp.138-139,; Bennington, 1990, pp.121-137,; Mattelart, 1994,; Siegert. 1999, pp.108-121,; Peters, 1999,; Winthrop-Young, 2002, pp.143-158, pp. 329-362). As Bratton argues:

the assignment of a unique postal address to a building gives it a certain legal, political entity as a public entity to which and from which messages can be sent, and the official enumeration of these identities by the state has been an essential feature of the political modernity of cities and a source of sovereign legitimacy for their governance (Bratton 2015, pp.193-4).

The political geography of the 'addressing regime' is developed by *WORLD 3*. *Statecraft*, by contrast, focuses on the visual imagination of rule by centralization. If newly independent states were concerned with linking, representing and facilitating the centralization of administration, as Larkin argued, then a critical role, for postage stamps, was to participate in the work of visual representation, linking and facilitating rule by centralisation. These three types of state-making or statecraft could be characterised under the term 'postal politics'. The notion of 'postal politics' was formulated by Bennington in order to elaborate Montesquieu's statement that the invention of the post produced politics (Bennington, 1990, pp.121- 137,; Monaville, 2013). What is at stake in *Statecraft* is not so much Montesquieu's intriguing insight into the relation between the temporality of the post and the postal as governance. What is more salient is Sartre's account of postal politics as colonial rule in the Belgian Congo. In *The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba* Sartre argued that Belgium's postal infrastructure imposed order throughout the dependent territory of the colony. Patrice

Lumumba’s experience within this colonial network allowed Sartre to pose the urgent relation of the postal politics of liberation through unification.

To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than 'a workman's wage', all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat – that is our immediate aim. --Vladimir I. Lenin (Lenin, 1968, p.92)

How sad must a customer feel when, running hastily to the post office to drop an important and extremely urgent letter, he receives this ready-made answer: 'the office is closed'. --Patrice Hemery Lumumba (1955,p. 53)

The Principal Characteristic

Sartre approached the postal system as an infrastructure for analysing the crisis of counterrevolution in the Congo during the 1950s and 1960s (De Witte 2002, Nzongala-Ntalaja, 2007, 2014,; O' Brien 1962,; Nkrumah, 1967,; First, 1970,; Monaville 2013). As Monaville points out, Sartre's account of the postal network as a 'centralized communication system' transposed Lenin's vision of the Soviet economy organised along 'the lines of the postal service' to the Congo (Lenin,1968,p.92). The postal network, according to Sartre, conveyed the colonial government's orders to the police who transmitted them to the Force Publique. Independence from colonial rule thus required a theoretical praxis capable of redirecting the colonial network so as to convey the ideals that would link the regions together by and with the new principles of Pan-Congolese unity. Lumumba's years spent as a postal clerk within the colonial postal system in the 1950s provided him with the networked knowledge required to respond to the counterrevolution that split Congo's first Republic before its unification:

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 gendarmerie 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, would receive information from remote villages, concentrate it, base the direction of its policies on it and send information and orders by the same route to its representatives in every little hamlet. The Government atomised 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 (Sartre, 2001, p.190).

Lumumba's postal experience might engender an anti-colonial imagination of infrastructure capable of supporting a politics of national unification. Reversing the direction of centralisation could facilitate the integration between Congo's disparate territories. If Sartre's analysis stressed the reversibility and contingency of the movement towards Independence, postage stamps, by contrast, represented Independence as an accomplished social fact. The secessionist states of Katanga and South Kasai delinked themselves from Lumumba's policy of national integration by connecting themselves with the infrastructural networks of the 'Southern African economic complex' that:

extended from the Congo Basin all the way to the Cape of Good Hope, with mining companies, white settlers and their backers in the Western establishment waging a vigorous campaign to preserve European interests and white supremacy in Central and Southern Africa. Against the national and social aspirations of the black masses for freedom and material prosperity, the counterrevolution was aimed at coopting traditional rulers and reactionary or moderate intellectuals in the preservation of the status quo in the name of bogus formulas such as 'partnership', 'internal settlement', 'homeland independence', or independent statehood emptied of its emancipatory thrust' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2014, p.105).

A coup becomes legal when it succeeds, but when it fails it becomes unlawful.
--Lieutenant Arthur (First, 1970, p.401)

He first had the lion as his emblem of leadership. But later he had the leopard, inside his victory sign. He had that put on his postage stamps, just the way I painted it.
--Tshibumba Kanda Matulu (Fabian, 1996,p. 141)

Disputed Sovereignty

What *Statecraft* studied were the ways in which political entities that represented 'independent statehood emptied of its emancipatory thrust', in the words of Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, issued postage stamps that were pictorially indistinguishable from their adversaries. *Statecraft* revealed the ways in which postage stamps issued by the mineral rich province of Katanga and the diamond region of South Kasai in 1960 designed philatelic claims to statehood. Katanga seceded from central government on 11 July 1960 to declare itself the Autonomous State of Katanga under Moise Tshombe's leadership of the Confederation des Associations Tribales du Katanga or Conakat thereby triggering the so-called Congo Crisis. South Kasai followed suit, declaring itself the Autonomous State of South Kasai on 8 August 1960 under the leadership of Albert Kalondji of MNC-K or Mouvement National Congolaise- Kalondji. Throughout the years of counterrevolution, these 'autonomous states' continued to issue their own stamps. Their stamps did not announce their widely known role as 'the voice of the Union Miniere de Haut Katanga and other companies speaking through African mouths' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2014, p.105). Instead, they asserted their sovereignty even as Tshombe and Kalondji contested the constitutional legitimacy of the Republic of Congo's sovereignty.

What was at stake was the postage stamp's capacity to confer and visualise legitimacy. The stamps issued by the 'autonomous states' of Katanga or South Kasai from 1960 to 1963 were indistinguishable from any other internationally recognised nation-state. They adopted the same iconography as the state from which they seceded. The 'autonomous

states' of Katanga and South Kasai availed themselves of the philatelic capacity for 'iconographic normativity' (Coccia, 2018, pp.ix- xv). Despite the refusal of the majority of African or European states to recognise their sovereignty, their claims to nationhood and sovereignty appear to have been recognised by the Universal Postal Union or by its regional organisations (Hammett, 2014, p.905,; Menon, 1964). What is required is a more detailed understanding of how and in what ways organisations formed under the auspices of the Universal Postal Union recognised postage stamps issued by states refused recognition by the international community. The UPU bestowed its 'philatelic recognition' upon illegal, unrecognised states regardless of the UN's withholding of 'juristic baptism'. Its 'philatelic baptism' conferred a 'philatelic legitimacy' upon unrecognised entities such as Katanga or South Kasai. Such a baptism operated outside and underneath the attention of historians such as wa Mutua or Miéville that located the power to grant international recognition within the United Nations. If the recognition of an entity as a state by other states rested on conflicting theories of constitutive and declaratory recognition that declared, firstly, that the act of recognition alone 'confers international personality on an entity purporting to be a state' and secondly, that recognition rested upon an entity that met 'the criteria for statehood set out under international law' then neither of these practices accounted for the existence of 'philatelic statehood' conferred as the Universal Postal Union (Mutua, 1995, p.1125).

The UPU's monopolistic capacity to grant 'philatelic sovereignty' produced the visual effect of international state recognition, even, or rather especially in the absence of juristic recognition. The political confusion generated by the visual indistinction between philatelic recognition and juristic baptism was exploited by the secessionist states of Katanga and South Kasai that recognised the capacity of the former to stand in for the latter. Why else would Katanga and South Kasai insist upon issuing postage stamps throughout the political instability of counterrevolution? By sanctioning unrecognised sovereignty, stamps issued by 'breakaway' states were mobilised on behalf of the hostilities those states had unleashed. From the perspective of postal politics, postage stamps cannot be characterised as 'paper ambassadors' to use the phrase popularised by Dennis Altman. On the contrary, stamps are better understood as apologists,

partisans, sycophants or adversaries that aim to normalise the authority of the coup, sanction the sovereignty of secession and prompt gratitude for the one-man rule of the one-party state.

Running a country these days is like running a business - any business.
--Major-General A.K. Ocran (Ocran, 1977, p.139)

Operative Collusion

The iconographic isomorphism of Independence stamps issued by sovereign states and secessionist states encouraged a graphic confusion whose implications encouraged

further scrutiny. My perplexity compelled me to return to the starting point of *Statecraft* as a ‘study of the image by means of the image itself’ that leads towards ‘the vital question of what an image is capable of. Nicole Brenez’s question could be reframed as a question addressed to the postage stamp: What are stamps capable of? One response seemed to emerge from the misattributions engendered during the process of researching and acquiring postally used stamps for *Statecraft.* Instead of differentiating between iconographic similitude, perhaps the project of *Statecraft* might be understood to reside in the study of the operative collusion continually practised by postage stamps. The aim would not be to fictionalise the chronology assembled for *Statecraft*. On the contrary, by correcting and refining the chronology of Independence, the distinctions between practices of indistinction gained in resolution. What was heightened was the differentiation between the sovereignty of legally recognised nation states, the unrecognised statehood of secessionist states and the decisionist sovereignty of the military coup d’etat.

What became apparent was the capacity of postage stamps to visually enact whatever was asked of them. What are postage stamp capable of? Whatever statecraft demands from them. The difficulties entailed by this insight became more apparent during the production process of *Statecraft*. Three days before the opening of *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* at Bergen Kunsthall in 2013, the curators urged me to write a chronology that might serve as a guide through the historical succession of African Independence. Such a guide would aid visitors that encountered *Statecraft*. The existence of such a guide indicated the difficulty of interpreting the historical timeline of *Statecraft*. It suggested the Kunsthall’s unease with the legibility of *Statecraft*. This illegibility was heightened by *Statecraft*’s lack of interpretation. Without a guide, *Statecraft* presented its own existence as an unreliable guide to itself. Sensing its historical unreliability and made uneasy by its aesthetic illegibility, the curators moved to alleviate their own spectatorial anxiety by requesting a textual timeline that rendered readable *Statecraft’*s immanent timeline. My unease at this curatorial request could not be openly articulated during the days leading to the opening of the exhibition. I allowed myself to be persuaded to

provide a written guideline for the installation of *Statecraft* at Bergen Kunsthall in 2013 and at CASCO Office for Art, Design and Theory in Utrecht in 2014.

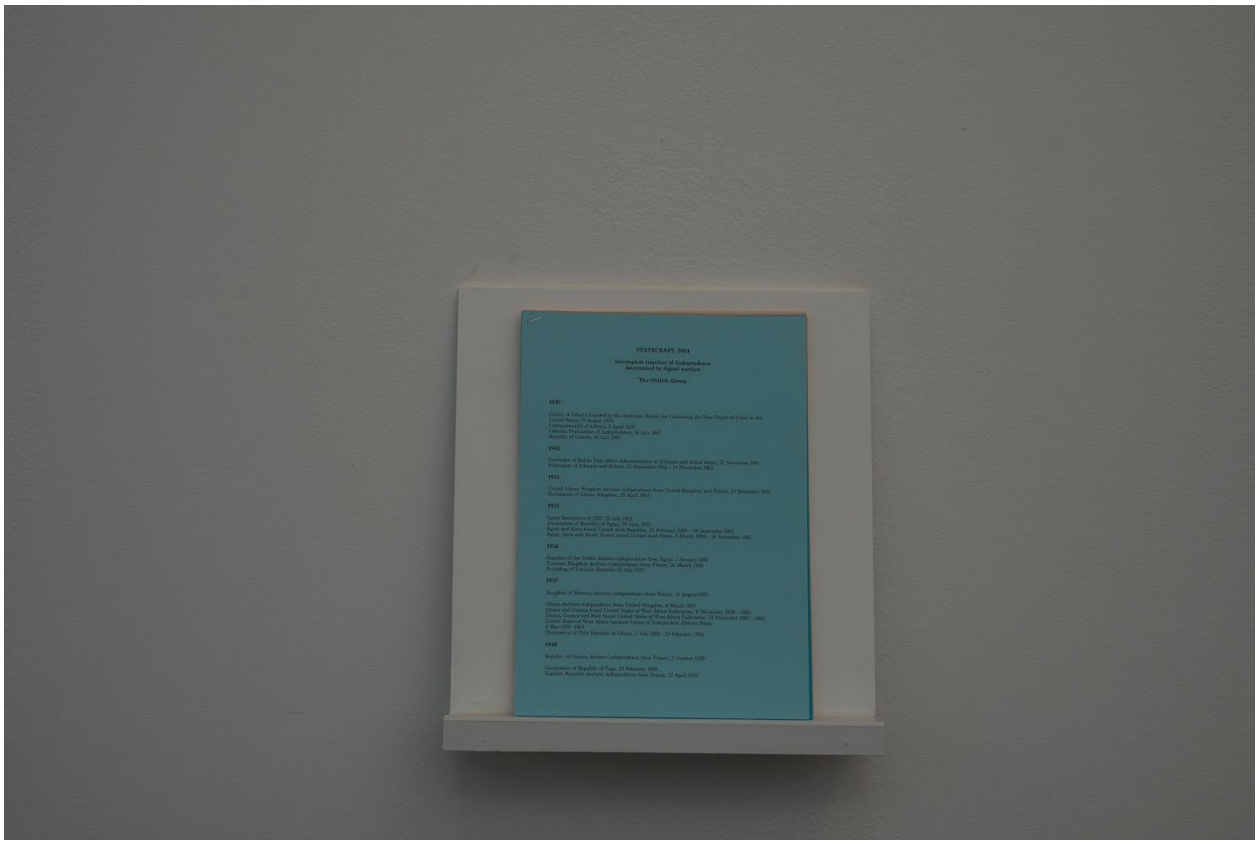

Figure 29. The Otolith Group *Statecraft*, 2014 [Installation]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Guide.

In the intervening years, the reasons for my discomfort with this innocuous request have become apparent. My unease stemmed from my awareness that the presence of ac guide encouraged an interpretation of *Statecraft* as a chronology of Independence. Such an interpretation, prompted by the work's subtitle, was not so much incorrect as insufficient. Armed with the written guide, spectators approached *Statecraft* as an invitation to encounter a historical timeline of forgotten dates from Africa's Independence. The guide encouraged viewers to think of *Statecraft* as a project animated by an archival impulse rather than as an experiment in the immanent enactment of visual study. Worse still, it allowed spectators to interpret *Statecraft* as a

naïve celebration of the historical process of African Independence. The third version of *Statecraft* at Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw finally removed the guide. In the third version, what became clear to me was the extent to which stamps operated as tools of statecraft. What differentiated *Statecraft*'s visual study of interscalarity from a critique of statecraft is its concern with the ambivalence of infrastructure and the amorality of statecraft. *Statecraft* aimed to draw contemporary attention to the postage stamp's ongoing historical capacity for integral complicity and operative collusion not in order to evaluate or denounce but to enact so as to test the conditions under which its powers becomes available and active.

4.

WORLD 3

The Third World was not a place. It was a project.
--Vijay Prashad (Prashad, 2007, p.xv).

The Third World as Platform

My artist publication is called *WORLD 3*. It actually two titles that refer to two phases of one political process. Understanding why this is the case requires an account of the rationale for its front and back cover titles. *WORLD 3* 's front title takes the form of a fraction in which the word '*WORLD'* is divided by the number '*3*'. This fraction bisects the image of President Diori Hamani that appears on a First day cover issued by the République du Niger on 3 August 1960 to celebrate its *Proclamation de Independence*.

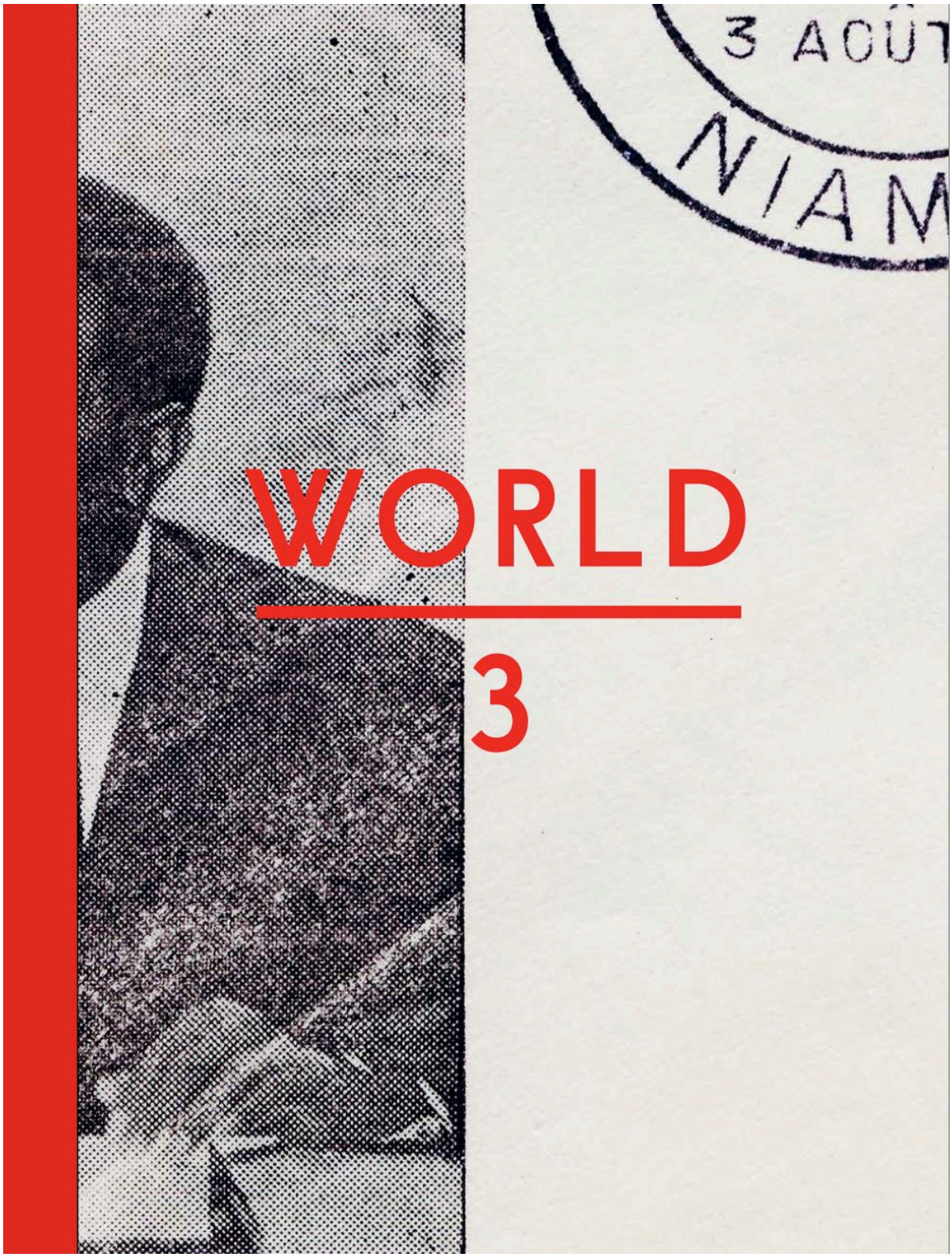

Figure 30. The Otolith Group*, WORLD 3* (2014), [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Front Cover

The phrase *WORLD 3* is my translation of the fraction *MONDE 3* that appears in one scene from Jean-Luc Godard's *Film Tract 10*, 1968.

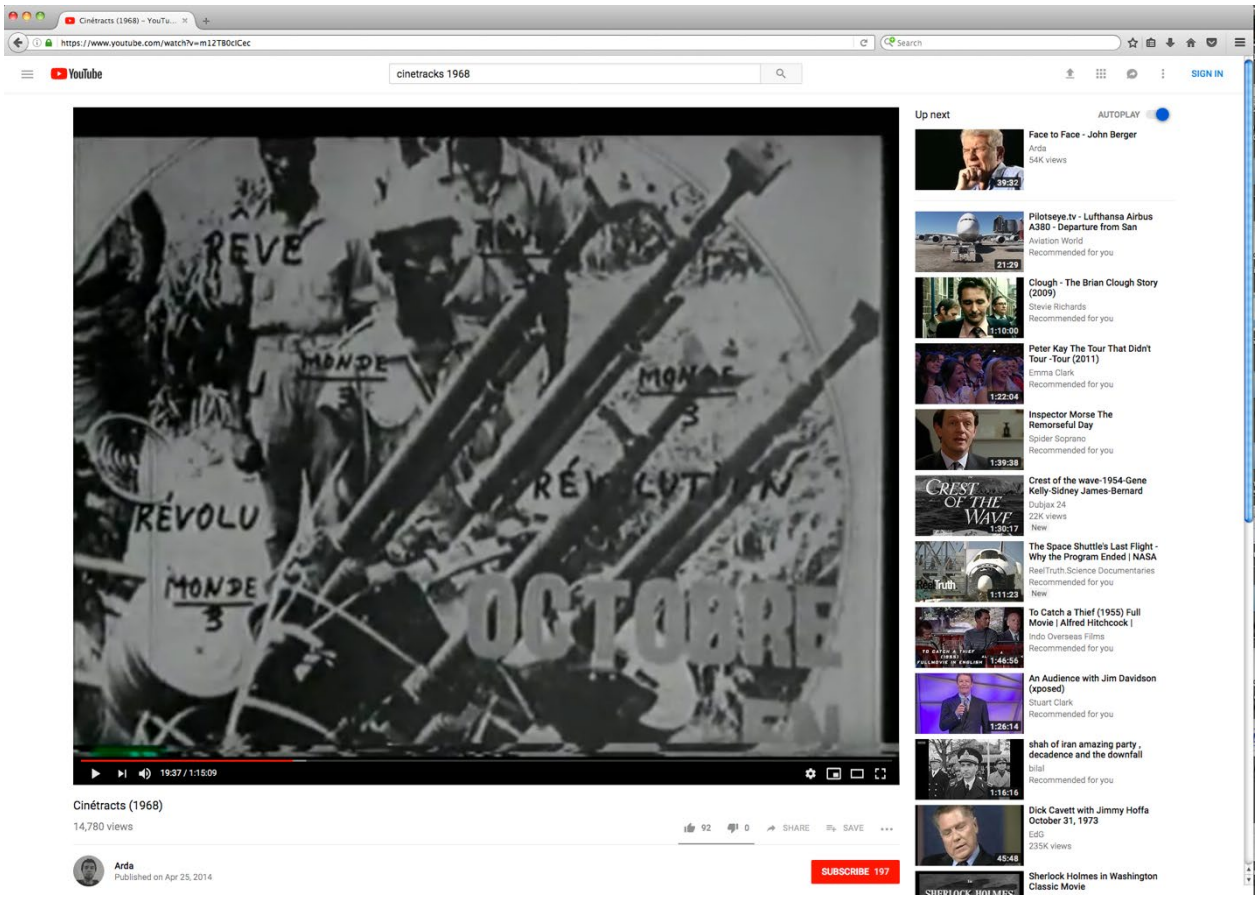

Figure 31. Jean-Luc Godard, *Film Tract 10*, 1968 [MP4]

The back cover of *WORLD 3* shows the sign of ‘O’ underscored three times. The triple underscored ‘O’ is positioned at the centre of a First day cover issued by the République du Mali on 18 March 1961 to honour the deceased President Mamadou Konate.

Figure 32. The Otolith Group, *WORLD 3*, 2014 [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Back Cover

This sign, understood as a fraction, is a quotation from one scene in Jean Luc Godard's *Le Gai Savoir*, 1968.

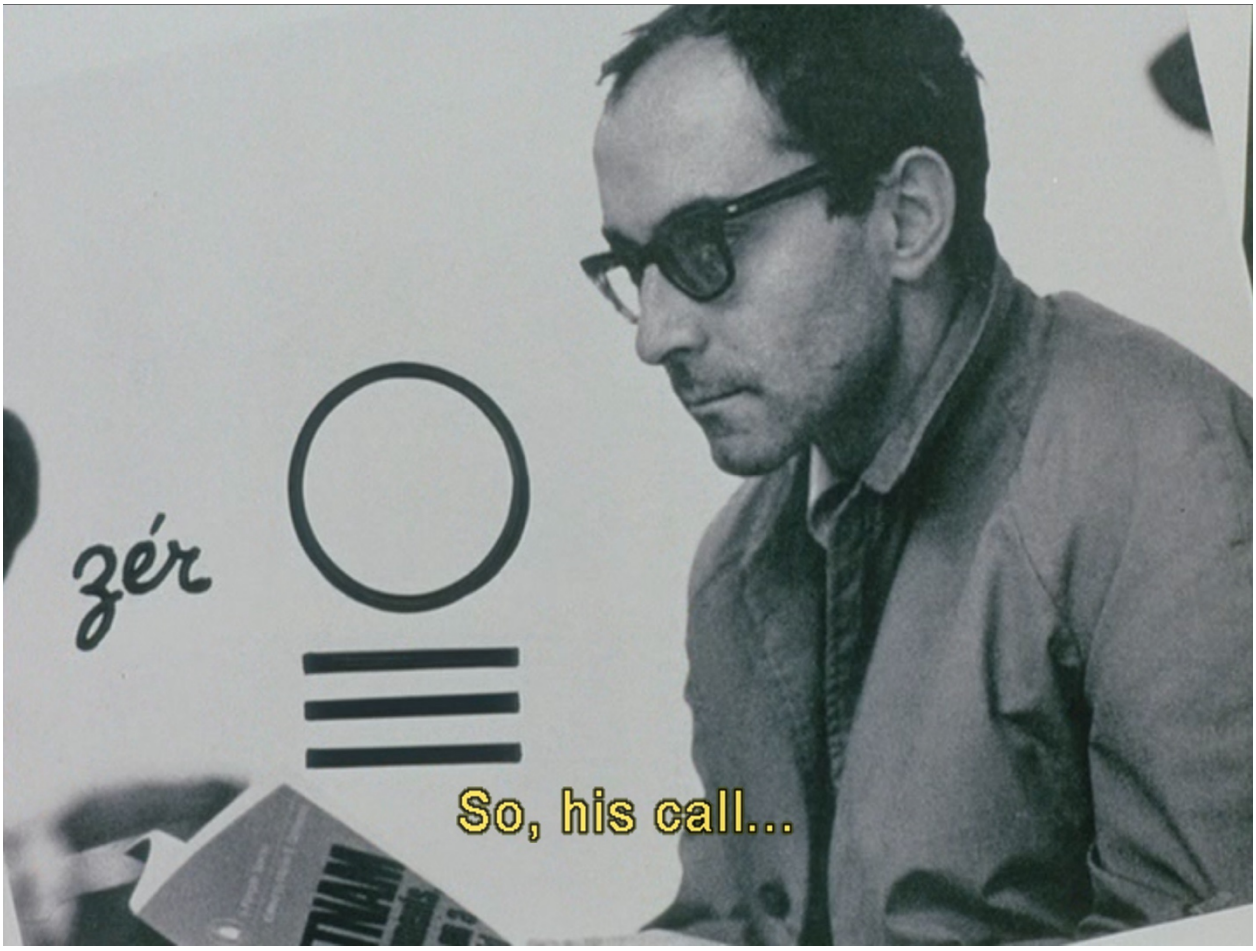

Figure 33. Jean-Luc Godard,*Le Gai Savoir,* 1968 [DVD]

WORLD 3 brings these two signs from Godard's late 1960s cinema into contemporary project concerned with the biography of African modernity under conditions of platform capitalism. What is at stake in *WORLD 3* is not a question of quotation nor a matter of adopting an artistic strategy of détournement. My idea is to reimagine the historical project of tiersmondisme or Third Worldism within a series of specific frames. These frames include the conceptualisation of the Third World as a platform, the medium of

the bookwork, the philatelic format of the First day cover, the aesthetics of statism and the structures of feeling of Afro-pessimism. My intention is to renarrate the political ideal of Third Worldism for the present.

The term *MONDE 3* appears at 19 minutes 36 seconds of *Film Tract 10* on YouTube.com.

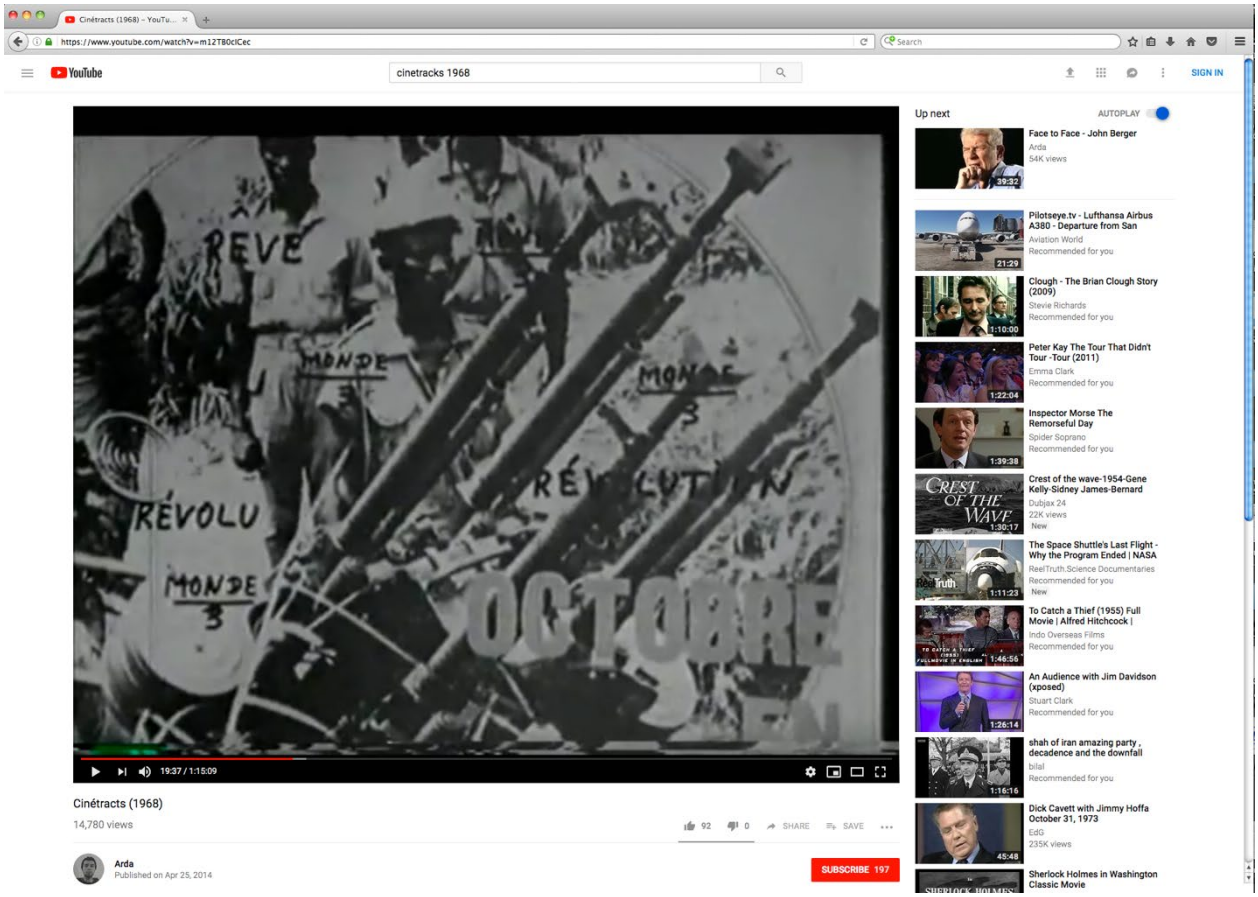

Figure 34. Jean-Luc Godard, *Film Tract 10*, 1968 [MP4]

Pausing this frame on YouTube.com, I see an unidentified black and white photograph of four unidentified, uniformed soldiers, surrounded by branches. The soldiers pose beside a rocket launcher whose eight launch tubes point rightwards. The words *OCTOBRE EN* are printed at the bottom right of the photograph. The words *REVE*, *REVOLU* and *REVOLUTION* are handwritten on the photograph. The phrase *MONDE* 3 appears four times. Firstly, on the front of the circular container propped on the ground

at frame left. Secondly, on the left shoulder of the second soldier. Thirdly, at the right of the second soldier's face which parallels the upper uniform of the third soldier. Fourthly, at the mouth of the fifth launch tube. Beyond the logic of detournément that links *film tract 10* to the collective invention of the cinétract in 1968, this photofilmic scene summarises two related but distinct political projects formulated during the 1960s. These were, firstly, the project of the 'Third World' and secondly, that of the 'Tricontinental'. Leaving aside Godard's preoccupation with the visual vocabulary of Guevarist Tricontinentalism, what concerns me is the popular understanding of the Third World. By 1968, the idea of the Third World was widely understood to describe the geopolitical division of the earth into the first world of capitalist-imperialism, the second world of socialist-communism and the newly independent states of the Third World. This Cold War formulation of political geography has been subject to multiple critiques (Sauvy, 1952, pp.81- 83,; Fanon, 1961, p.241,; Pletsch, 1981,; Spivak 1985, pp.243-261,; Young, 2003, pp.204-216,; Ross, 2002, pp. 80-99,; Prashad, 2007, pp.xv-15,; Garland Miller, 2018, pp.19-105).

My intention for *WORLD 3* is not to redeem the historical idea of the Third World but to rethink the political imagination of Third Worldism for the present. My theorisation of Third Worldism is informed by Frantz Fanon's theorisation of the Third World as a 'project'. For Fanon, the Third World was not to be understood as a specific geographical periphery. Nor did it entail the nativist invocation of a culturally unified people as either 'ethnos' or 'demos'. Instead, the Third World indicated a political project undertaken by innumerable peoples that shared a common task. It was this shared goal that brought African peoples together to face Europe:

like a colossal mass whose project should be to try to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find the answers' (Fanon, 1963, p.314).
Building upon Fanon's formulation, Vijay Prashad has recently argued that the Third World should be understood not as a place but as a 'project'. A project for the 'creation' of a 'political platform' that supported the 'colossal mass' of the 'peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America by assembling their grievances and aspirations 'into various kinds of

organisations, where their leadership then formulated a platform of demands' (Prashad, 2007, p. xv, p.15). As Prashad pointed out, Constance Farrington translated Fanon's original term 'le projet' as 'aim' in 1963. Prashad retranslates 'le projet' as 'project' (Fanon, 1961, p. 241, Fanon, 1963, p.314, Prashad, 2007, p.283). From Prashad's perspective, the Third World can be understood as a political platform whose leadership coordinates organisations that enabled the articulation of demands, grievances and aspirations in a world context. Prashad's idea of the Third World as a 'platform' informed my conceptualisation of *WORLD 3*. At the same time, I do not share Prashad's desire to align Third Worldism with Tricontinentalism under the political ethos of Third Worldism as Tricontinentalism. My concern with the African state system necessarily excludes Asian and Latin American states.

Instead of following Prashad in this respect, I want to link the idea of the Third World as a platform with George Padmore's theorisation of Nkrumah-era Ghana as a platform for continental unification. In an essay entitled *Scholar-Activist St. Clair Drake and the Transatlantic World of Black Radicalism*, Kevin Gaines draws upon St. Clair Drake's unpublished essay entitled *The Politics of Kwame Nkrumah*. In that undated essay, Drake recalled conversations with George Padmore in Ghana during 1958 and 1959. Padmore, stated Drake, declared that 'Ghana is a platform where we stand to liberate and unify Africa' (Gaines, 2015, p.89). In 1958, Ghana understood itself as an intermediary for planning the liberation and unification of the African continent. From Padmore's perspective, Ghana could be understood as providing a state infrastructure capable of supporting Pan-Africanism's revolutionary movement towards continental unity in a global context. In conversation with George Shepperson in 2008, Drake recalled the historical moment at the end of the 1950s in which Padmore theorised newly independent Ghana as a platform for Pan-Africanism in action.

Drake stated that:

I was visiting with Padmore one night, and his position was, Ghana is like this book. It's a base on which you stand, on which to mobilize your forces, to free and unify the rest

of this continent. Ghana has to become part of something bigger (Shepperson and Drake, 2008, p.62).

Drawing Padmore's formulation of Ghana as a platform together with Prashad's notion of the Third World as a platform and Fanon's understanding of the Third World as a project, what emerges is a historical genealogy of Pan-Africanism as organisational infrastructure that precedes and complicates the contemporary understanding of the digital platform. This expanded understanding of Africa's infrastructural path to the future from 1958 onwards takes on a contemporary cultural form though Godard's artistic strategy of alphanumeric reduction. What intrigues me about *Film Tract 10* is the way in which Godard reduces the epic Fanonian idea of the Third World into the fraction of *MONDE 3*. A fraction written four times on a single black and white photograph of soldiers in the field until it reads as a lesson for primary schoolchildren.

Godard: Yes but its zero because we were under zero.
Reporter: You were under zero?
Godard: Oh, completely.
--Jean-Luc Godard (Mordaunt,1968)

You've probably all noticed that postmarks, not postage stamps, are already in use for bulk mail. Enemies of the postage stamp think this procedure should also be used for private mail, which would require the automation of mailboxes.
--Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2014, p.137)

We were under Zero

What happens when this specific frame from *Film Tract 10* is brought into relation with one frame from *Le Gai Savoir*? When the phototextual scene from *Film Tract 10* is placed in proximity with a scriptovisual scene from *Le Gai Savoir*, both frames become readable in new ways. *WORLD 3*'s back cover shows a triple underscored 'O' that could be described as a circle or a zero or a symbol or an 'O'. This frame appears at 06: 01 in *Le Gai Savoir*, 1968. What appears is a black and white photograph of Godard in profile (MacCabe, 2003, 204-213, Brody, 2008, 326-341).

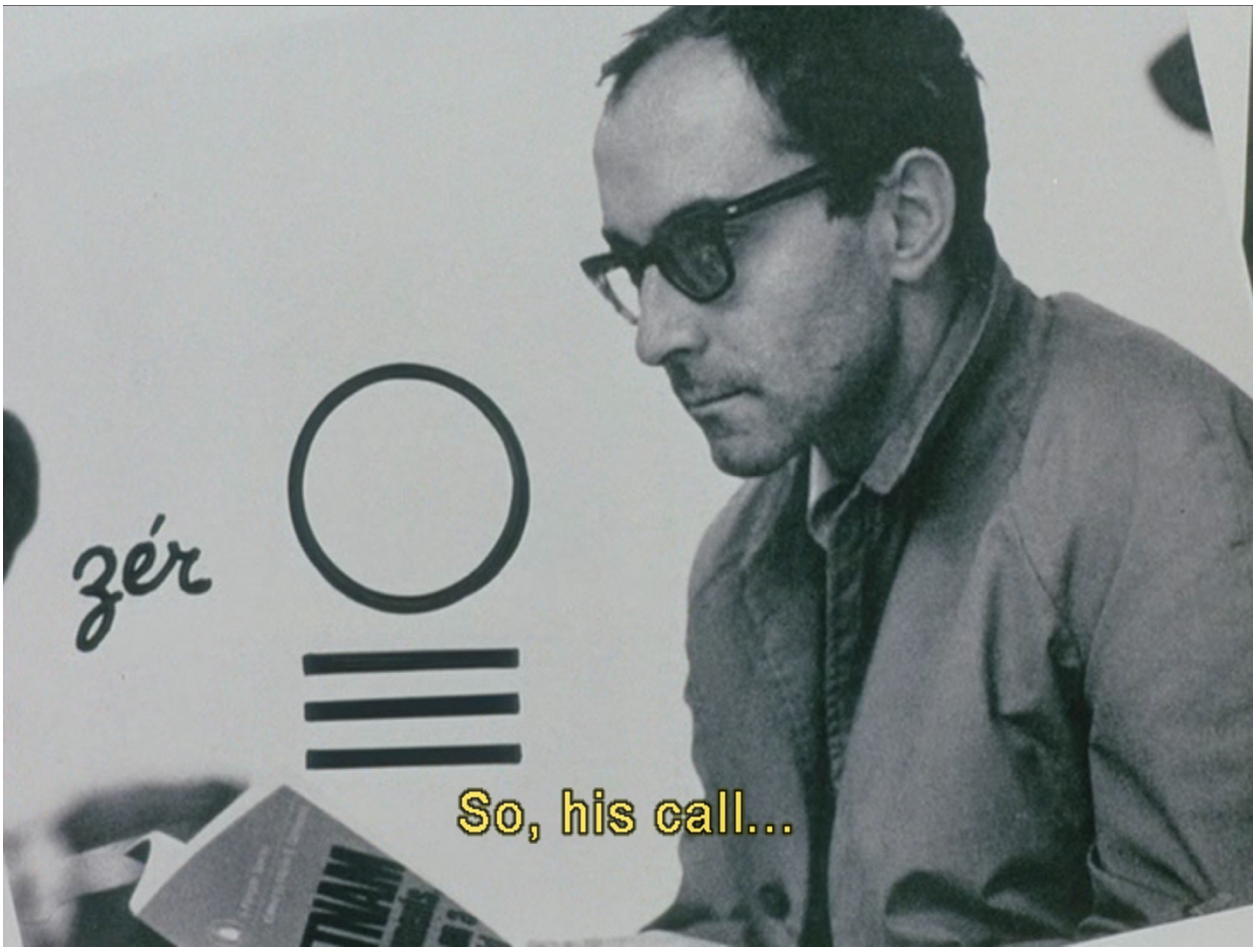

Figure 35. Jean-Luc Godard, *Le Gai Savoir*, 1968 [DVD]

Godard holds a book. Its cover indicates a Penguin Edition on the Vietnam War. Photographed in profile, he looks left, out of frame, eyeline above its book. On the flat surface that appears behind his profile is that circle or zero or 'O'. It is printed at midpoint between the book's open pages and Godard's eyeline. The 'O' or zero is prefixed by the handwritten letters 'zér'. The word 'zér' meets the symbol 'O' so as to form the word *zér* O. According to Kaja Silverman, the 'O' should be interpreted as 'the letter "o" which is 'underlined three times' so as to turn it into 'a numerical zero within the verbal zero, further foregrounding the notion of nothingness.' (Silverman and Farocki, 1998, p.118). This emphasis on nothingness does not, however, exhaust the possibility of an alternative interpretation. I argue that the numerical zero within the verbal zero, which can be understood as the letter "o" or the circle 'O' all stand in for the word *MONDE* or *WORLD*. I propose that the three underscored lines stand in for the

number *‘3’*. Against Silverman’s interpretation, I argue that the symbol in *Le Gai Savoir* can be said to stand for *WORLD 3*. Once you see the symbol from *Le Gai Savoir* in relation to the frame from *Film Tract 10*, the linkage between the two frames becomes understandeable. By isolating *MONDE 3* from *Film Tract 10* and printing it on *WORLD 3*’s front cover and by extracting the symbol from *Le Gai Savoir* on its back cover, the two film quotations speak to each other across the front and back covers of *WORLD 3*. Both become readable as phases in one continuous process of alphanumeric conversion. What initially appeared to be Godard’s strategy of reduction becomes readable as two moments in the Godardian movement of Third Worldist thought. Understood as two phases in one process, the fraction and the formula invite an imagination of interscalarity. They enact a permutational poetics of the scriptovisual and the alphanumeric. They speak of the fictionalisation of equations, the imagination of etymologies and the invention of philologies. What intrigues me, most of all, however, is the extent to which they evoke an anti-imperialist mathematics that models methods of compression, abstraction and encryption. The idea of a fraction powerful enough to compress Third Worldist discourse into one formula implies the reimagination of the next stage of compression beyond the formula.

It implies the symbol as an equation that can be verbally articulated in terms of how and why ‘we were under Zero’. Perhaps that enduringly enigmatic sentence uttered by Godard during the production of *One plus One*, 1968 and captured during the making of *Voices*, 1968, provides an allegory for the structure of feeling of Third Worldism at one moment in 1968. Contemporary historians of the New Left *cinétract* such as Brenez, Stob, Grant and Adamson have analysed the ways in which the Godardian *film tract* treated the screen as a page that rendered *‘cinema comme a l’école’* in order to challenge the existing colonial institution of cinematic spectatorship (Daney,1976, p.33,; Grant, 2016,; Stob, 2018, pp.35-65,; Brenez, 2018, pp.191-203,; Adamson, 2018, pp. 46-48). The photoframes of *MONDE 3* and *Le Gai Savoir* analysed here remain undertheorised by scholars such as Stob, Grant and Adamson. Perhaps, however, these specific frames did not want to be the object of discovery or the subject of attention. It is this intuition that leads *WORLD 3* not to decode these enigmatic signs but

to create a method for hiding them in plain sight. By transposing them onto the front and back cover of a bookwork, the aim is to create a new context for curiousity rather than publicity that works by holding transparency at a distance.

When Godardian pedagogy is transposed from the screen towards the page, the idea of scriptovisuality is reconfigured. Such an alteration is mobilised in order to displace the expectations engendered by the appearance of a book published on the occasion of an exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall. Instead of satisfying the traditional demands for an exhibition catalogue, *WORLD 3* can be understood as the third in the series of Otolith artworks that adopts the format of the timeline. *WORLD 3* brings its readership face to face with signs that play the role of titles that are neither explained nor contextualised. This displacement of the traditional function of the title suggests that WORLD 3 is to be approached as a bookwork rather than as a catalogue or a monograph. In *From Bookworks to Mailworks*, Ulises Carrion defines the bookwork as a text that is 'conceived as an expressive unity, that is to say, where the message is the sum of all the material and formal elements (Carrion, 1980, p.25)'. Carrion's emphasis on the 'material and formal elements' of the bookwork can be more precisely focused on its 'paratexts'. The paratexts of a book can include its title, its preface or its table of contents, each of which, according to Gerard Genette, function as 'thresholds of interpretation' that bear upon the most socialised side of the practice of literature (the way its relations with the public are organised) (Genette, 1979, p.14)'. If paratexts confirm the assumptions held by readers that navigate the mental space of the printed page, then a bookwork can be understood as that object or entity that seeks to suspend the presuppositions that render a printed object legible.

By removing the Foreword, the Preface and Table of Contents and reallocating the position of the page number from its habitual location in the grid of the page *WORLD 3* invites readers to attend to its chronology of decolonisation organised according to the sequential and simultaneous logics of the printed page. Each page in *WORLD 3* can be read as a succession of 'postally used' envelopes arranged as a timeline of African independence. Each page can be interpreted as a visual study that contrasts its

historical envelope with the contemporary envelope used for its delivery. *WORLD 3*'s timeline, unlike *Statecraft*, begins on July 29 1940 with an envelope issued to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth of Liberia.

Figure 36. The Otolith Group, *WORLD 3*, 2014 [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. First day of Issue, 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Liberia

It concludes, unlike *Statecraft*, on 23 May 2001 with an envelope issued to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of Eritrean Independence

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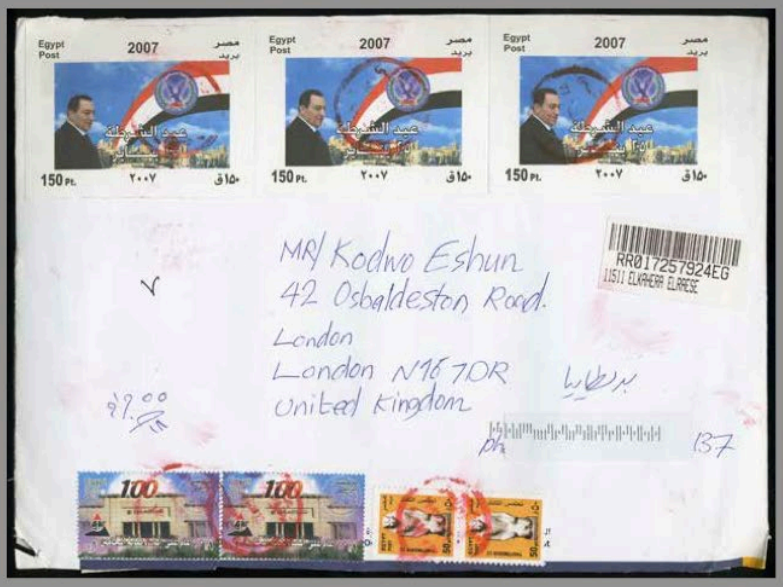


The mosaic, the collage, the parts from which a hero or heroine can be assembled like a machine have been imported from a foreign country that specializes in consignment orders of the required product after painful research into local conditions.

Nuruddin Farah, **Sardines,** 1981

Figure 37. The Otolith Group, *WORLD 3*, 2014 [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. First day of Issue, 10th Anniversary of Eritrean Independence

Unlike *Statecraft*, *WORLD 3* does not focus on ‘long sets’. It assembles its chronography from illustrated commemorative envelopes described by collectors as First day covers. These so-called First day covers or FDCs can be defined as a specially designed envelope or ‘cover’ that is ‘post marked’ or ‘cancelled’ or ‘franked’ by postal workers on the ‘first day of issue’ of stamps issued to commemorate an official event. What distinguishes the First day cover from the ‘postal wrapper’ now known as the common paper envelope that was first mass-produced by Edwin Hill’s ‘legendary envelope-folding machine’ in December 1840 is not its cancellation. What is distinct is that its cancellation occurs on its ‘first day of issue’ in order to prevent subsequent reuse (Siegert, 1999, p.119,; Bratton, 2015, p.46). What concerns collectors is the ‘superb’ quality of its withdrawal from cancellation. Specialists preoccupy themselves with the ‘well-centred’ machine cancelled ‘datestamp’ that leaves the postally used stamp ‘clear of the cancellation’.

My concern is not with the ‘quality’ of machine cancellation. What draws me towards the commemorative envelope is the opportunity to understand the postmark or date stamp as the indexical evidence of the technological infrastructure required for the commemoration of Independence. Arranging First day covers according to chronology brings you face to face with the extent of interoperable mediation required to coordinate the mnemonic synchronisation of Independence. For those who can interpret its circular date stamps, the postmark offers an insight into the mechanisms of commemoration. What the First day cover that bears the words Premier Jour D’emission offers is a window into the coordination of commemoration (Zeruvabel, 1996, p.12,; Becker and Lentz, 2013, pp.1-10,; Lentz, 2013, pp.208-216, 2013,pp. 217- 237). Each cancellation demonstrates the ways in which one historical ‘addressing regime’ imprints its ‘identity onto the existing geography of things’. First day covers demonstrate the ways in which the addressing regimes of Africa’s state system are undergoing ‘segmentation and organization’ by the contemporary addressing regime of the online auction market that operates ‘whether it is organizing physical or virtual space’ (Bratton, 2015, pp.194-5). What *WORLD 3* reveals is the extent to which platform geography reshapes the

addressing regimes of postcolonial nation states shaped by the international state system. Contemporary envelopes, in contrast with First day covers, can be understood as direct descendants of Edwin Hill's standardised packets. Each envelope functions as a meta-envelope for delivering a First day cover acquired at online auction. Each contemporary envelope has been posted to my address in North East London by a collector based in Pinner, Middlesex or Weehawken, New Jersey or Sutton, Quebec or Heroldsbach, Germany or Granville, France. Each envelope is marked with *Please do not bend* underlined in black ball point or PLEASE DO NOT BEND in handwritten red letters or PLEASE DO NOT FOLD!! in printed red Arial font. Many envelopes are stickered with a small white square that reads PRIORITAIRE or PRIORITY PRIORITAIRE LUFTPOST. These warnings announce their compliance with the postal standards required for international air travel. As Jean-Godefroy Bidima suggests, each of these stickers:

points to the relationship that each letter or document bearing that stamp has with the norm. Etymologically, norm derives from the Latin 'norma' meaning a carpenter's square. A stamped letter reaffirms, at each passage from hand to hand, that it is carrying a message that presents itself as 'normal' through the decoration on the envelope enclosing it (Bidima, 2014, p.74).

As a support for postage stamps, the contemporary envelope is designed to travel without attention. This intentional inattention contrasts with the imperial ornamentalism of the earliest First day covers. According to Townsend, Buckingham and Philips, the first such design can be attributed to the Junior Philatelic Society on the occasion of the 'Coronation Day of King George V June 22, 1911' (Townsend and A. Buckingham, 1982,p. 6, Philips, 2013, pp.4-5). This 1911 design portrays a white, winged female angel dressed in billowing white, surrounded by clouds, against a red sky, holding aloft a giant envelope addressed to The Junior Philatelic Society. The first commercially available First day covers, argue Townsend and Buckingham, were not issued until twenty six years later, on the occasion of the Coronation of King George VI in 1937. This assertion contradicts the argument advanced by the editors of America's *Heritage*

Rare Stamps that the first commercially available First day cover was issued in 1929 on the occasion of the death of President Warren G. Harding. The historical question of whether British or American design preceded which matters less than their shared stake in imperial aesthetics. Both of these First day covers shared an aesthetic of ‘ornamentalism’ defined by David Cannadine as the ideological ‘vehicle of organisation and perception’ in the metropolis and the so-called periphery ‘through which imperial nation-states’ rendered hierarchy ‘visible, immanent and actual’ (Cannadine,1997, p.122). Both participated in imperialism’s ‘ritual complex’ of coronations, jubilees, weddings and funerals (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.6).

It is unclear that the state can be thought, or has yet been thought, beyond personification. --Hamid Parsani (Soske, 2013)

The Statist Aesthetics of *l'Enveloppe Philatélique*

The designs demanded by new governments indicate a mid-century ornamentalism that borrows from existing vocabulary in order to express the novelty of statehood. What is singular to First day cover designs is their concern with the aesthetics of personification. In seeking to understand how states work, Timothy Mitchell proposes a Foucauldian critique of political science's tendency to generate 'statist' interpretations of the post-war state as a 'distinct entity' presumed to be 'opposed to and set apart from a larger entity called society'. Instead of analysing the state as an assemblage of microphysical 'arrangements that produce the apparent separateness of the state', First day cover designs insist on portraying the state as 'some political subject, some *who*' that 'pre-exists and determines those multiple arrangements we call the state.' If stamps adapt Wilder's critique of methodological nationalism into an aesthetic imperative, First day covers tread a similar path by transposing Mitchell's critique of methodological statism into statist aesthetics.

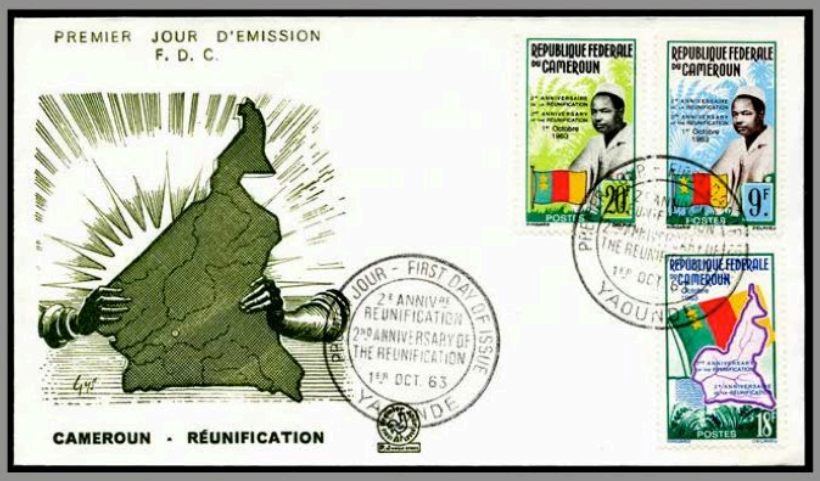
FDCs treat the state as 'an actor that intervenes in society' with all of the 'coherence, agency, and subjectivity this term presumes' (Mitchell, 1991, p.89, p.91, p.88, p.90). But what does a state actor look like? How is its agency represented? First day covers personify the state in the body of 'some political subject that stands behind and above the state' (Mitchell, 1991, p. 91). What Mitchell suggests, but does not quite articulate, is the understanding that an aesthetics of personification requires the design of 'some political subject' that need not necessarily take human form. As Hamid Parsani has recently argued, personification treats the nation as 'a skin stretched over the bones and organs of the state'. Personification does not require humans as much as it does 'membranes' that fabricate sovereignty into a shape. Understanding the nation as a skin or a membrane allows the state to be 'conceptualised as a single entity' that is personified 'as a coherent actor, as an organism' (Soske, 2013). Personification visualises 'entities' such as national flags that drape their folds, ridges and creases

around pink or green cartographic unities. These territorial entities border on simplified maps or isolated nations whose location appears as a marked shape within the contoured outline of an emptied continent. Personification confuses the distinctions between flags, maps, borders, outlines and territories. In its effort to unify these political avatars it imposes an aesthetic of discrepant literalism upon the FDC.

In the cover titled First Day of Issue 17 April 1990 issued by Zimbabwe's Posts and Telecommunications Corporation to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Independence, two shouldered sleeves in dark suits emerge from Zimbabwe's national flag. The left sleeve emerges from the low left corner of the wooden flag pole. The right sleeve extrudes itself from the lowest bands of red, yellow and green. The two hands clasp each other in an awkward grip. Between and behind those hands can be seen a second flag that alludes to Zimbabwe's newly designed Presidential Flag. Behind the flags and the sleeves is the amorphous blue of sky. What the design alludes to is the official photograph of the Unity Accord that was signed on 22 December 1987 by Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union Popular Front or PF-ZAPU and Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front or ZANU-PF (C.S. Banana, 1989, pp. 242-287,; M. Sithole,1992, pp. 143-153,; D. Munemo, 2016,pp.184-201, 256-257). The Accord brought to an end the seven-year civil war between the armed forces of Zimbabwe's leading liberation movements. The First day cover conflates the suited torsos of the male leaders with the emblem of the Presidential flag in order to attribute the success of the signing of the Accord to the actions of the national flag rather than its signatories.

Figure 38. The Otolith Group*, WORLD 3*, 2014 [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. First Day of Issue, 10th Anniversary of Independence, Zimbabwe

On the First day cover issued by the Republique Federale du Cameroun on 1st October 1963 to commemorate the 2nd Anniversary of the Réunification, two hands with thin, tapered fingers that represent the British Southern and British Northern Cameroons on one side and the Republic of Cameroon on the other emerge from the left and the right sides of the newly 'unified' country, grasping the territorial entity of the Federal Republic of Cameroon as if it were a trophy awarded to the victor. Behind the hands radiate the new rays of the rising sun. The outcome of the two United Nations plebiscites of February 1961 that resulted in the majority of British Southern Cameroons voting for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon while the majority in British Northern Cameroons voted to remain in Nigeria is elided in favour of the new Federal Republic celebrating its own existence (Awasom, 2000, p.111, p.113). Its gesture summons an image of the 2018 FIFA World Cup tournament in which the FIFA World Cup Trophy is readies itself to lift itself up by its handles and show itself off to the crowds gathered at Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on 15 July 2018.



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In the day, trucks were going up the road loaded with men chained up; in the night, around 3 a.m., it was the backfires and the gratings of the army truck that was going to the cemetery, where a team of prisoners were burying the naked and bloody bodies of the poor people who have been tortured to death, and who sometimes were still breathing.

Charles Van de Lanoitte, Dakar based journalist and reporter for The Reuter Agency, 2010

Figure 39. The Otolith Group*, WORLD 3*, 2014 [Bookwork]. Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. Premier Jour d'Emission, F.D.C. Cameroun Réunification

Postcoloniality has, also, I think, become a condition of pessimism.
--Kwame Anthony Appiah (Appiah, 1992, p.155)

'Yes,' said Apolo-Gyamfi, 'death is indeed an exercise in pan-Africanism.
--Ali A. Mazrui (Mazrui, 1971,p.107)

Afro-pessimism as a Structure of Feeling

First day covers imagine political adversaries as male allies whose hands meet in gestures of concord. This emphasis on national unity calls for commentaries that critique, question, dispute and disenchant. Each of these roles are played by the quotations I have selected for each FDC. *WORLD 3*'s timeline begins with a First day cover stamped MONROVIA, LIBERIA JULY 29 1940 illustrated by a cachet of Liberia inside of which are printed the words FIRST DAY OF ISSUE July 29th 1940 100th ANNIVERSARY FOUNDING OF THE COMMON WEALTH OF LIBERIA. Below is the quotation from Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997) that reads:

However, suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one's suffering but rather of intensifying it? (Hartman, 1997, p. 5).

WORLD 3 brings Hartman's problematisation of 'the pressing question of freedom' into relation with the words of the national seal of the Commonwealth of Liberia which assert that *The Love of Liberty Brought us Here*. *WORLD 3*'s timeline concludes with a First day cover that declares "24 MAY" 10th ANNIVERSARY OF ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE 23 May 2001. Its design shows the national flag of Eritrea against a backdrop of fireworks that illuminate the night sky. Below is a quotation from Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines: A Novel (Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship: Truth versus Untruth*) 1981 that reads:

The mosaic: the collage, the parts from which a hero or heroine can be assembled like a machine have been imported from a foreign country that specializes in consignment orders of the required product after painful research into local conditions (Farah, 1981,p. 41)

The idea is not to match a First day cover from Eritrea with a fiction from Eritrea. The aim is to produce a discrepant engagement that simultaneously complicates text and image. Farah's fable on national ideals assembled from imported collages provides an acerbic allegory of the cultural values supported by the economic cycle of colonial dependence that have persisted into Somalia's Independence era and comments on the First day covers designed for Francophone African states by the Paris based printers J. Farcigny and CERES. *WORLD 3*'s one hundred and seventy-six quotations provide a range of commentaries that revise the official optimism projected by each FDC. In its totality, the process of decolonisation appears as a series of military coups interrupted by civil wars that confounds the linear temporality of timeline. Each quotation is irreducible to the strategy of détournement. According to Mackenzie Wark, détournement can be understood as:

the opposite of quotation. Like détournement, quotation brings the past into the present, but it does so entirely within a regime of the proper use of proper names (Wark, 2011, p.140).

WORLD 3 uses quotations to assemble a 'regime of the proper use of proper names' according to a goal that distinguishes itself from Wark's critique. *WORLD 3's* 'proper names' attest, in their entirety, to 'the range of artistic reflections' on the 'collapse' of Africa's 'nationalist legitimation narratives' affirmed by the state fictions of First day covers (Mercer 2000,147). Nationalism's collapse is weighed, measured and judged by quotations that deliver pitiless verdicts on the ideals promised by the First day covers. *WORLD 3* assembles quotations that play the roles of judges, witnesses, prosecutors, cynics, counsellors and criminals. They speak from a time after the endings of formal

Independence but before freedom's final fulfilment. Stranded in a time between the temporalities of the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003, p.192).

By locating the aftermath of independence within the durée of decolonisation, *WORLD 3* participates in the project of Afro-pessimism as formulated by Kobena Mercer in 1995 (Mercer, 2000, p.147). Mercer's theorisation of Afro-pessimism should be differentiated from Frank B. Wilderson III and Jared Sexton's philosophical project of Afro-Pessimism or Robert D. Kaplan's sensationalist reportage (Walsh, 2016,; Wilderson 2010,; Sexton, 2011,; Soske, 2004,; Kaplan, 1994). I understand Afro-pessimism as Mercer's critical account of the artistic reflections on the 'postcolonial and post-nationalist structures of feeling' that emerged from the 'collapse of nationalist legitimization narratives in the early 1990s. Mercer developed Taylor's reading of Djibril Diop Mambety's *Hyenas*, 1992 and Appiah's interpretation of novels by Ououlouguem and Mudimbe into an analysis of 'diasporic translational cinema' that acknowledged the limitations of national Independence (Mercer, 2000, pp.146-7). Mercer focused upon David Achkar's *Allah Tantou*, 1991, which portrayed Achkar's father Achkar Marof's fall from Sékou Touré's 'favoured cultural ambassador' at the United Nation to his death in Guinea's notorious Camp Boiro in 1971, Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of A Prophet*, 1991, which narrated a cinematic 'biography' of the Congo as a 'nation in turmoil' and John Akomfrah's *Testament,* 1989, which dramatised the 'experience of loss, abandonment and mourning' experienced by Abena, a former CPP activist turned television presenter that returned to Ghana after a long exile in Britain, following the military coup of 1966.

These films suggested the time required to process the psychic costs of repression engendered by Tshombe's counterrevolution in the Republic of the Congo in 1960, the proscription imposed on the Convention Peoples Party by Ghana's military in 1966 and the mass detentions imposed by President Ahmed Sékou Touré on his former comrades in the Democratic Party of Guinea in the 1960s and the 1970s. *WORLD 3* can be understood as a project that builds upon Mercer and Appiah's initial formulation of Afro-pessimism by gathering one hundred and seventy-six quotations within one volume in an effort to resume and renew the artistic critique of Afro-pessimism for the

21st Century. Through its comparative study of First day covers, contemporary envelopes and quotations, *WORLD 3* aims to expand on the implications of Afro-pessimism as artistic critique so as to confront the limits of African self-determination by coming face to face with the limitations of Africa's modernity.

4.

Epilogue

By our actions the whole future of Africa must be affected.
--Kwame Nkrumah (Nkrumah, 1961, p.110).

And there is scarcely a country where the face of the hero does not appear on stamps…
Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein, 1961,p.100).

Critiques of Ideological Settlement

From a distance of five years, the red thread that connects the three Otolith artworks is my preoccupation with the limits of African modernity. *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*, *Statecraft* and *WORLD 3* were concerned with writing a new chapter in the biography of Africa's encumbered emancipation. My project was guided by the desire to think through the ambivalent ideals of modernization, the ambiguous values of modernism and the adversarial pursuit of modernity that became the object of Africa's political imaginary from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. At the middle of the century, it seemed to me, Africa's political imaginary, understood in its broadest sense of positing a world, intensified its scale, scope, ambition and aspiration. What I discerned was the expansion and intensification of a prospective political imaginary that took the form of an outpouring of programs, plans, platforms, promises, poetry, proposals, pamphlets and polemics for the future. These aesthetico-political efforts were mobilised by the prospect of a future that some called Pan-Africanism, some described as Pan-African socialism, others described as Pan-African nationalism and others called All- African Union. Pan-Africanism's future was oriented by the prospect of a continent unified under a Union Government that would rule over the borderless superstate of a United States of Africa. This goal would necessitate the reconstruction of the international state system organised around political blocs composed of differentiated capitalist and communist alliances.

The submitted works were motivated by the desire to firstly, reflect on the contemporary significance of 1957 from the perspective of 1966, secondly, to analyse the importance of 1966 from the perspective of 2013 and thirdly to reflect on 2013 from the perspective of 1966. These reflections would provide a timeline that would allow me to situate my own work within an intergenerational tradition of artistic critique. In 1957, the 'dependent territory' of the Gold Coast invented itself as the 'free and sovereign state' of Ghana and dedicated itself to the goal of a United Africa. In 1966, Ghana's armed forces overthrew the government of the First Republic and committed itself to the ideological containment of the African political imagination. In some ways, the rebellion against the CPP led by General Afrifa and Lieutenant Harley on 24 February 1966 prefigured that of General Pinochet's coup in Chile against Allende in September 1973. Its impact within Africa's state system paralleled that of the latter within South America. As Ruth First wrote in 1970:

Nkrumah's government might have been a case of socialism badly manqué; but its successor regime, far from restoring the health of a dependent economy, has delivered it to the system responsible for the poverty and exploitation of all the Third World (First 1970, p.407).

For those born after the coup d' état of 1966, the military curtailment of Ghana's continental imagination began a process of capitalist realism that transformed Pan-Africanism into a political idea that now appears to be a wishful 'dream' of the future. 1966 began the process of transforming Ghana from a state that aimed to transform the existing world order into a country that gratefully accepted its diminished place within the existing world order. Those of us born into the existing world order look back at Pan-Africanism's Promethean ambitions in disbelief. Its continental ambitions appear to us as fragments from a foreclosed futurity crystallised in the destroyed forms of forestalled futurisms. This idea of an interrupted future can be heard throughout each Otolith work. It can be heard in the electronic sound design that invites spectators to listen to the All-African future imagined by *In the Year of the Quiet Sun*. It can be seen in the chromatic modulation of the images from which *In the Year of the Quiet Sun* is composed. It

becomes visible in the enlarged stamp designs that bring spectators face to face with the infrastructural unconscious of Ghana's postal network. It becomes public in *Statecraft*'s timeline that takes the form of an extended chromatic skyline assembled from illuminated blocks and long sets. It appears in the encoded emblems that invite readers to enter the chronological complex of *WORLD 3*.

There is more at stake in the submitted Otolith works than a critical nostalgia for a cancelled future. What animates these works is the desire to understand the enthusiasms and antipathies aroused by Ghana's Pan-Africanist project. The path from the enthusiasm of 1957 to the enmity of 1966 poses the question of reconstituting the process by which the 'rot of the promise' corroded the future envisaged by the CPP. Imagining the decomposition of political hope into despair requires an understanding of how continental unification engendered the profound pessimism articulated in 'the death of hope'. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah writes that:

The man remembered times when Teacher had talked with eagerness about hopeful things, but then always there was the ending, when he would deliberately ask whether the rot and the weakness were not after all the eternal curse of Africa itself, against which people could do nothing that would last. Sometimes this death of hope would spread all over the world (Armah 1968, p.91).

Stranded in an endless present after the 'ending' of 'hopeful things', Armah's anonymous narrator remembers what it was like to look forward to the future. Confronted by the dismal prospect of a future drained of promise and overdetermined by the 'death of hope' that 'would spread all over the world', he tries to reconstruct the moment of critique when the figure known as Teacher 'deliberately' posed the epistemological question of the meaning of 'the rot and the weakness' in the ontological vocabulary of the 'eternal curse of Africa itself'. Teacher's question, in all of its fatalism, narrates Afro-pessimism's confrontation with Pan-Africanism. Framed in these terms, Armah's Afro-pessimism extends the formulation proposed by Mercer during the *Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas* conference at the British Film Institute in London in

1995. If the existential malaise dramatised by Akomfrah's *Testament*, 1989, David Achkar's *Allah Tantou*, 1992 and Raoul Peck's *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet*, 1993, emerges in artistic reflection for the first time in Teacher's question, then the cosmic defeatism evident throughout *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* narrate the painful process by which the horizon of continentalist expectation collapses into the existentialist predicament of 'post-nationalist structures of feeling'. If Armah inaugurates the structure of feeling of living after the ending of the promised future then successive artistic projects have each sought to articulate life as it is imagined to have been lived after the end of political belief in the future promised by Pan-Africanism. Situated within this tendency, the submitted Otolith works appear as contemporary attempts to resume and renew an ongoing tradition of artistic critique. They can be located within an intergenerational pattern of artistic reflection upon the contemporary implications of the closure of Ghana's political imagination. Those born after the coup find themselves face to face with contemporary conditions that require an approach that differentiates itself from those earlier projects. Confronting the contemporary limits of the incomplete historical project of decolonisation requires an encounter between images and sounds that submits the continental imagination to the judgement of an ethical pessimism and subjects the ethical authority of pessimism to the demands of the present. Such a project indicates the necessity to formulate a historical timeline of the present that situates these works within the ongoing artistic analysis of Africa's political futures.

I conclude the Epilogue by returning to the years of 1957 and 1966. I read the year of 1957 by situating independence within ongoing processes that constitute three stages in the invention of Ghana as a formative chapter in the biography of African modernity. These readings of 1957 are followed by readings of three interpretations of the coup of 1966 analysed as a legitimation crisis that dramatise three distinct positions on the closure, the renewal and the continuity of the political imagination of Pan-Africanism understood as future.

Unfair though this may be, Africa as a whole remains on trial in Ghana. If people become widely disillusioned with Ghana, it will be most unfortunate for Africa as a whole. --David E. Apter (Apter, 1972,p.337)

The Invention of Ghana in the Glare of World Publicity

Those born before Ghana's Independence, who lived through its invention, experienced Ghana's modernity as a structure of feeling that was globally broadcast, photographed and reported by media structured according to American, European and British dominance. This 'social experience in *solution*' can be understood in three ways. Firstly, it suggests an understanding of a global medial context of 'world publicity' that aimed to interpret the meanings of Ghana's independence. Geoffrey Bing recalled that:

for nine years, from its independence in 1957 to 1966, Ghana was illuminated by the glare of world publicity. Every figure who appeared on its stage was magnified and distorted, almost beyond recognition (Bing 1968, p.11).

Under these conditions, international media scrutinised Ghana's statecraft for its precedent and its portent. To be a public figure in Ghana meant commanding a world stage upon which your decisions took on an demonstratively encumbered Africanity. Nkrumah began his Address to the National Assembly of Ghana in 1957 by quoting from Edmund Burke's 1783 Parliamentary speech on 'the substantial reform in our Eastern administration' before outlining the stakes in terms of a demonstration that is directed 'to the world':

We are on a conspicuous stage and the world marks our demeanour. If we can make a success of our endeavours, it will be demonstrated to the world that a former African colonial territory is as able and capable of conducting its own affairs as any country in the world. This will be an event of tremendous significance. If on the other hand we fail, if we show ourselves disunited, inefficient or corrupt, then we shall have gravely harmed all those millions in Africa who put their trust in us and looked to Ghana to prove that

African people can build a state of their own based on democracy, tolerance and racial equality (Nkrumah 1961, p.110).

What this context suggests, secondly, is that Ghanaians experienced their experience as a demonstration of African modernity ‘to the world’. It was as if Ghana was projected onto the screens of the world for global audiences. Under these medial conditions, Ghanaians were understood, and understood themselves, as exemplary Africans. This meant that political decisions within Ghana generated interpretations outside Ghana that were contested within Ghana and counter-attacked outside Ghana. As Apter argued:

Ghana underwent the most intensive political scrutiny which a developing area has had to bear. When people went to prison for political ‘crimes’ in Senegal or Ivory Coast, no one remarked this. When it happened in Ghana there was a worldwide public reaction (Apter 1972, p.337).

This ‘worldwide public reaction’ was part of what St. Clair Drake described as a process in which democracy found itself ‘on trial in a double sense’ (Drake 1964, p.120). What Apter and Drake sought to describe was the cycle of national action and global reaction that provided the third process in the invention of Ghana. These medial processes provided a volatile context in which democracy was continually on trial in a ‘double sense’ of action and reaction that amplified each other. Within the continental contexts of Africa’s ‘initial experiments with democracy’, argued Drake, the West tended to look ‘with a critical eye at Africans whom they accuse of jettisoning democracy as soon as the colonizing power has gone’. For their part, African states, which had not experienced democracy under colonial rule, tended to ‘visualize Western democracy as being ‘on trial’ with respect to its ability to extirpate racism in southern Africa and in the United States’ (Drake 1964, p.120, p.110). What was at stake, Drake argued, was the conflict:

over the precise definitions of *ends* and the *priorities* given to them, over the choice of *means* to attain ends, and the conditions under which they are to be used, as well as questions of *pace* or timing' (Drake 1964, p.120).

These disputes could be described as a 'war of naming the problem', to use Black Audio Film Collective's term. This war of interpretation reached its maximum intensity within and between Ghana, Britain and North America. It was a struggle over the epistemological and ontological implications of decolonisation that began in 1949, intensified in 1957 and escalated until 1966 when the military pronounced its verdict upon the entire era. It claimed the right to pronounce the final verdict on the corruption of the Convention Peoples Party. This moral judgement constituted a Cold War consensus that persists into the present as an ideological settlement. Questioning this settlement requires rethinking the terms that narrate the passage from the illusion of nationalism to the wisdom of post-nationalism. One such way is to return to the coup of 1966 as it was interpreted from distinct perspectives by Wallerstein, James and Rodney. The aim is not to adopt these positions but to use them to formulate reading practices for revisiting 1966 in order to intervene the Cold War consensus that seeks to capture the meanings of legitimation crisis for all eternity.

What is striking about Wallerstein's *Africa: The Politics of Unity* is not that he completed the manuscript just as 'the fall of Nkrumah in February 1966' brought the first 'phase in the history of the movement' of African unity to an end (Wallerstein 1967, p.236). What is compelling is that his formulation of Pan-Africanism as 'the movement for African unity in terms of the world system' can be understood as an argument informed by Nkrumah's reframing of the analytic category of African nationalism. In *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, Nkrumah shifted the level of analysis from the 'isolated objective' of independence towards the social movement of nationalism, which he argued, was 'always' to be understood 'as a part of a general world historical pattern' (Nkrumah 1965, p.240). In moving towards Nkrumah's global account of the 'general world historical pattern', Wallerstein challenged the colonial hierarchy of knowledge that organised discourse such that European observers 'see themselves always as the

givers, and Africans as the takers, themselves as teachers and Africans as the taught' (James 1982, p.38).

What Wallerstein was reaching for was a co-constitutive understanding of Pan-Africanism as a social movement that remade the world system as it was remade, in its turn, by the world system. Wallerstein characterised Pan-Africanism as the 'movement for African unity in terms of the world system' for three reasons (Wallerstein, 1967, p. 237). Firstly, because it was 'the most significant single African attempt to affect in an important way the rate and direction of social change' (Wallerstein, 1967,p. ix). Secondly, because, although its 'goals are phrased in terms of the formal aim of political union', its 'real objectives' were nothing less than:

the reorganization of the world economy in ways that would permit the rapid industrialization of Africa and the realization of its full political and social equality with Europe and America (Wallerstein 1967,unpaginated,).

Thirdly, because an observer could not:

adequately appreciate the relationships of non-African states and movements to particular African events unless one is aware of how these relationships have been affected by, and have affected this social movement' (Wallerstein 1967,pp. ix-x).

Wallerstein grasped the extent to which the aspiration of Pan-Africanism had shifted the balance of forces at play in the 'world system', thereby decentring the authority of the position of interpretation. Pan-Africanism needed to be situated within 'the field of action' that was 'not Africa but the world, for its objectives were not simply to transform Africa but to transform Africa by transforming the world' (Wallerstein 1967, p.237).

From this co-constitutive perspective of mutual transformation, the emphasis on 'a continental government is not the goal per se, but a symbolic rallying point and a major element of strategy.' Indeed, Wallerstein suggested that continental government might

be understood as a contemporary version of Georges Sorel's idea of myth which 'must be judged as a means of acting on the present'. Any attempt to 'discuss how far it can be taken literally', as Sorel had argued in the case of myth, would be 'devoid of sense (Wallerstein 1967, unpaginated). 'The real goal', asserted Wallerstein:

is far more revolutionary, for the attainment of continental equality would in fact mean a basic transformation of African society and therefore of world society' (Wallerstein 1967, p.253).

The years from 1957 to 1966, which coincided with those of Nkrumah's rule, could be understood as 'one great phase in the history of this social movement' that allowed 'the movement freedom to organize, to propagate its ideas among its followers and its opponents and ultimately to bargain in the political arena.' It was the 'changing state' of the world system that 'made it possible for the movement to gain and then to lose its freedom of maneuver' (Wallerstein 1967, p.237). This freedom of maneuver was already 'declining toward the end of that period, and the fall of President Nkrumah in February 1966 may be said to have marked its effective end, at least for the moment', provided that the idea of the 'terminal point' was understood to be the 'end of the first cycle of its efforts' (Wallerstein 1967, p.x, p.237, unpaginated). If the fall of Nkrumah marked the 'terminal point' of 'one great phase in the history of this social movement', then Wallerstein presupposed that the movement would nonetheless continue onto its second 'great phase' or 'cycle' (Wallerstein 1967, p.x).

Wallerstein's belief in historical cycles allowed him to position the coup of 1966, within the prospect of a second 'great phase'. Faced with the crisis, Wallerstein seemed to demonstrate a political faith in Africa's movement towards unity. Perhaps that was because Wallerstein understood continental unity as a political mythology rather than an actually existing policy. In rendering it as such, Wallerstein sought to preserve the principle of continental unity by declaring its value to be independent of its material existence. Pan-Africanism could continue as a political imaginary on condition that it should not be realised as political imagination. As a political myth of imaginary creation,

its force came from its capacity to act upon the present regardless of its realisation or its destruction. If its social movement was blocked, then its political imaginary of Pan-Africanism would continue. It was not a fiction or an illusion. Instead, it was to be understood as the 'positing of a new form' that 'no causal, functional, or even rational explanation' provided by political science could 'account for' (Castoriadis 1993, p.102).

And United West Africa rises chastened and stimulated by the thought that in union is her strength, in weakness in discord. --J. E. Casely-Hayford (Casely-Hayford, 1971, p.103)

After-Africa: The Sense of An Ending

In contrast to Wallerstein, C.L.R. James responded to the news of the fall of 1966 with an anguished account of 'political collapse'. Writing in 1966, James began by acknowledging the spread of the painful emotion of political dismay:

For many years no political collapse has unloosed among our people – and many others – the dismay that the fall of Nkrumah has caused. A sense of politics being an insoluble mystery has increased and that is bad for democracy; above all, people must understand (James 1992, p. 357).

The 'political collapse', wrote James 'has unloosed' a feeling of 'dismay' that that connected 'our people' with 'many others' in an affective community of negative solidarity. Addressing readers that may have succumbed to political feelings of 'dismay' and 'insoluble mystery', James used his four-part series in Trinidad's *The Daily Mirror* to advance an interpretation entitled *The Rise and Fall of Nkrumah* that sought to counter political feelings of profound dismay. James aimed to help his readers to 'understand' the meanings of 'political collapse'. He sought a vocabulary that would help readers to come to terms with the immediate aftermath of the fall of President Nkrumah. The coup of 1966 was a world historical event that could not be adequately grasped through recourse to character assassination or psychological speculation. Instead of defending Nkrumah's authority against the illegitimacy of the coup or vindicating the rights of the coup d'état against the CPP, James focused on the political necessity of the fall itself. James pronounced a sentence of anathema on the head of Nkrumah: 'He had become a disease in the blood of Ghana and of Africa' (James 1982, p.357). Such a sentence drew a line under James and Nkrumah's political friendship. It consigned their alliance to history.

The unflinching severity of James' sentence shocks me each time I read it. It is a sentence that confronts me, then and now, with its political decisionism, its moral conviction and its poetic condemnation. It is a pitiless sentence that cuts through popular opinion. A sentence that aims to lance the boil and drain the pus. A sentence from which there is no hiding and no escape. A sentence that looks political failure in the face. It is a Communist sentence written in the political conviction of separating the 'coming struggle for Africa' from the prospect of yet more 'contamination' by Nkrumah. It is Communism written in the medical vocabulary of the political clinic. The health of the African revolution requires the draining of the diseased lymphatic system. If Nkrumah is 'a disease' that infects the bloodstream of Ghana and makes Africa's blood run ill, then

Africa needs Ghana to find a cure for the ‘sickness’ that is Nkrumah. James’ sentence aims to provide a remedial vocabulary for readers weakened by the contagious disorder of Nkrumah’s overthrow. James aimed to provide a political vocabulary of moral judgment so as to strengthen the ethical conviction that his readers need in the present and clear danger of dismay and mystery.

Any ‘Pan’ concept is an exercise in self-definition by a people, aimed at establishing a broader redefinition of themselves than that which has so far being permitted by those in power.
--Walter Rodney (Rodney, 1974, p.256)

And Africa leads on:
Pan Africa!
--W. E. B. DuBois (DuBois 1960,p.55)

What is the Actual Shape of Society?

In contrast to Wallerstein and James, Rodney regarded Nkrumah's fall as the jolt required to awaken from the sleep of illusion. 'We won't get fooled again', Rodney seems to repeat to himself. It as if he could not quite believe the extent to which he had followed himself to be lulled into belief in the popularity of the CPP. The overthrow of Ghana's First Republic ended the myth of Nkrumah's popularity that had reassured Rodney and his comrades. In looking back at the army coup of 1966 from the vantage point of 1974, Rodney recalled the ways in which it confronted him with the extent of his profound misunderstanding of the actual shape of society in Ghana. It acted as a spur required to revisit, revise and renew the concepts that had proved insufficient for grasping the actual shape of 'class struggle developing in Ghana':

We have allowed illusions to take the place of serious analysis of what actual struggles are taking place in the African continent; what social forces are represented in the government and what is the actual shape of society. We made the same mistake about Kwame Nkrumah and we were very surprised when he was overthrown because we thought that everything was fine in Ghana and that the CPP and Nkrumah had things perfectly under control. And we woke up subsequent to this overthrow to a realization that there was a class struggle developing in Ghana and it was a natural consequence of that struggle that this particular stratum emerging as a petty bourgeois class around the Ghanaian state would act against an option which seemed to threaten them- with or without the direct intervention of imperialism (Rodney 1974, p. 40).

The coup of 1966 forced Rodney to embark upon an ongoing revision of Pan-Africanist theory. Not only could Pan-Africanism's concepts not explain the coup. The discourse of Nkrumaism in itself had provided a misleading sense of the actual shape of Ghana's society. Instead of posing Africa's future in terms of Pan-Africanism or Communism, in Padmore's words, Rodney found himself confronted with the necessity of updating his epistemic commitments to Marxism in order to rethink Pan-Africanism. What Rodney was forced to confront was the realisation that Pan-Africanism itself, as an account, had lulled him into the sleep of illusion. It is the Marxist understanding of 'class struggle developing in Ghana' that will keep his comrades awake for the struggles to

come. Pan-Africanism's future, Rodney suggested, will depend upon its transformation by Marxist concepts. What was necessary was to formulate a vocabulary without pathos or mystification capable of providing an analysis for the actual struggles that are taking place in the African continent.

Each of these readings interpreted Nkrumah's fall as an opportunity to develop a pedagogy that could make sense of legitimation crisis. None of these interpretations are available for adoption in the present. The distance between those readings and the present provides a measure that helps to bring the limits of the present into focus. This focus permits me to imagine a timeline that extends from 1966 to 1957 to 2013 to 2018. This timeline in turn allows me to situate my artistic practice within a history of the present that does not imply Glissant's 'prophetic vision of the past' (Glissant 1989, p.64). Instead, it suggests the construction of a prospective vision of the past that opens onto the construction of prospective political imagination. The military regime of 1966 narrated the Nkrumah era as a fable on the dangers of the African political imagination. It proposed a narrative that persists into the present in the form of a Cold War consensus that continues to recruit generation upon generation of American-Africanists to the disciplines of history and political science. Look what happens, this fable says, when Africa's political imaginary exceeds its limits. When Africans imagine they can unsettle the world rather than settling for their place in the world. But Africa's futures were not settled once and for all in 1966. The process of ideological containment cannot suspend interpretation for all times, all places and all spaces. It cannot determine the imaginary creation of Africa's futures. New futures will be imagined, invented and created. Returning to 1957 from the perspective of 1966 illuminates the year of 2013 from the perspective of 2018. It provides a timeline within which to situate these submitted works. From there it becomes possible to analyse them in terms of an artistic imperative to write a new chapter in the critical biography of Africa's modernity.

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Artworks

The Otolith Group (2013) *In the Year of the Quiet Sun,* [digital video, 33 min]

The Otolith Group (2014) *WORLD 3* [bookwork, First day covers]

The Otolith Group (2014) *Statecraft: A Timeline of Incomplete Independence Determined by Digital Auction*, [lightboxes, laminated stamps, 55 metres] Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen.

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Films

Allah Tantou, [MP4] Directed by D. Achkar, 1991.

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Film tract 10, [MP4] Directed by J.-L. Godard,1968.

Le Gai Savoir [DVD] Directed by J.-L. Godard,1968

Handsworth Songs, [DVD] Directed by Black Audio Film Collective, 1986

Hyenas, [DVD] Directed by D. D. Mambéty, 1992

Lumumba: Death of a Prophet [film] Directed by R. Peck, 1990.

Testament, [DVD] Directed by J. Akomfrah, 1988.

Voices, [DVD] Directed by R. Mordaunt,1968.

Appendix

1.The Otolith Group (2013) *In the Year of the Quiet Sun,* [digital video, 33 min]

Vimeo Link:
https://vimeo.com/294570052/de558219af

2.The Otolith Group (2014) *Statecraft: A Timeline of Incomplete Independence Determined by Digital Auction*, [lightboxes, laminated stamps, 55 metres]

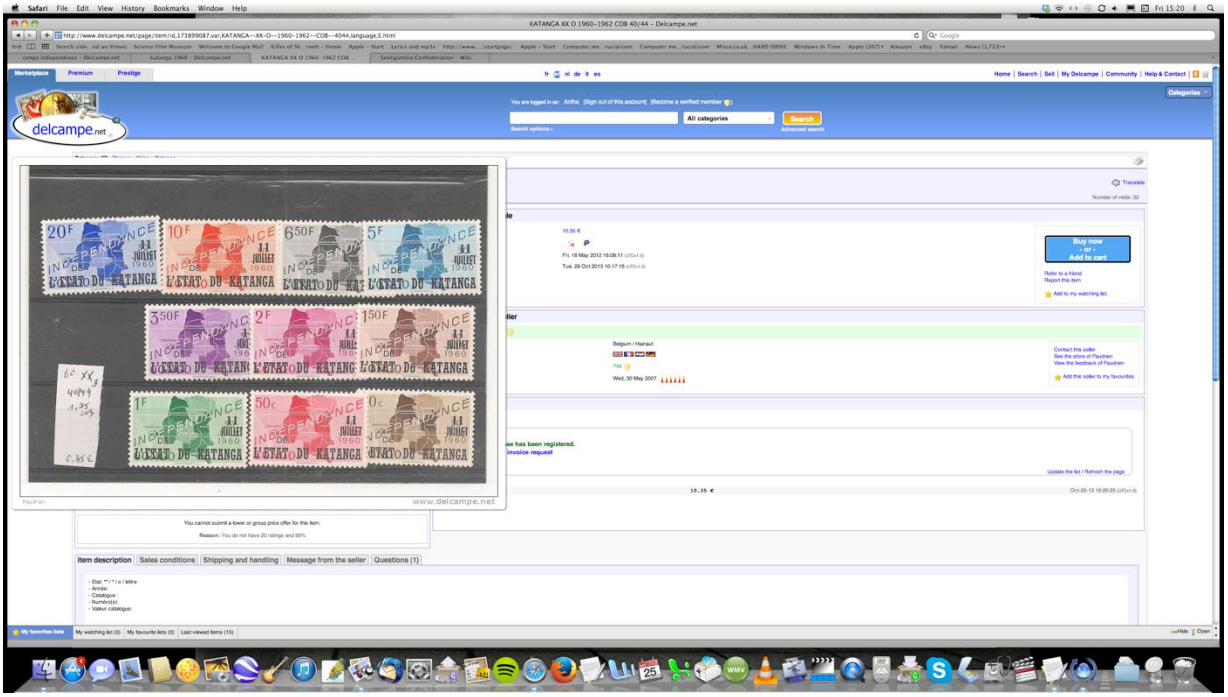
Portable Document Format. Installation of *Statecraft: A Timeline of Incomplete Independence Determined by Digital Auction*, at Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen. 10 to 15th January 2014.

3. The Otolith Group (2014) *WORLD 3* [bookwork, First day covers]

Three Bookworks Packaged for Examiners

4.The Otolith Group (2014) *Sovereign Sisters* [digital animation 3 minutes 43 seconds]

Vimeo Link:
https://vimeo.com/294680344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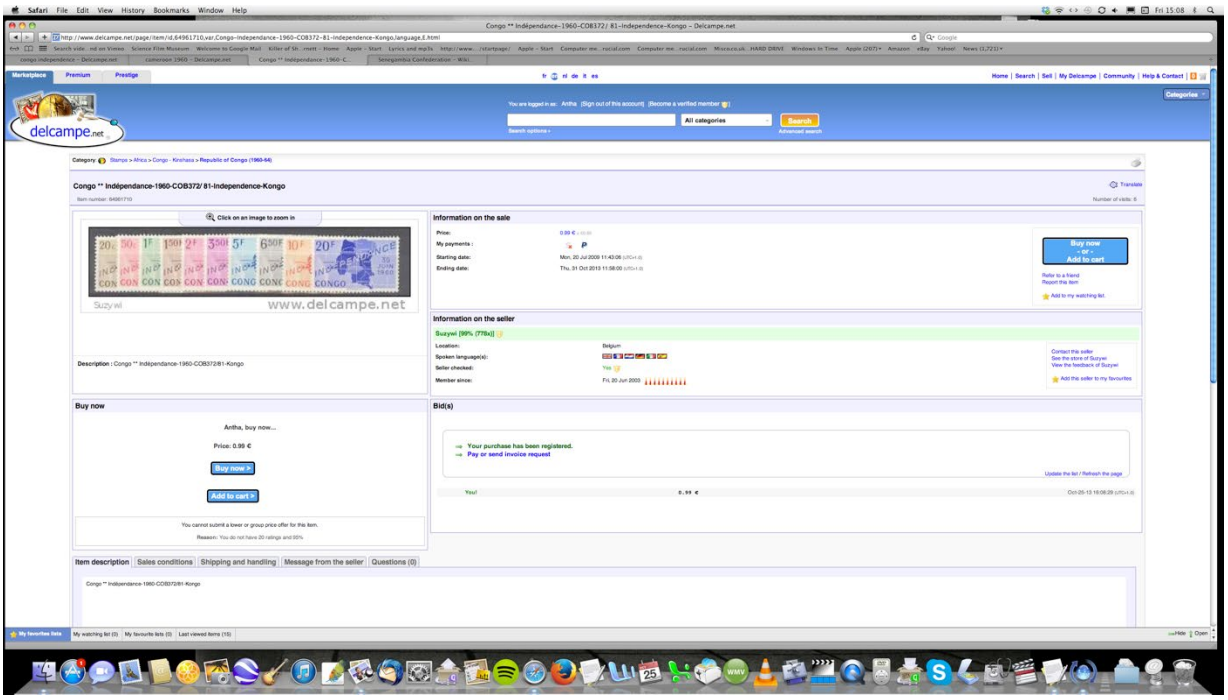
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