Simon Gikandi and Jane Wilkinson

Re-imagining Africa: Outside Africanism / Creative Crossings – An Introduction

Outside Africanism

The works collected in this volume of *Anglistica* represent an ongoing attempt to liberate the idea and image of Africa from what has come to be known as Africanism and to restore African subjects to the center of their narratives. Even readers who are not familiar with the scholarly definition of Africanism encounter it almost every day in the headlines of the major metropolitan newspapers in Europe and North America. Whether reporting on political crisis in Central Africa or natural disasters in the Horn of Africa, journalists prefer to report the continent through the lens of what Denis-Constant Martin has described as a "double unity": Africa is considered to be a uniform place that is nevertheless unique.[1] The uniformity of Africa is evident in the terms of its description – it is one geographic and cultural mass in which local distinctions are subsumed under the whole. The uniqueness of Africa is evident in the assumption that its problems are different from other places in the world. In both cases, the unity or unanimity of Africa is generated by what Martin calls "the generalizing temptation to infer general facts from the imperfect knowledge of local phenomena, then this presence appears as an imprisonment, an isolation."[2] Subsequently, African knowledge is enclosed in a prison house of radical difference and negativity; African voices are repressed or displaced and the kind of crossing that scholars and artists aspire for is foreclosed.

But the prison house of Africanism is not just a response to what appears to be the unending crisis of African society, or the persistent conception of the African as the unmodern subject; it has a long history and is rooted in the very epistemological frameworks that have made modern, western, knowledge possible. As V.Y. Mudimbe has shown, African societies, cultures, and subjects enter the western episteme as "signs of something else" – the primitive, the savage, the other.[3] The sign of Africa as the other has been entrenched as an idea, an image, and a narrative all unified by the power of negativity. Organized and classified according to "the grid of Western thought and imagination," African alterity functions as "a negative category of the same."[4] In this economy of representation, the African has become "not only the Other who is everyone else except me, but rather the key which, in its abnormal differences, specifies the identity of the Same."[5]

If the goal of African art and literature at the moment is to reject the logic of "abnormal differences" and to assert the identity of the African as a human subject, then an understanding of the long history of Africanism constitutes an important space clearing gesture. This clearing gesture must begin by noting that Africanism has never been about Africa. Although it may appear to be obsessed with African

[1] Denis-Constant Martin, "Out of Africanism! Should We Be Done with Africanism?", in V.Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 45. An extended discussion of Africanism can be found in Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[2] Ibid.

[3] V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), ix. See also *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: J. Currey, 1994).

[4] Ibid., 12.

[5] Ibid.

difference, Africanism has been a discourse of European identity that needed the African in order to assert the authority of the same. And if the image or idea of Africa seems to oscillate between aura and demonology it was because these varying images of the continent were needed to service specific European projects of identity. African difference was essential to European self-fashioning.

Nowhere is the idea of Africa as a function of Western anxieties and desires more apparent than in the various transitions that European societies went through beginning in the Renaissance, through the Enlightenment, and culminating with the age of empire in the nineteenth century. As numerous studies have shown, these transitions were directly or indirectly linked to the enslavement of Africans.[6] Slavery was, of course, just one of the many political or economic forces driving the transformation of Europe, but it was responsible for the creation of a whole range of anxieties that pushed modernity into areas that it would otherwise not have considered crucial to its structure or identity. Enslavement diminished the aura of Africans as subjects in the European imagination; it also impoverished the ideals of modernity by calling into question European notions of freedom. In all cases, however, what was at issue was not the character of the African (although this was to become an obsession in modern culture), but the nature of European society in relation to the world of the other, of which the African was an inescapable symbol. Forced to make radical shifts in its perception of blackness by the economics of slavery and imperialism, the idea of Europe came to function under the shadow of African difference.

For a long time, the encounter between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa was mediated through myths, images, and ideas. Although this part of Africa had certainly been part of the western imagination since antiquity, it presented a different set of problems to the project of European self-making than the other continents in the expanded geography of human culture. For one, there is no evidence of an intricate process of cultural exchange between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa of the kind we witness in the former's relation with the Middle East and China. The circulation of objects and other curiosities that was part of the European project of collecting other people's cultural treasures did not extend to sub-Saharan Africa in substantive ways until the nineteenth century.[7] In contrast to Asia, one scholar has noted, "Africa offered little challenge to reconsider the nature of Europeanness."[8] In contrast to the Americas, whose discovery was to shake the European map of humankind, Africans do not seem to have functioned as a significant site of contradiction, one with the capacity to reshape the terms of European identity. While the discovery of the Americas triggered major debates and disputes about the human subject and natural law, the African presence in Europe tended to operate in a thin context.

But the absence of a thick context for describing the African in the European imaginary and the paucity of traffic in goods and peoples does not mean that Africa was absent from the European imagination. Indeed, the very distance of Africa from the daily lives of early modern Europeans made its mythological

[6] For a discussion of the relationship between economies of slavery and the making of European identity see Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[7] See the essays collected in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Culture of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[8] John Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 43.

character even more compelling. As Eldred Jones has shown, the representation of the African in Elizabethan England continued to rely heavily on classical images and geographies. As Europeans slowly made their way down the West African coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, there was noticeable interest in the customs and beliefs of Africans and the increasing number of black figures on the Elizabethan stage functioned in an increasingly thickening context of cultural encounter; but there is no evidence to suggest that encounters with real Africans were effective in displacing inherited mythologies about blackness.[9] In spite of the increasing presence of Africans in the early modern world, "the words Renaissance and sub-Saharan Africa appear to have no obvious connection; indeed, it would be argued that they stand in almost complete opposition to each other."[10]

Still, the opposition between the culture of the Renaissance and the idea of Africa can be read as another sign of European anxieties about a modern identity. Let us recall that when European intellectuals in the sixteenth century reinvented themselves as cultured subjects, they tended to do so by conjuring the image of a Middle Ages that they thought they had superseded. The culture of the Renaissance was invented against the background of an uncivilized Middle Ages, which was embodied in the Turkish Sultanate across the Bosporus. But when a later generation of Europeans came to narrate the story of the early modern period and to imagine the "barbarism" against which this age had emerged, they could not single out the Turkish Sultanate as the depository of the barbarism of the Middle Ages. It was to Africa that they would turn for the tropes and images of what was considered to be the medieval. The conception of Africa as the unmodern place, and the vocabularies that came to describe this state had, however, taken root way before the Swiss historian Carl Jacob Burckhardt rediscovered the Renaissance and celebrated it in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1878).[11] By the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, the terms that Burckhardt would later come to associate with the "barbarism" of the Middle Ages – superstition, childishness, despotism, and the Gothic – had already been circulating freely among trade European agents on the West African coast. For William Bosman, who was the Dutch trade agent on the Gold Coast at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Africans were characterized by degeneracy. The people of the coast of Guinea, Bosman wrote around 1701 were "Crafty, Villainous, and Fraudulent"; their "degenerate vices" accompanied by sloth and idleness; like beasts, "they sleep perfectly undisturbed by any Melancholy Reflections."[12]

One common theme in European discourses on Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was that all systems of government on the continent were despotic and that this despotism was underwritten by superstition. Writing on Dahomey in 1793, the Scottish surgeon, Archibald Dalzell, described the religion of the country as "a jumble of superstition and nonsense" and its government as a "perfect despotism."[13] Courtly processions and rituals at Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Kingdom, appeared to Thomas Bowdich to be scenes of "a horror and barbarism" out of the dark ages – "a splendid pantomime after a Gothic

[9] Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, June 1971), 11-17.

[10] Kate Lowe, "Introduction: The Black African Presence in Renaissance Europe", in T. F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

[11] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990 [1860]).

[12] William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967 [1704]), 117, 118.

[13] Archibald Dalzell, *The History of Dahomey* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1793]), vi, vii.

tragedy."[14] This idea of despotism came to constitute the idiom which intellectuals of Europe would adopt in their differentiation of European high civilization from what they considered to be lower forms of culture and consciousness. "I never felt so grateful for being born in a civilized country" – those were Bowdich's words as he sought to separate himself from the scenes of "medieval barbarism" that he had encountered in Ashanti.[15]

It is important to note that the language used to described African "barbarism" would remain unchanged from 1701 (Bosman) to 1819 (Bowdich), a sign that the image and idea of Africa had come to be fixed in time and space. In fact, most European discourses on Africa were unoriginal, copies or duplicates of each other. European trade agents on the West African coast all claimed to produce exact and original accounts, but in reality they quoted, recited, and recycled each other's work. Significantly, this plagiarized discourse of Africanism could make its way from the journals of slave traders and adventurers to the highest echelons of European culture, even providing leading intellectuals with a vocabulary for describing radical difference. The most prominent example of this form of cultural importation can be found in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Here, Hegel characterized Africans as "magical," operating outside the domain of reflection in a world of passion, and imprisoned by "a wild sense," one that foreclosed self-consciousness and rationality. In Hegel's scheme, the African was locked in perpetual childhood, unable to achieve universal rationality and hence to apprehend or account for causal relationships.[16] Hegel's evidence, as Robert Bernasconi has shown, was drawn from the speculative and often unoriginal discourse of missionaries, travelers, and adventurers.[17]

But it was in his discourse on history that Hegel was to affirm the logic of Africanism. As is well known, Hegel's goal in the preface to the *Lectures on World History* was to exclude Africa from the movement and consciousness of history; nevertheless, he spent more time and space writing on the continent more than on any other. In fact he devoted over two thirds of his preface not to the place where the movement of history ostensibly began (Asia) or where it reached its apex (Europe), but to the continent where history is "out of the question."[18] What appears on the surface to have been an act of negation – the evacuation of Africa from the narrative of world history – would turn out to be a form of disavowal. Africa would be defined as ahistorical, yet function as the threshold of modern time. Why did an ahistorical Africa need to be inscribed and deleted at the same time? And why did Hegel spend so much time and energy denying the possibility of a historical understanding of Africa?

One can begin to find answers to these questions by noting how Hegel's account of Africa and Africans was saturated by a grammar of negations:

> The characteristic feature of the negroes is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity – for example, of God or the law – in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become

[14] T. Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast to Ashantee* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1819]), 285.

[15] Ibid., 227

[16] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by R. F. Brown et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 233.

[17] Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti", in Stuart Barnett, ed., *Hegel after Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 41-63.

[18] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. from the German edition of Johannes Hoffmeister by H. B. Nisbet, with an introduction by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 176. Further references to this edition will be inserted in the text as *LP*.

> aware of his own being. The African, in his undifferentiated and concentrated unity, has not yet succeeded in making this distinction between himself as an individual and his essential universality, so that he knows nothing of an absolute being which is other and higher than his own self is. Thus, man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. (*LP,* 177)

As we have already noted, the "undifferentiated and concentrated unity" that Hegel refers to here was operative in the language of Africanism. Hegel's goal, however, was to endow this undifferentiated mass – this thing called Africa – with the power of fact. He recognized that most stories about Africa circulating in Europe appeared incredulous and provided readers more with "a collection of fearful details than with a determinate image or principle" (*LP,* 176). His goal was to counter these unsubstantiated stories with an exact account of Africa from which a set of principles or generalities could be drawn. Out of these generalities, the philosopher would sketch out a definition of "the universal spirit and form of the African character in the light of the particular traits which such accounts enumerate" (*LP,* 176). At the same time, however, Hegel's goal was to position Africa as the quintessential figure of difference. Here, the African character was difficult to comprehend "because it is so totally different from our own culture, and so remote and alien in relation to our own mode of consciousness" (*LP,* 176). To understand Africa, Hegel contended, analysts had to forget "all the categories which are fundamental to our own spiritual life, i.e. the forms under which we normally subsume the data which confront us; the difficulty here is that our customary preconceptions will still inevitably intrude in all our deliberations" (*LP,* 176).

If Africa had "no historical interest of its own" why had Hegel decided to locate it at the beginning of a discourse on world history? Hegel's contention was that Africa had to be explored "because it can well be taken as antecedent to our main inquiry" (*LP,* 174) and because anyone "who wishes to study the most terrible manifestations of human nature will find them in Africa" (*LP,* 190). At this point Hegel would affirm African barbarism as the essential condition for understanding European civilization:

> It is now generally accepted that man, as a human being, is free; but where this is not the case, man has value only in one or other of his particular capacities: for example, partners in marriage, relatives, neighbours, and fellow citizens are of value to one another. Among the negroes, however, even these values are scarcely present; their moral sentiments are extremely weak, or, to be more precise, they are altogether deficient. The first ethical relationship of all, that of the family, is a matter of total indifference to the negroes. Men sell their wives, parents sell their children, and children sell their parents whenever they have it in their power to do so. Since slavery is so prevalent, all those bonds of moral esteem which we cherish towards one another have disappeared, and it never occurs to the negroes to expect of others what we are entitled to demand of our fellows. (*LP,* 184)

Freedom only has substantive meaning when we recognize it in its absence. Similarly, the teleology of history could not be understood unless one was able to represent

another place, a place outside history, as its counterpoint. To initiate modern history, Hegel had to part from Africa:

> We shall therefore leave Africa at this point, and it need not be mentioned again. For it is an unhistorical continent, with no movement or development of its own. And such events as have occurred in it – i.e. in its northern region – belong to the Asiatic and European worlds. Carthage, while it lasted, represented an important phase; but as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered as a stage in the movement of the human spirit from east to west, but it has no part in the spirit of Africa. What we understand as Africa proper is that unhistorical and undeveloped land which is still enmeshed in the natural spirit, and which had to be mentioned here before we cross the threshold of world history itself. (*LP,* 190)

But like all partings, this is also a form of connection, a copula as it were. Hegel's use of the word "threshold" is pertinent here, for the term has a dual meaning: on one hand, a threshold is the point of beginning; on the other hand, it is a limit, the arch that must be reached in order for a certain effect to be achieved. Was Africa, then, a beginning or a limit?

Simon Gikandi

Creative Crossings

1. *Intersections*

Behind this issue's re-imaginings of Africa is the long history of the "idea" or ideas of Africa: the Africanisms Simon Gikandi engages with in the first part of this introduction.

What interested us in planning the issue was to see how Africa is re-imagined today through our contributors' crossings of verbal, visual, performative and digital creativity with criticism; how its many articulations in recent cultural productions, counterpoint and complicate the mediatic images of Africa that dominate the contemporary scene. It was evident, from the start, that the re-imaginings of Africa would intersect with and produce re-imaginings of other locations, including Italy and especially Naples, the geographical "home" of *Anglistica*. Crossing geopolitical and cultural borders, images, texts and sounds of diverse origin, the alternative mappings and counter-geographies that would emerge would also self-reflexively interrogate the positioning and perspective of their creators.

Fig. 1: William Kentridge, *Regali Decreti (Regali Decreti Titoli Del Codice Napoleone)*, 2009, watercolour and pastel on original document pages, 42,4 x 130,8 cm, photo John Hodgkiss, courtesy of Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan/Naples.

At about the time the first call for papers was drawn up, an exhibition by William Kentridge was on at the Capodimonte museum in Naples.[19] It was one of a series of exhibitions in which Kentridge creatively crosses areas of the globe, showing dark, silhouetted figures of migrants, nomads or refugees – "porters", indistinguishable from their burdens as they trek across maps of different countries and regions in a state of perpetual transit. Lacking any indication as to their race, age or gender, they can be located anywhere, yet the specificity – temporal and spatial – of the maps they are projected onto cast them as actors in the complicated stories and histories of their temporary homes. In *Streets of the City*, the artist was re-imagining Naples, superimposing his characteristic torn construction-paper or watercolour and pastel images of porters and horses onto 18th and 19th century maps of the city and onto copies of royal decrees and treaties from the Napoleonic era.

[19] William Kentridge, *Streets of the City (and other tapestries)/ Strade della città (e altri arazzi)*, Napoli, Museo di Capodimonte, 14 novembre – 20 gennaio, 2010 (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2009).

Fig. 2: *Chorographia Campaniae Felicis*, 2009, construction paper, tape and pins on original etching, 38x30 cm, photo John Hodgkiss, courtesy of Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan/Naples.

Fig. 3: *Pianta della Città di Napoli*, 2008, mohair silk and embroidery, 352x462 cm, edition of 6, courtesy of Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan/ Naples.

Kentridge's images, transformed into tapestries in South Africa and transported to Italy, were hung in the site normally occupied by a series of immense sixteenth century Flemish tapestries celebrating the imperial forces' victory over Francis I at the battle of Pavia (1525), which established Spanish supremacy over Italy. Haunted, for Neapolitan viewers, by these previous representations of empire, the artist's remappings of Naples were shown alongside some of his maps of other areas, notably southern Europe, Egypt and Palestine, telling of Biblical and other dispersions and diasporas.

Considered against this backdrop, the images of shaky, overloaded vessels in difficulty on the Mediterranean that were already flooding television screens and newspapers acquire different, vaster dimensions, complicating the Afropessimism

that tended and tends to dominate the media. Kentridge's tapestries point to a global, transhistorical linkage, suggesting the transnational, planetary reach of what is frequently seen in Europe and particularly and paradoxically in Italy, despite its own long history of migration, as a local political problem whose solution depends on increasingly severe legislation and police control.

The theme of "porterage" and migrancy is a thread that intersects a number of the articles, interviews and examples of creative writing published in this issue, but although the difficulties of migrants are alluded to in several contributions (see in particular the stories and poems by Chika Unigwe, Warsan Shire and Igiaba Scego), the focus here is rather on the creative openings and crossings stemming from migration. As the grandmother insists in Gabriella Ghermandi's story, "in the terrible things that happen there is always some piece of the cloth, some fold in the fabric, that we will want to hold on to." And although she is speaking in Ethiopia, to a family that has not yet migrated, her words apply also to the experiences and culture of migrants. Counterpointing the nostalgia, loneliness and disrupted lives of some of Shire's immigrants and exiles is the grandparents' tender body-mapping in the "dark rooms" of her first poem, "Grandfather's hands". As she kisses the brown knuckles of her husband's hands, the grandmother "circled an island into his palm/ and told him which parts they would share,/ which part they would leave alone", before wetting her finger "to draw where the ocean would be/ on his wrist, kissed him there,/ named the ocean after herself." Dispossessed of their homeland, they explore new territories, using their fingers to find "places to own –/ under the tongue, collarbone, bottom lip,/ arch of foot" and claiming "whole countries/ with their mouths."

Another artistic projection of the migrant condition – inserted, like those of Kentridge, among the images that alternate on our cover and integrate its contents – is offered by Teju Cole's photograph of African traders in Rome as they flee up the Spanish Steps. The origin of the image is explained in Cole's "Angels in Winter" essay in the first volume of the *African Cities Reader*:

> At the Spanish Steps, where even in winter, tourists swarm, there were lithe African men doing a brisk trade in Prada and Gucci bags. The men were young, personable as was required for sales, but at other moments suffused with melancholy. The bags were arranged on white cloths, not at all far from the luxury shops which sold the same goods for ten or twenty times more. It was late afternoon. …
>
> There was a sudden commotion: with a great whoosh the African brothers raced up the steps, their white cloths now caught at the corners and converted into bulging sacks on their backs. One after the other, then in pairs, they fled upwards, fleet of foot, past where I stood. Tourists shrank out of their way. I spun around and pressed the shutter. Far below, cars carrying *carabinieri*, the military police, arrived, but by then (all this was the action of less than half a minute) the brothers had gone.
>
> Later, I looked at the image on my camera: the last of the angels vanishing up the long flight of steps, *a hurry through which known and strange things pass*, their white wings flashing in the setting sun.[20]

[20] Teju Cole, "Angels in Winter", *African Cities Reader 01* (Cape Town: African Centre for Cities and Chimurenga, 2009), 208-9.

Fig. 4: Teju Cole, "Angels in Winter", courtesy of the artist.

2. "A hurry through which known and strange things pass"

Cole's description of the passage of known and strange through the movement of fleeing or moving subjects may be used as a key to open up and link together the different contributions. In "Koroga: Another African Story", the article with which this issue opens, Keguro Macharia and Wambui Mwangi reflect on both "the punctuated strangeness of the familiar spaces we call 'home'," and on "the familiarity of strange sights we do not recognize, but which nevertheless assert themselves as portrayals of our home." Set up as a reaction against the stereotypical images and stories of Africa that continue to circulate, the aim of the Koroga project was to explore "new ways of creating and disseminating Africa's image-text", juxtaposing poems and images to posit "new and alternative social imaginaries, rich spaces and resources for Kenyans to inhabit and re-think our collective social and political lives and practices". From the start, the project was collective, involving a group of Kenyan artists and writers – the waKorogi – and working through and on the web. Playfully stirring together a variety of ingredients, they created mixtures that would interrupt "the authority of the single image, the singular photographer, the lone poet, and the one image-text", enabling their viewers to see with "compound eyes" and discover sites not so much of loss as of enchantment. Constantly multiplying frames, images and texts, the waKorogi work and rework their creations, taking full advantage of the flexibilities and spaces of creative identification made possible by digital technology as they "imagine and re-imagine pasts, presents and futures", disrupting the relationship between space and time. As a virtual project, Koroga is part of the "fragmented and rapidly-morphing engagements" that form, today, "the contours and contents of 'Kenyan-ness'". Behind it is the enormous popularity of web culture in their country, as evidenced by its vigorous blogosphere, the popularity of social networking and of products such as the "viral Kenyan internet sensation that was *Makmende*,[21] with its irreverent and hybrid references to global culture, seventies Kenyan kitsch and super-hero mythologies."

[21] Visible at the Just a Band website.

A creative crossing with images from elsewhere is the departure point for Chika Unigwe's story, "Hope", where news of the Haitian earthquake accompanies and interacts with the protagonist's gradual move from the emptiness of her present existence to hope for a fuller future. Inquiring into what lies behind the empty expression of one of the earthquake survivors she sees on television, she recalls the losses she too is both enduring and surviving in her life as a migrant in Belgium.

The process of "getting used to things" entails forgetting much of her previous life, and she begins to realize that "migration had the ability to change people and make them strangers even to those they were most intimate with." At night, as her dreams of Haiti move into dreams of the life she left behind in Nigeria, the scenes of havoc the earthquake has produced trigger memories of the destruction of her family's home in Jos during the religious riots. Dreaming "in a new place" is always an intricate process: the old dreams still remain, interacting with the different fragmented and fragmenting modalities of the new, as Ingrid de Kok suggests at the end of "Shards":

> It is not as if old dreams depart
> like foot soldiers recalled to another front
> while wives knit socks, roll bandages
>
> but new dreams do sunder in a different way,
> break into shards – sliver of moon, arrow, ankle bone,
> stone rattle, whitened horn.

Another "strangeness of home" appears in Serena Guarracino's study of the "dynamics of familiarity and estrangement" in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, where Bizet's opera is sung in Xhosa and its original setting and interplay between different ethnicities and life styles are replaced by scenarios of a South African township. The 'foreign', African sound of Xhosa displaces the non South African audiences from their habitual locations, positioning them in a musical and cultural elsewhere. Bereft of the security afforded by classical music, they are forced into a condition of cultural migrancy by the "postcolonial ear" or "point of hearing" adopted in the film.

U-Carmen's crossings of linguistic, geographical and musical borders in Guarracino's rendering is followed by the visual and performative cross-border movements described in Alessandra De Angelis's study of recent work by the South African artist, Penny Siopis. Japanese erotic wood-block prints, paintings by Claude Monet and John Everett Millais, but also reflections on the fate of "African migrants drowning – thrown overboard by traffickers in their bid to get to Europe",[22] become the starting point for portrayals of scenes of sexual violence and of processes of flux and flow. Through the unpredictable interactions on the artist's canvas of liquid ink and viscous glue, what ensues is "a kind of dance, a perpetual movement across borders, mediums and visions through which choreographies of colors emerge, and virtual, hitherto unknown possibilities are disclosed".

A rather different crossing appears in Siopis' earlier work, "Dora and the Other Woman", discussed in the last part of De Angelis's study. Here Freud's Dora[23] and Sarah Baartman come together to form a meta-artistic portrait of the artist herself, depicting her desire to avoid – but at the same time display and interrogate – her own participation in the "scopic obsession" with the body of the "Other Woman" that constructed and continues to construct Baartman's story.[24]

[22] Penny Siopis, "On a Knife Edge: Penny Siopis in Conversation with Sarah Nuttall", *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, XXV (2009), 100.

[23] Sigmund Freud, *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Standard Edition, vol.7 (1905 [1901]), 1–122.

[24] As in Abdellatif Khechiche's 2010 film, *Vénus Noire*.

While Siopis' pastel foregrounds the ambivalence of the white artist in her self-reflexive reworking of Baartman, Nelisiwe Xaba translates her story "into an autobiographic vision of the black African woman's body today, caught in between invisibility and hypervisibility". New ways of "re-think[ing] the genre of Africa, especially the image of women in Africa" are also examined in the Koroga project: Macharia and Mwangi refer explicitly to Baartman in their discussion of how attention to the "pornographic" and "medicalized" female body in poems by Stephen Derwent Partington and Phyllis Muthoni "suture[s] two discourses key to understanding the production of African women in colonial and postcolonial imaginations". Xaba seeks to go beyond such images. Through her dancing, she "challenges and 'defers' the audience's gaze, whether black or white, European or African, directing it towards other visions and re-visions", as Annalisa Piccirillo observes in her introduction to the interview, carried out at a dance festival in Italy. This was Xaba's first Italian performance of *The Venus*, combining two solo pieces, *They Look at Me and That is All They Think* and *Sarkozy says NoN to the Venus*, commissioned by the Musée du Quai Branly in 2009. More overtly political, *Sarkozy says NoN…* is also "a comment on European immigration laws and policies, which have become increasingly anti-African". Xaba's intention, as she herself explains, was not only to tell Baartman's story, but to use her own history as a performer "who always has to go out and perform in foreign places". What does it mean "to produce a contemporary African dance piece for/on white stages in European festivals", where African dancers and choreographers are located in a special, separate "African contemporary box" as in the *African Crossroads* section of the Dance Umbrella festival? "What is 'contemporary African'", Xaba asks. "Does the color of my skin make my work 'contemporary African'?"

3. *Dialogue debate dissent*

"Dialogue debate dissent" is the section of *Anglistica* reserved for interviews – dialogues between interviewer and interviewee, whether or not they include debate and dissent. In this issue the dialogue extends beyond the interactive space of the interview to include contacts and exchanges between different forms of art. Photography, fiction and architecture come together in Paola Splendore's interview with Ivan Vladislavić about *TJ/Double Negative*, a joint publication that brings together Goldblatt's photographs of Johannesburg and Vladislavić's novel about a young photographer. Poetry speaks to photography in Karen Press's engagement with three of Goldblatt's other images in "Monument to the South African Republic (on some photographs by David Goldblatt)", while the photographs themselves reflect on graveyard monuments and inscriptions. Choreography, dance, theatre, visual art and costumes interrelate in the work and words of Xaba in her interview with Piccirillo, discussed above, while crime fiction, police reports and the dialogues and stories of psychoanalysis are behind the investigations of the New South Africa presented in Agustín Reyes-Torres' interview with the popular Afrikaans writer, Deon Meyer, on *Dead Before Dying*.

All five contributions address the problem of the archive, directly or indirectly engaging with the poetics and politics of the rebuilding of the South African nation expressed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in the debate around the therapeutic value of its memory work. But at the same time their reflections reach to a wider horizon of sense. As Press so beautifully expresses it, looking at Goldblatt's portrayal of a "weathered, semi-literate scrap of older time" or "a bare gravel patch" on the ground, "The long dry grass collects our history/ and every few years burns it off/ in a frenzy of memory". A cycle that is perpetually renewed as the grass grows again, "long and soft and ready to catch" a smouldering cigarette stub, beer bottle splinters and the new stories that lie behind them, "and burn fast, and lay itself down as ash over the past."

4. Intersecting Past and Present, Texts and Myths, People and Places

Vladislavić's practice of writing "within the magnetic field of another body of work and trying to create an interesting interplay between the two" resonates with several of the other contributions to this issue, starting with the Koroga project but including also "Door into the Dark", Teju Cole's hitherto unpublished "fictionalized essay". Cole's story-essay opens with a dialogue with – and about – Ryszard Kapuściński's account of his time in Nigeria[25] and the memories and "other African stories" they trigger in his parents and, on a different, self-reflexive level, in his writer-protagonist:

> Even before I brought my parents and Kapuściński together, I had been wondering about the narrator of my novel-in-progress, a young psychiatrist named Julius. How would I bring his grandparents together with my own? I had to decide how permeable to make the boundaries between my fiction and the faraway truths out of which they were growing.[26]

[25] Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Soccer War* (London: Granta and Penguin, 1990).

[26] The novel in progress Cole refers to is his recently published *Open City* (New York: Random House, 2011).

As he listens to his mother's memories, the imaginific language they inspire in her brings to his "mind's ear" the words of a Middle English lyric, like "the sweet ping of a lock springing open": a moment of recognition he desires to grasp. In his journey into his parents' fading memories, moments such as this may enable him to fix "that thing that was slipping from one generation to another, assuming a different shape in each, from grandparents to parents to children, across oceans and countries".

Cole's urge to "hold the moment" recalls the definition of photography Vladislavić borrows from another writer to describe the work of David Goldblatt, but also his own narrative strategies:

> Geoff Dyer uses a wonderful phrase – 'the ongoing moment' – to describe the status of a photograph. Every photo is a cross-section through time; it freezes a moment, which then stays with us, the viewers, in a sort of perpetual present. When I look at David's work, it is extraordinary how much life, how much history folds out of one of those cross-sections. … All these still

> moments, placed side by side, read one after the other, manage to set time in motion. The relationships between the photos, the changes or continuities they reveal when they are compared are just as important as the individual elements. I think I pursue a somewhat similar strategy in my work, placing texts side by side and allowing them to generate meaning through the ways they argue or agree with one another, rather than unfolding a seamless, linear narrative.[27]

[27] Vladislavić is referring to Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

Rather than texts that "argue or agree with one another", in Chris Abani's early novel, *Graceland*, it is two apparently irreconcilable myths that come into contact, producing "a radical re-imagination of the Nigerian postcolony". Madhu Krishnan sees the 16 year-old protagonist, a would-be dancer named after Elvis Presley, as a modern *ogbanje*, intersecting the traditional mythological igbo border-crosser, migrating to and fro between birth, death and rebirth, and between the human and spiritual worlds, with his version of the American dream. The presence of the *ogbanje* suggests "the fragmentation of individuals and communities in the postcolonial era", allowing the novel to engage with "the complexities of identity-formation and communal belonging in contemporary Nigerian society". Although it is "permeated by mythological significance", *Graceland* is "simultaneously sceptical of that very mythology." Self-reflexively highlighting its "undecidability and instability" as it critiques the very notion of mythologizing, the novel ends in the liminal "no place" of an airport waiting lounge: Oke, renamed "Redemption" and thus the bearer of a borrowed identity, is preparing to leave Nigeria for America, the country of his ambivalent and probably unrealizable dreams.

Creative mixings and crossings occur, not surprisingly, also in the field of language. The narrator in Cole's "Door into the Dark" comments on the difference between his own fluent but limited Yoruba and the "luxurious texture" of his parents' speech, which becomes his "access to things past." When she speaks of "old things", his mother's language takes on a metaphorical, poetic density, even though she is using an admittedly rare but also "normal locution, one that was comfortably nestled within the language."

For the protagonists of fiction written in Italian by authors of Somali and Ethiopian origin, the mixed space of their languages is more troubled. Ghermandi's story of a young girl in Ethiopia in the 70s, tells of how the changes introduced by the new government after the military coup of 1974 affect even the language that is spoken. Along with the Russian gymnastics displays, piano concerts and military parades that replace the American television series the family had enthusiastically watched each week, and with the removal from the market of "anything that could pollute the minds of the young. No more toys, cookies, candies, or chocolates", a new vocabulary and new meanings are introduced:

> In the gaps left free by everything that was being cancelled even from the simple world of ordinary conversation new words were being inserted.
>
> "Imperialist and capitalist": what had to be definitively eliminated from the country, in every possible shape and form.

> "The people's well-being": what had to be created or strengthened.
> "Ideology": a big word, smelling of ideas, reasoning, squaring off and hard lines.
> "Protecting ideology": soldiers on every corner of the city, neighbourhood control centres, check points and curfew from seven p.m. to six a.m.

As the new government's ideological stitching loosens, Ghermandi's narrator and her family adjust to the situation. Following the teaching of the grandmother, they manage to "find a fold in it for [themselves]", threads with which to "weave a piece of cloth, arranging its woof and warp according to [their] own desires". But for migrants and exiles the situation is more complex. Zuhra, Igiaba Scego's lively Romanesco and Italian speaking Somali protagonist, lives in Italy. Despite her Italian citizenship, she has an insecure purchase not only on her condition as a citizen, which not even her passport seems able to vouch for, but on the linguistic homes or landscapes in which she finds herself. Thus she "stumbles around uncertainly in the confused version" of her mother tongue, Somali, using "twisted" words, "polluted" sounds and with her "other mother peep[ing] out" in every conversation, word, sigh: "The Italian I grew up with and sometimes hated because it made me feel a foreigner." There is no way she can keep the borders separate between the two: "when I speak one of them, the other turns up impudently, an uninvited guest. There are perennial short circuits in my mind. I don't talk, I mix."

Zuhra's involuntary mixings could be seen as a form of *Fra-intendimenti*, the title of Kaha Aden's short story collection reviewed in this issue by Alessandra Marino, and thus as another expression of the "precariousness of intercultural communication as a border practice." As Marino explains, *fraintendimenti* – literally "misunderstandings" – "refers both to the migrants' condition of living in-between (*fra*) languages and discourses (*intendimenti*), and to the risk of failure that is embedded in the exercise of cultural negotiation." A risk that is visible also in the last of Shire's poems, expressing the alienation of a Somali exile in Britain who "can't compete" with the home of her loved one: while her experience of Somalia is indirect, vicarious and imperfect, her new home, the London she identifies with and considers hers, "can never be enough" for her companion.

The Africas imagined and re-imagined in this issue look both out and in as they engage in their constantly shifting and proliferating creative crossings. In "Lorha", another of the artworks whose alternating presence on our home page is activated by our readers' navigations, the South African artist Erika Hibbert re-imagines her elder daughter through multiple, variant replicas of Lorha's upper body. Seated together on a sofa, absorbed in the barely visible, ghostly laptop posed precariously on the girl's stretched out leg, their fingers delve delicately into the tangled strips of printed paper released by the computer, playing on them and with them, while strips of printed words curl round and over the contours of their hands and faces, drawing them anew with streaks of light and colour.

Finally, in "Cape to Rio", Hibbert's second image, the grave, beautiful face of a young African woman looks out from Africa across the ocean, while white, migrating, peace-bearing birds fly to and fro across her face and across this new/old mapping of the world.

Jane Wilkinson

Fig. 5. Erika Hibbert, "Lorha", 2010, charcoal on paper, courtesy of the artist.

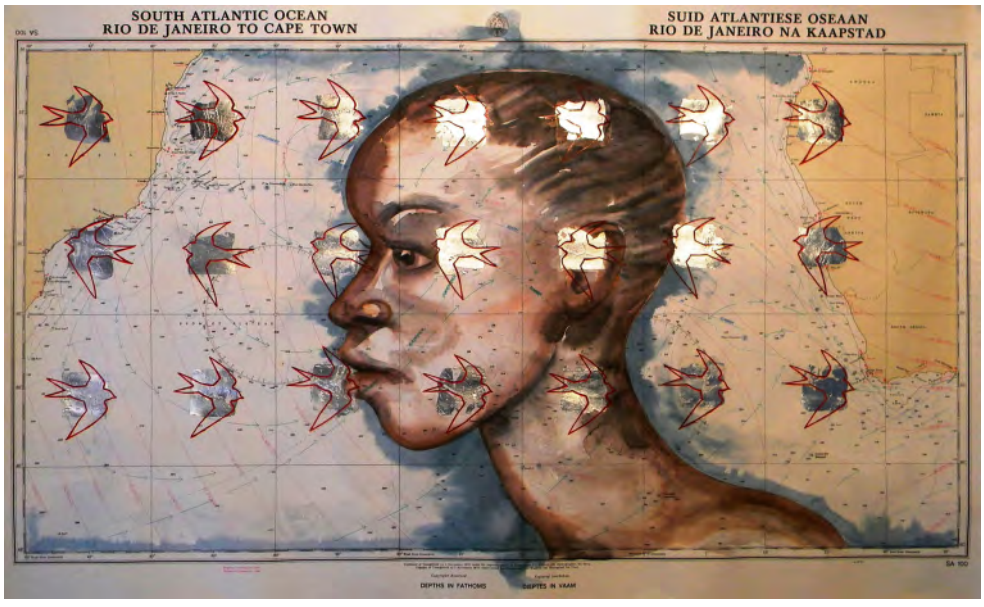

Fig. 6. Erika Hibbert, "Cape to Rio", 2010, ink, enamel paint, silver leaf on map, 955x590 mm, courtesy of the artist.