



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

b(l)ack home hole land - Afropean wo/anderings

Sathoud, Aude

Citation

Sathoud, A. (2024). *b(l)ack home hole land - Afropean wo/anderings*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4082437>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

b(l)ack home hole land

Afropean wo/anderings

A Master's thesis by Aude Sathoud (s3664384)

Research Master's thesis in African Studies

African Studies Center Leiden, Leiden University

The Netherlands

July 1st, 2024

Supervisors: Pr. Dr. Mayke Kaag, Leiden University

Dr. Anna Carastathis, Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research

Word count: 26 842 (excluding footnotes)

Table of contents

Where is here? What is left?	5
B(l)ackground.....	6
Seeking for, Thinking of, Sinking into – Afropea.....	8
Afropean demo(n)s	9
Afropean eth(n)ics.....	10
Dis/location as a method.....	11
Researching Afropea	11
Where is here?	12
What is <i>left</i> ?	13
Itinerary	14
Together(e)ness	15
(home) sweep (home)	21
<i>Sweep, verb.</i>	22
(b)room	23
<i>dysleXic</i> bodies, dysphoric wor(l)ds, – anagrammar of dis/location.....	24
Banda	26
L and I’s room.....	28
Ana/sthasie.....	30
breaking noise	36
Sound, noise, parasite	37
Over the window	38
para-site.....	38
para-sight.....	39
Parasites: bugs, witch, child.....	40
cockroach.....	41
witch.....	43
child	45
further and suns	49
Pool off - leaving the main road.....	50
Roads must fall.....	51
Afropean weather – memories from the Pool.....	53
(oil) pool: subsurface oil accumulation	54
pool: fairly small area of still water	55

a pool of people, money, or things is a quantity or number of them that is available for an organization or group to use.....	56
Afterwor(l)ds	58
Afropea: some tentative wo(r)lds.....	61
<i>(home)</i>	61
<i>para-site</i>	61
<i>mo(u)rning</i>	61
'More Maps'	62

We should begin every day.

Cross words out, rewrite. Or write over, rather, until layers and layers of ink render any message illegible. Until there are no phrases but a series of mingling rubbing scribbles stains traces – that scream.

This thesis was written in the unfolding of a genocide in Gaza, Palestine, and with the energy of a global movement of protest and resistance against colonialism, imperialism and the ecocidal ‘petro-sexo-racial’ capitalist order we live under.

While Palestinian universities were bombed and crushed, others, all around the world, rose up. In Paris, Amsterdam and Leiden, the cities I both studied and wrote most of this work in, students and staff gathered and chanted, walked out and camped, taught and held one another.

In France like in the Netherlands, this solidarity movement was met with institutional contempt, repression, and police violence – dogs, horses and trucks. Mass arrests, beating, surveillance and imprisonment.

This thesis was written, in Amsterdam, during the first months of rule of a far-right government. This thesis is submitted, in France, on a day of elections that could see the far-right access power for the first time since the Second World War.

This thesis is about a world that lives, *somewhere else*, in the margins of maps, unknown to geography. It is made of flesh, tales and memories. About a world that feels, looms, trembles, that is made of questions, absence and desires.

This thesis departs from and returns to anger and urgency – hope, that is. It bears the smells of forbidden books and crowded streets, nights of sweat and uncertainty. It sounds like chalks drawing on the pavement, marbles rolling in the yard, and whispers in crypted languages. It is salty, a bit. Warm. It scratches the throat like giggles, at times. This thesis is an attempt and a testimony – a reminder, perhaps.

We begin every day.

Introduction

Where is here?

What is left?

I begin to write this introduction, along with love letters and poetic notes, in French, English and Greek, sitting in buses and cafés, standing on station platforms and rest areas, on the way from the east of France to the Netherlands and back to Paris. I answer to messages coming from Paphos, Cyprus and Dolisie, Congo-Brazzaville. I highlight texts while stuck in the dense mid-day traffic along the North Sea continental coast, reflect on dis/location, belonging and home as I pass through the immigrant neighborhoods, independent cinemas and desert museums of European capital cities, and imagine Afropea, cradled by the conversation of my fellow bus passengers, speaking on the phone in Spanish or Lingala.

I scribble ideas down in my notebooks or phone before falling asleep in temporary beds, lying by the side of siblings, friends, soulmates. I arrange meetings, on and off line, scattered around time-zones - Chicago, Athens, Stockholm. I switch alphabets on keyboards, walking pace and clothes. I promise to come back soon - or home?, to Paris, Berlin, Lesvos. I pass by my childhood bedroom, drop books and bags, notice that the cherry tree in the garden has grown, frozen or blossomed, building works are over, and the playground I knew in the park has gone.

I wake up and, for a second, I wonder when I am.

B(I)ackground

If there ever was a loss, at the beginning of this research, it may not be so much that of a land as of ground. Where land is marked, cultivated and named – ‘a country’, the dictionary begins, ground is bare - under, back, as if by essence. And thus ever ahead, potential, looming in the same movement as it is collapsing. Afropea, to echo Muñoz, “is not quite here yet”.¹ Afropea longs to be – rather than ever belongs to the utopian, the missing and fugitive, yet stubborn and feeling. That which sur-vives, literally, that is exceeds and overcomes, persists and *beyonds* life. *Ce qui échappe*.

In introducing my search for Afropea, I want to unearth and return to its initial trouble – and hear back its echoes. The background, Sara Ahmed reminds us and explicates that Husserl suggests, at the beginning of her *Queer phenomenology*, as a “dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality”, is what goes “‘unseen’ in its ‘thereness’ or ‘familiarity’” and, in this, simultaneously constitutes all that “must take place in order for something to appear”².

“A background can refer to the ‘ground or parts situated in the rear’ (such as the rooms in the back of the house), or to the portions of the picture represented at a distance, which in turn allows what is ‘in’ the foreground to acquire the shape that it does, as a figure or object. Both of these meanings point to the ‘spatiality’ of the background. We can also think of background as having a temporal dimension. When we tell a story about someone, for instance, we might give information about their background: this meaning of ‘background’ would be about ‘what is behind,’ where ‘what is behind’ refers to what is in the past or what happened ‘before.’”³

In the beginning was *vertige*.

¹ “Utopia is always about the not-quite-here or the notion that something is missing”, see Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia - the Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2019 edition, p. 118

² Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology – Orientation, Object, Others*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2006, p.37

³ *Ibid.*, p.38.

This project is literal skin diving.

This proposal a lifebuoy, perhaps, which I finally get to, after months of drifting away

– eyes half-closed, body numb from the cold. Which I hold on to, now, trying to catch my breath.

Looking away to some distant shore. The horizon is a blur, the future a trembling bracket.

Time is out of joint, Shakespeare once said.

This project is a struggle⁴. Barehanded, a child is hitting the university's walls. Which stand, high and still, as the ground is shifting.

Let us - out.

This project is a scream. Captured, pulled out from somewhere between my lungs and thighs, disinfected, manufactured, trapped in ink. Deflated, translated, it now lies here

– muted.

This project is an assault. I against national, epistemological, disciplinary, linguistic boundaries. And I is us all. Attempt at building holes. This project was born of a vertige. We perhaps should not have classes on the fifth floor. Sat at my empty desk, on my boring chair I look at a white screen – and wonder.

Can I think ?

When the ground is so far, when the world is so calm. Flat, almost invisible.

Can I sink ?

I sometimes am afraid I'll forget what is real.

This project is a flight. I refuse, I resign – this project is a matricide. The métis child speaks, names and laughs – anthropology may now die. This project is a relic, a vestige, I feel very old, archaic, my mouth dry with those words from another age as I write.

This project is the final point we may now start all our sentences by.

This memoir is to be read hanging somewhere far upside down

– in the dark.

⁴ And we may, it is true, secretly wish for literature to win.

Written in the margins of a research proposal, beating in the background of this thesis, this poem speaks to the conditions of unease and dissonance of its elaboration, in a moment of increasing neoliberal and conservative pressures on academia, and institutional silence over crumbling worlds – which the following months would only best exemplify. In its embodied experience of and criticism towards the capitalist university as a place of science without sense, it also echoes a particular feeling vis à vis knowledge of and narratives of the ‘real’, that visual artist and researcher Hito Steyerl reflected on as early as 2011 in her essay ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’, which resonates perhaps even more vividly thirteen years later.

“Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness. We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike.”⁵

In the months of making of this thesis, the ground has seemed to collapse on multiple occasions – and it keeps on breaking, under the heat or bombs. It may well be the reason why this work seeks to sketch a place that has none, explore another form of space-time. In bringing this subconscious to the fore, indeed, in summoning these tremble and trouble, choosing to read through and work with the real from them, I define and argue for politics of dis/location. I want to challenge what comes first and is *there*, qualifies as valid, true, real, object/subject or, on the contrary, is kept in the background, unseen. I ask what matters – that is both counts and materializes, renders possible, makes things dis/appear. I engage in this critical phenomenology, parageography, following on the steps of writers and poets of Black and queer theories, especially the above mentioned works of José Esteban Muñoz and Sara Ahmed, joined by Dionne Brand, Christina Sharpe, Tina M. Campt, Paul B. Preciado, Fred Moten and more. To them, we owe the constantly renewed knowledge and experience of otherwise and other ways of inhabiting, documenting, un/making it through worlds, in spite of and beyond normative categorizations, discipline and naming – of bodies, things, desires. Their thinking will guide us through and inspire our wo/anderings around Afropea. For, if there is any space where one can begin to encounter her, if there is any way to approach and attempt at seeing them, it surely is right – or, rather, *wrong* there.

In the b(l)ackground.

Seeking for, Thinking of, Sinking into – Afropea

Some of us were always falling, one is reminded upon engaging in a search for a space-to-come, imagined and experienced by so many, yet invisible on most maps we are shown and taught about at school. Some of us were born on the verge – and risk toppling over anytime. Some of us lie on the threshold.

Emerged in the 1990’s as an experimental genre played with and by musicians – David Byrne and Zap Mama, co-authors of the first volume of Byrne’s trilogy ‘Adventures in Afropea’, English rap

⁵Steyerl, Hito. ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’, E-Flux, Issue 24, April 2011: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>

group Cash Crew or French duet Les Nubiennes, the polymorph idea of Afropea has been popularized by two recently published books, in France and in the United Kingdom, which first got me intrigued and inspired.

Travel logbook of photojournalist Johnny Pitts, *Afropean, Notes from Black Europe*⁶, published in 2019, takes us through an original tour of the old continent. Pitts deserts its majestic buildings and historical sites, shiny avenues and imposing museums, to sit down at sunset with the cleaners of its train stations, wonder around its grey and crumbling *banlieues*, and join a protest or dance in streets, community centers and bars. Mixing personal reflections, stories of encounters, interviews, and historical (re)mindings, Pitts aims at telling another story of Europe, through the eyes and lives of its Black and Brown citizens, the African diaspora and immigrants. In this claim for a shared belonging and contribution to the making of Europe, as a historical construction and political project, Pitts' discourse appears to rather align with that of Cameroonian-French novelist and thinker Léonora Miano. She developed her own proposition in an essay published a year later, *Afropea, utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste*⁷. In another literary genre, engaging with both Europe's ongoing nationalist surges and African impatience, Léonora Miano, writing for her daughter, calls for an Afropean alternative and synthesis, embodied by a new generation of youth, born and raised in Europe from African parents, which she defines as the Afropeans. Focusing on the identity struggle of a minority group lacking representation, having to live through stigmatization, racism, and ever pushed back to a 'homeland' they never knew, Miano hopes for their overcoming through political organization, artistic and cultural creation and transnational alliance. Such an Afropean community, she wishes, should then be able to act as a mediator and pioneer towards a world freed from racial assignation and national(ist) narrow-mindedness.

Let me first acknowledge the complexity and nuance brought by those two pieces I consider beautiful and necessary, before pointing at the many ways I offer to distance myself from, challenge and move with and over them. Neither Miano nor Pitts shies away from a sharp critique of global capitalism, its historical making through hundreds of years of exploitation – slavery, colonialism and actualized forms of work and life alienation, of Black bodies, and, while they do endorse a certain identity discourse, it is not without a thoughtful and rather critical use of it. In their naming of a specific group, searching and accounting for a certain experience, Pitts and Miano both follow what I call the 'Afropean demo(n)s/Afropean eth(n)os' paradigm.

Afropean demo(n)s

Recording an absence, or the presence of a wrong, Johnny Pitts and Léonora Miano each offer to make up for, correct it, through their work. For the first, the absence is that of another story; for the second, of representation. Both thus seek the recognition of a presence, non-hegemonic existences, minoritarian perspectives and ways of being, in a space unquestionably identified as Europe. The presence is that of a stigma, violence and thus struggle in reaction to suffering and trouble. Otherized, discriminated against, Afropeans are refused a legitimate home in France, where Miano focuses her attention. Demonized, they have to prove and claim their belonging, through the promotion of their specificities turned values – multiculturalism, hybridity, in-betweenness, and historical membership to the European community, with the unearthing, preservation and transmission of a proper heritage. The passage from the otherized category of 'demons', social deviants, naturalized trouble-makers (*corps étrangers*) - allowing for the hegemonic community to create and ever return to a fantasized

⁶ Pitts, Johnny. *Afropean, Notes from Black Europe*. London, Penguin Books, 2020

⁷ Miano, Léonora. *Afropea, Utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste*. Paris, Grasset, 2020

pure self - to that of 'demos', legitimate political collective embodied in the nation, thus is, according to Miano (and Pitts, although less explicitly), one of visibilisation, collective coming-out of a dark underworld, unseen and yet crucial to the social fabric. They advocate for a move away, to return to our phenomenological introduction, from the background, thus obviously renamed *b(l)ackground* of liberal-democracies.

Although reproducing the identity/reparation/representation paradigm that has been dominating the progressive agenda for the past decades, Léonora Miano does not embrace it without caution. While Pitts himself admits wondering "Who was 'Black'? What was 'Europe'?"⁸ upon embarking on his journey, Miano justifies of her strategic use of the term Black. She indeed does not believe in it per se but employs it as a signifier, to indicate her "solidarity" with, "deep affection for" and loyalty to "the memory of the deportees of the transoceanic human traffic" and "afro-descendant populations whose daily life is marked by race"⁹. Adopting a critical distance and reserve towards essentialist discourses and projects, both authors appear to favor ethics over ethnics, drawing inspiration from practices, beliefs, and ways of being in and with the world inherited from African and multicultural experiences and histories, to sketch creative and open collectives in a near future.

"When I set out on my trip I had hoped to find Afropea in the physical geography of Europe, but after watching Marie Daulne [Zap Mama's singer] perform and how it made the crowd behave I realized that the dream of an Afropean utopia had to be found first in the realm of ideas."¹⁰

Of the Afropean atmosphere they both seem to be sensing, and *poethics* they begin to draw, I would like to highlight the main characteristics, enriching and confirming the epistemological compass of this research I will then move on to define in greater depth.

Afropean eth(n)ics

One of Pitt's chapters that stayed with me the most, interestingly enough, is his prologue, stroll round his black British hometown, Sheffield. With a tender melancholia, Pitts stares at what has gone and recollects what once was – on walls, street corners, window sills. In this urban context, sanitized by increasing market and police pressure, the Black condition and culture of his youth seem to be defined by fugitivity and illegibility (if not illegality). "Like the graff, there was something ephemeral about the black community in Sheffield", Pitts writes as he "walk[s] around these stale spaces today, once home to a lost, commemorated history (...) It was never as solid or as sure of itself as London's, and everything connected with it was underground and clandestine."¹¹ Liminality, 'escapism' as prime conditions, spaces and ways of being – survival and existence, have constituted historical patterns of Black theory and ontology¹², and will underlie this study too.

Spatial, this tension, movement, constant state of dis/appearance, is also temporal, putting a certain understanding of time as linear into crisis. Pitts recalls Byrne talking of Afropea as this "new continent" emerging, marked by some kind of a "reverse colonization". "'Afropean' was used as a 'subtle manifesto', making visible what had already existed, and not as history but as something

⁸ Pitts, Johnny. *Afropean, Notes from Black Europe*. London, Penguin Books, 2020, p.19

⁹ Miano, Léonora. *Afropea, Utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste*. Paris, Grasset, 2020, p.92 – translation is mine.

¹⁰ Pitts, *Afropean*, p.94

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹² See, for example, Bey, Marquis. *Black Trans Feminism*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2022 ; Harney, Stefano and Moten, Fred. *The Undercommons – Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoe-New York-Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2013; Moten, Fred. *In the Break – The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003 ; Touam Bona Dénètem. *Sagesse des lianes*. Paris, post-editions, 2021.

happening *right now*.”¹³ Once again, the work is one of visualization, perhaps not so much interested in bringing to light for others as in *seeing*, recognizing and re-membering, for one and ourselves. In this, Pitts’ gentle and delicate ambition speaks to the tension of such a work of documentation, preservation and publicization: “I was searching for a way to protect the knowledge and the secret beauty which I knew lurked among all the mess of my upbringing in Firth Park while also attempting to transcend it.”¹⁴

Finding in Afropea a “ressource in which to draw so as to renew imaginaries and forge new relational modalities”, the “critique of the working of the two worlds that make her”¹⁵, Léonora Miano cannot but endorse and build on Pitts’ intuitions as she asserts “We will need new words to express what we now are, what we want to be”.¹⁶ Indebted to and inspired by such gestures myself, I offer to take them further, or somewhere else – to dis/locate Afropea.

Dis/location as a method

“What does it mean to be orientated?”, Ahmed wonders in the introduction of her *Queer phenomenology*, whose method I will much rely on throughout this work. What does it mean to be located? I here offer to ask back. “To discover the position, situation, or whereabouts of; find”, according to the Collins Dictionary, which adds: “to situate or place”: “to become established or settled”¹⁷. While orientation is a movement towards, about “finding [one’s] way”, according to Ahmed, location thus is fixed, about being found, or finding oneself to be at. Location is still, or in the process of stillness. Location stands and lasts – is seen and known, identified. Location signifies and insures, does not fail nor collapse. Location is the certainty of the horizon made vertical. Location is a place on the map – a name and its associated coordinates. Location is a piece of order.

Researching Afropea

What, then, about that which does not quite have a place yet? That is in motion, still. That cannot stand nor remain but is meant to escape. What about those names that we have yet to teach our mouths to utter, allow our voices to whisper? What about our losses and secrets? Dark corners, forest huts and closets. Those spaces we seek refuge in, unknown to geographers, Google maps and the likes, where we nonetheless have been born, learnt to lie and unmask, where we invent languages, moves and ways, thanks to which we survive? Where we run to, gather. What of our books, basements and dance? What of our rooftops and shells? What of our utopias that have known no address? All those we can only approach, navigate and inhabit, I believe, if – that is for we dis/locate.

Afropea, as the imagined and experienced space I have begun giving a sense of, and, consequently, this thesis, are not to be found on any known globe nor read following traditional coordinates – whether they be geographical, linguistic or academic. Quite the opposite, they offer to take you on another type of journey, drawing their own, elusive and empirical map. Stopping by migrant memories, house and city ruins; walking along lightless roads, through dense forests, all the way to some ocean, perhaps. Refusing to assume location, this research aims at tracking, accounting for the existence of Afropea, a spatiotemporal making, variation of and on reality, born of though exceeding

¹³Pitts, Afropean, p.92-93

¹⁴Ibid., p.30

¹⁵Miano, Afropea, p.26 and p.46, translation is mine.

¹⁶Ibid, p.44, translation is mine.

¹⁷Online Collins Dictionary, “locate”: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/locate>

the colonial encounter and exchanges between the European and African continents. Centering relations, objects and language, this critical study, drawing from both phenomenological and ethnographic methods, takes Congo-Brazzaville, along with and in relation to France, as its official context of departure.

I indeed arrive to Afropea through a specific configuration of affects and kinships, a historico-intimate positionality, that inform my entire navigation and engagement with Afropea and its making in the form of a social sciences research production. Born and raised in France in a French-Congolese-Gabonese family, I had never traveled to my father's country, Congo-Brazzaville, until now, essentially for security reasons. Choosing it as my 'fieldwork' environment, in the framework of this research, as a Master's student in African Studies, thus was not anecdotal. One could even go as far as to state that the research came after the country, the desire to encounter the latter overcoming and conditioning the desire to engage in the former. It is of this very situation that I decided to depart from in my theoretical reflection, questioning and documenting that desire, from its origins, through the journey it led to, to its turning into an academic production – its background, once again, its conditions of possibility. In that, I was curious of what this first journey to Congo was – meant, revealed, told and did, of the worlds we live in and make, today. Of myself as a historical body. Afropea, a notion I had been familiar with for the past few years, and excited by, quickly appeared as the appropriate space in and with which to elaborate and think through my impressions, thoughts and, later on, arguments. I started wondering about the possibility of offering an ethnography of it; about the ways in which one could work with its idea, promise, perhaps fantasy, with the tools of social sciences and critical theory.

I, literally, *researched* Afropea.

Wo/andering through three geographico-hegemonic spaces – Congo's main cities, Brazzaville, Dolisie and Pointe-Noire, I thus offer to dis/locate them so as to account for their Afropean sub/sur/un/reality. That, which I have seen emerge through quotidian gestures, encounters and enactments, and calls for a specific sensoriality and method of study: dis/location. It can be defined as the systematic asking of and working with the two following questions. Where is here? What is left?

Where is here?

I here again wish to turn to Sara Ahmed, first, and her interrogation and queering of the phenomenological tradition in the pursuit of a richer understanding of our experiences and bodies. "The starting point for orientation", Ahmed states in the introduction of her *Queer Phenomenology*, "is the point from which the world unfolds: the 'here' of the body and the 'where' of its dwelling."¹⁸ I argue that this starting point, that here-where a body stands, is nothing but location – from which and where it can then orientate itself, move in, through and with the world. It is this very 'here' that I am interested in as I attempt at mapping Afropea. Dis/location begins with as much as it results in the putting into question and crisis of this 'here' that precedes the experience, that is, in phenomenological terms, no less than the world, which it works to allow and condition. I want to challenge the certainty of this 'here'. To this end, I return to the inaugural gesture of phenomenology, centering the "lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness"¹⁹ and, dismissing the familiar, *escaping the background*, I genuinely ask *Where is here?*

In answering this rather vertiginous question, I start with the documenting of my impressions, embodied experience, sensual apprehension turned intentional awareness of what is near, what I

¹⁸Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.8

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.2

touch and am touched by. And, in the mo(ve)ment of this recording, I question them as well – why am I feeling this and not that? Why am I experiencing this as near rather than far? How is this touching me or leaving me unaffected? What is staying with, sinking in, me, and for what reason? It is through this series of observations and thoughts that the world then may begin to unfold, exist, take shape and meaning. It is how a ‘here’ – in our case, an *Afropean here*, comes to be.

“When the connection between orientation, disorientation and the existence of a hegemonic map is disturbed and interrupted, then a moment of radical disorientation occurs.”²⁰ Introducing a collection of essays on Disorientation, cultural analysts Niall Martin and Reij Rosello are faced with the delicate task of orientating readers through disorientation. I replicate this gesture and endorse a moment of “radical disorientation”, that is temporary impossibility to move towards, situate and hold oneself, as the first methodological step of dis/location. Having informed you of the official coordinates of a place, chapter, page, where we land on “a hegemonic map” – Dolisie, for example, in the second chapter, I will proceed to disconnect our movement through and experience of it in the unfolding of the text. I will not only disorientate but dis/locate it and us.

Afropea will thus progressively emerge as and through a myriad of ‘heres we will each time attempt to craft names for. Yet, this is not all. A second question will allow us to better experience her texture, attempt at grasping her in her complex and unstable multidimensionality, her utopian feeling – her potentiality. José Esteban Muñoz, inspired by Frankfurt School critical theorists and idealists, the first of whom being Ernst Bloch, has taught us so beautifully. How one may approach, tell, record and re-member, what lies and looms, somewhere in between the no-longer-conscious and the not-yet-here. How one can account for that which is said not to count, matter. How one can see – and keep on seeing, that is how one can seek, and care, for what is deemed worthless, inexistent, pushed b(l)ack. What is *left*.

What is *left*?

When I ask *What is left?* I, in fact, ask three questions, at least. I first ask what has been left, behind, away, disregarded in previous studies, what others may forget. I turn to the anecdotal and residual. This could be rephrased as the *What is left by them?* where them indexes normative readings, hegemonic narratives. I follow traces. This, which I already referred to as a common paradigm of Black thinking and being, then moves us towards a second understanding of the question, speaking to an epistemology of affects, and more existential if not ethical considerations. What is left is what remains, what comes after loss, what persists, survives. The small portion of life that overcomes and embraces death. Searching for what is left thus takes the form of a certain attentiveness to silence, lacks, apparent absence, holes, understood and worked with in their depths, lacunary yet so rich meaning. This ‘left’ may become another site of temporary and precarious location as well, from where one, moved about by circumstances, attempts at standing and orientating oneself again, crafting a *home* of – or not. Afropea is to be found in those diasporic world-makings and stories, which so many poets have witnessed, to and with whom we will be listening throughout. I would translate this second version as the *What is left for us?* where us signifies the minoritarian collective, in which my I merges as well. From those two understandings the third derives quite obviously, which Sara Ahmed is again the inspiration of. Going on with her questioning of orientation, Ahmed indeed reminds us that the basic orientation tools that are the ‘right and ‘left’ are no evidence or nature at all, nor equivalent.

²⁰ Martin, Niall, Rosello, Reij M. ‘Disorientation: An Introduction’. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 57(1), 2016, p.1-16

“Indeed, we can note here that the etymology of the word left is ‘weak and worthless’ (...) This lack of neutrality is what grounds the distinction between right and left: the right becomes the straight line, and the left becomes the origin of deviation.”²¹

So, when I ask what is left, finally, I ask what is abnormal, what takes turns and rounds, what deviates from the right track, the traced line. I wonder *What is wrong? What is queer?*

Bearing those interrogations in mind, I will seek for their answers, reveal them, through a focus on and play with words, objects and practices, brought together through what Muñoz defines as “an associative mode of analysis”²², which, while his leaps through time, will here take us through space as well, “between one [spatio-temporal] site” and one or multiple others. I could call this a practice of dislocated echoes as well, one moment, encounter, gesture, bringing us back somewhere and somewhere else, their multiplication and colliding slowly giving our initial map its multidimensions. As we will see in the next fragment, Banda may name many things, beings and places, beyond its being a village in the department of Niari, Congo-Brazzaville. Its summoning up then may reveal a certain way of remaking of the world through displacement in time and space, an intimate apprehension/imagination of distance and nearness. This is one example of the practices of reality and self-crafting that dis/location aims at highlighting, which I understand as utopian in their reaching and calling for an otherwise, other ways, in their taking us towards, and already, somewhere else. It is those “anticipatory illuminations” culture holds that I am tracking. What is left?, if we follow Muñoz, thus is both about what we are left with but all that is to-come too, what we know, for feel, “is missing”. Muñoz, advocating for Bloch’s “principle of hope”, demands that we do not stop at the “here” and “now” but open our eyes and lungs to the “then” and “there”.

Itinerary

Afropea is both a name and a place – a wor(l)d, that is. Our way towards it will thus be one through space and language, using words and the objects they name as dis/located tools. Through this, we will ask:

How does Afropea emerge through intimate and collective narratives and enactments?

We will begin at (*home*) *sweep (home)*, where Afropea is understood as neither place of origin, departure, nor arrival or dwelling. It indeed rather appears as a territory in (e)motion, whose borders are set and distances experienced and reconfigured through memory and imagination. In this introductory chapter, the particular practice we will be looking at is that of naming - the giving of a name to places, objects or beings, through the conceptual lens of Mel Y. Chen’s animacy. We will indeed observe what names, animated by their users, who give and iterate them, can be said to animate the real themselves – by allowing for closeness and intimacy with, re-membling of, distant or lost places and people. Inspired by Dionne Brand’s *A Map To the Door of No Return*, we will travel by way of language and recollection to a family village of the Congolese countryside, and follow its transformations as it becomes guesthouse and dog somewhere in the French Vosges. Next, in conversation with Christina Sharpe, that is thinking/sinking *In the Wake*, and practicing “wake work”, “a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives”²³, we will stop at the door of an empty children bedroom and return to graves lying by the road to reflect on names as both traces and calls, marking bodies through space and time.

²¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.13-14

²² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p.3

²³ Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake – on Blackness and Being*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p.18

Moving from Afropea's intimate cosmographies to domestic micropolitics, and from words to sounds, the next name-place we will stop at is a house in Dolisie, more particularly looked at through a bedroom window. The latter, in conversation between Bernhard Siegert and Michel Serres, will indeed constitute a *para-site* of observation. Medium of distinction between inhabitants, articulating the spatial and social order of the household, the window, our dis/located tool in this second chapter, *breaking noise – cartography of a para-site*, will allow us to hear the noise coming out of the house. It indeed is through a series of sonic memories of scenes experienced from or around this window that I will be reflecting on the social hierarchies and dynamics at play, ordering house inhabitants along lines of race-species, class-status and gender-sexuality. There, working with Siegert's cultural techniques and Serres' parasite, both reflecting on conditions of closeness and distinction, encounter and hospitality, I will reflect on Afropea as a place of dis/located, or para-sitic relationalities.

Building on those two chapters, respectively speaking to Afropea's para-geography and language, architecture and senses, the third and final one, *further and suns*, offers to embrace and move beyond both, by pulling off the road and attending to Afropean spatiotemporalities, through experiences of weather and landscapes: *Afropean mo(u)rnings*. Written in the presence of relatives and strangers who passed away in the process of this work, this final part will hop from one pool to another, where 'pool' will operate as both the last dis/located tool of the research and an entry into accounts of Afropean ecological experiences and potentialities lived during my time in Pointe-Noire. I here will return to Christina Sharpe's illuminating works, calling on her "weather" to decipher Congolese skies, but not only. I indeed will offer to imagine wor(l)ds, to-come and in-the-making, in anticipated conversation with a monograph yet to be published: *Refusing Necrotopia*. Endorsing her gesture, I will conclude this thesis with some reflections on and ecological fabulations over Afropean lives, f(l)ights and futurities.

Together(e)ness

I have been walking her paths, climbing her cliffs, tumbling down her slopes for some months, now. Tracing some, finding others, coming back. In wo/andering, I argue that one cannot inquire without setting oneself in radical motion – and emotion. I attempted to, may have and, throughout, never was alone on the track.

It all begins in a house – silence, laughter and doubts. Thanks to my parents and siblings – for the love, support, humor and intelligence, care and learning, throughout the years. Thank you for our journey. Thank you, Alix, for flying to and exploring Brazzaville with me, I could not have dreamt of a better companion to begin my stay with and cannot wait for Andréa to join us next time. Thank you for the laughter and tears, growth and healing. Thank you for being there, always. Thank you, Dad, for taking me along your trip and sharing with me some fragments of your country and story. Witnessing you there was like meeting you again. Thank you, Mom, for seeing me – here or there, always. I believe I found some pieces of you too, in Dolisie.

Thanks to my great-uncles Albert and Édouard for taking me so generously through decades of family and French-Congolese history and for being my first interviewees. Thanks to my aunt Justine, who would each time cook such great cakes and meals to accompany our conversations. Thanks to my aunt Victoire for her thoughts, hopes and recollections. Thanks to my aunt Bienvenue and Mélanie for their support and enthusiasm for my work and journey. Thanks to papa Martin and papa Jean, for the support and kindness, by phone or on the ground. I hope I both get to see you soon in Pointe-Noire and Libreville. I think of you – and of maman Anasthasie, Jeanne and Marcel too.

My time in Congo was one of so many and so precious encounters, for which I am incredibly grateful. I was welcomed and taken care of in so many houses – that made the country feel like home.

Thanks to the sisters of the Couvent Javouhey, for their warm hosting – special greetings to Sœur Séraphine, for the care, and Sœur Maryam, for the mischievousness and stories. Thanks to Sylvie, Davy, Brice and his family, for looking after Alix and I so kindly throughout our time in Brazzaville. Thank you, Lily, for being my first Congolese friend. Thank you, papa Vickyp and maman Irène, for welcoming me at your table so generously. I keep the sweetest memories of our festive dinners, your great guests – and my 23rd birthday! Thank you for making me feel at home.

Thanks to maman Prisca, for embarking me in her busy life and welcoming me in her warm houses. Thank you for the delicious cooking and great conversations – thank you for the love and care. Thanks to maman Clarisse for looking after me in Dolisie, I appreciated it a lot. Thanks to Edwige, Chanelle and Matt for the assistance too. Thank you, Anna, for talking to me about your life. It was good meeting you. Vianney, thank you for the rides. Thanks to the amazing team of H-Care in Dolisie – Bercha, Yashnel, Eriel, and all the participants of the English classes and workshops. You gave me so much joy and hope, it was such a pleasure meeting and working with you, and I cannot wait to come back for more. Thank you for the future.

Yannick, Yvan – thank you for being my brothers. I came to meet you, perhaps. Thank you for the strolls around and beers, the laughter and stories. Thank you for having me. Urielle, I am very proud to call you my niece.

Thank you, papa Ange and maman Mireille, for taking me in and around Pointe-Noire as the child of the house – for Christmas and Djata. It was so precious and sweet ending my stay with you. Thank you so much, Gigi, César, Précieuse and Jérémie, for the joy, friendship and energy. It was a pleasure having you as bedmates and holiday companions. I hope we all get to go back to the ocean together, once. Thank you, tante Mado, for taking care of me.

This thesis – the journey it narrates and the (dis)places it sketches, would not have been possible without the support, excitement, hope and love of so many. It maps the way to one of our many worlds.

From the Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research to A World of Neighbours, Zaatar NGO to Voice of Ezidis, I have found along the way, those past years, friends and allies in the making of *elsewheres*. It has been an honour and a joy standing and struggling by your side.

Thanks to the Gang – Maryame, Pieter, Panashe, you were the best companions on this two-year adventure. Thank you for your intelligence, solidarity, thank you for the fun, too. It was great being part of you. Thanks to Kirsten, Amelia and Isabel for joining along, at the beginning or end. It was great travelling with you all. Thanks to Harry and Loes for hearing me when few others did. Your friendship and trust meant a lot. Thanks to my supervisors, Mayke and Anna, for their enthusiasm, kindness and appreciation – this was precious.

Dear Suzette, thank you for seeing and seeking me, from the cemetery to Afropea and beyond. Thank you for our island.

From Athens-Albania to Iran-Chicago, I thought of you and us a lot, Faezeh, Marleno. Thank you, Marleno, for our hours of brilliant bedroom and balcony conversations. You are such a luminous and precious being. I cannot wait to discover your own wo/anderings – and embark on many more together. Faezeh, I am amazed at the echoes of our lives and questions, thousands of kilometers away,

through language and ocean. I am incredibly glad for the borderless place of soothing and growth we have been building for the past three years.

A few days before I flew to Congo, we gathered on a rooftop and sat in a circle. We closed eyes, open wounds and listened – to our worlds, Athens, Gaza. Val, Noe, Simone, we may have never quite left, but let's go back.

Simone – you are everywhere. From the day I set foot in Congo to every sentence of this piece, infused with your countless questions, labyrinthic thinking, magical imagination and sensitivity – and beyond and beyond. Thank you, too, for sharing with me your utopian library. It was the most beautiful, writing with you. The map was in the name, I guess. Yet, I never can find words nor coordinates. You are another world. Αγαπώ σε πιο από παρά πολλά.

In memory of
Olivier Sathoud
Anasthasie Sathoud
Jess Sathoud

We are driving east. It is nighttime, December, Christmas day, and the leather of the car seats is cold. I am squeezed in between my siblings – or is my brother at the wheel, already? The radio perhaps is playing. Behind us are the large and bourgeois family table and living room, the pleated skirts and white shirts, the Christmas songs and sanitized discussions. The turkey, yule log and racist-sexist-homophobic comments which are not, perhaps, which are just comments - and to which I smile. Waiting. Behind us is Jesus.

We are driving east.

I have never seen my aunt's new castle – or manor, which sounds even more exquisite in French, I like to say 'le manoir de ma tante'. Her and her husband have just retired in the Vosges after having lived all those years on the other side, in Switzerland. They fell in love with this old austere mansion, where she has decided that the family would gather, each winter, from now on, to celebrate Kwanza. I rose my eyes to heaven when I was told – What is this, now? My mother and I looked it up on the internet, discovering that this Afro-American alternative to Christmas had been invented in the late 1990's with the aim of celebrating and strengthening the bonds within families, communities, and with Africa, the motherland. I sigh-smile as we approach, traverse that quiet dark lost village of a few hundred souls. Some faint light and noise filter through the ground floor windows, we park the car in front of a wide hole I guess to be the swimming pool, walk towards the back entrance. There is dust and mess from the ongoing works, light voices and loud barks – we pass through a few cluttered rooms then under a small arched door into a big wooden warm kitchen. There is the smell of cassava, bananas, rice, vegetables and meat coming out of the stove. There are the huge dogs like lions lying on the floor and my aunts, sat at the table, braiding.



Chapter 1

(home) sweep (home)

1.

to clean or clear (a space, chimney, etc) with a brush, broom, etc

2. (often foll by up)

to remove or collect (dirt, rubbish, etc) with a brush, broom, etc

3.

to move in a smooth or continuous manner, esp quickly or forcibly

cars swept along the road

4.

to move in a proud or dignified fashion

she swept past

5.

to spread or pass rapidly across, through, or along (a region, area, etc)

the news swept through the town

6. (transitive)

to direct (the gaze, line of fire, etc) over; survey

7. (tr; foll by away or off)

to overwhelm emotionally

she was swept away by their kindness

8. (transitive)

to brush or lightly touch (a surface, etc)

the dress swept along the ground

9. (transitive; often foll by away)

to convey, clear, or abolish, esp with strong or continuous movements

the sea swept the sand castle away

10. (intransitive)

to extend gracefully or majestically, esp in a wide circle

the plains sweep down to the sea

²⁴ Online Collins Dictionary, "sweep": <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sweep>

I wonder if I sweep to be taken back there

I once write down in my black notebook, thinking back to Brazzaville's nights and the mosquito net.

I find myself quite well, under that vaporous veil, from where I listen to noises at night when I cannot find sleep – the insects, birds, bats, probably; the wood that cracks, people walking, sometimes, the sweeper, too, whose dance I hear until late in the dark, whose dance I even imagine, closed eyes, endless soundtrack of my dreams...

I wonder as I sweep and remember – Dolisie's yard, the maid's humming, Pointe-Noire's mornings and the girls, waking up to start quietly sweeping the floor, from the corridor all the way to the contours of my bed become island. I pretend I sleep, still. Listen to their movements and whispers, brush rubbing and smooth steps.

(b)room

I begin with sweeping as this mundane, domestic, anecdotal gesture that *makes space*. The broom, through its moving around, reaching to the corners of the room, going along the walls, up to the window sills, under chairs and tables, maps the ground, marks the world – its borders, potential. In her *A Map To the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand recalls

“According to my grandmother, the world was the house, its perimeter its shadow which the sun made each morning to the back of the house, withdrew at midday, and refigured in the afternoon in the front yard. Her bed was the ship of the world and her broom was her harpoon to spear us when we reached beyond its boundaries.”²⁵

As the house is waking up, the remnants of the previous day are collected and thrown away – heap of dust, dry tree leaves, pieces of plastic paper food, broken toys or bottles, rusty cans and wires. Dismissed archive. In this, sweeping *makes time* as well, delimits and opens, distinguishes between the past, its neglectable and undesirable fragments, and the day-to-come and welcome, made possible by the clean emptiness that comes after the brush. The first and last activity of the day, that which one performs upon dwelling in or leaving a house as well, sweeping appears as a home-making practice *par excellence*, which both sets the space, makes it ready, and closes it, that is speaks to the house and, perhaps, home, temporality and temporariness.

In dialogue with Mel Y. Chen, I offer to read sweeping, along the other practices this chapter will come to encounter, as animating practices, that is practices of and with animacy. “Animacy—or we might rather say, the set of notions characterized by family resemblances— has been described variously as a quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness.”²⁶ Chen sketches. I here will understand animating practices as ways to invest agency and liveness, capacity of action, movement, and transformation, into entities – whether they be human, non-human, object or space. A body, space and object that, through movement, together begin to make a world, a room and house, sweeping, for example, hints to the specific arrangements of and relationality between forms – beings, living and nonliving, animals, spaces and things, I want to study here. As Chen notes that “the world around us animates according to what we humans make of it”, I seek for Afropean ways of investing certain bodies and spaces “with humaneness or animateness”²⁷. Those can be said to be practices of animacy

²⁵Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return – Notes to Belonging*. Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2011, p.152

²⁶Chen, Mel Y. *Animacies – Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2012, p.2

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13

that contribute to the making of Afropea as a lived, dis/located, space rearranging coordinates of geography and ontology to speak to experiences of displacement and dispersal through generations.

In centering this notion and reading by Chen, travelling from linguistic to critical theory, I wish to highlight language as a key tool in the invention of Afropean animacies as I analyze them in this chapter. I indeed will focus my reflection on the practice of naming and renaming, of places and beings, as a way to re-member distant or lost worlds and ones – bringing them closer, by the iteration, summoning or perpetuating of their name, that is, literally, calling them. In French, *appeler* is used to both mean ‘name’ and ‘call’. I argue that, in Afropea, naming does not simply define, indeed, but calls, for one to come (back). Naming addresses and demands, invokes and invites. Through the discussion of three personal and family experiences, related to my aunt’s guesthouse and dog; unknown Gabonese cousins; and late aunt whose name I share, I will point at the way language, through naming, is used to narrate and make sense of distances, loss and movement, in both its impossibility and inevitability – *stasis*.

As an essential component of Afropean wor(l)d-making, finally, language unsurprisingly will constitute the main site of experimentation of my method and analysis throughout this thesis. While dis/location constitutes the paradigm and method of this study, indeed, I have found its main form, communicability, textual rendering, to be *dysleXia*.

dysleXic bodies, dysphoric wor(l)ds, – anagrammar of dis/location

dysleXia began in October, evening (or was it earlier?) in an Athenian kitchen – backyard staircase or square. White thoughts floating on a black screen. Invented words, mingled letters. *dysleXia* first was a conversation – and a gift. At the Trans City International Workshop, held by the Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research in October 2023, a few days before my departure for Congo, S and I both shared sketches of our undisciplined graduate projects. There, my *trance* bodies, ~~human~~ *beyonds* and *poethics*, attempts at making sense on the verge of language, collided with S’ solitary anarchitect, seeking justice on rooftops or ruins, making worlds of small gestures, stolen moments, illegible subjects, ephemeral and absurd communities – mix of bodies, things, holes. Sitting by Exarchia, later that week, her trees, benches and possible surrounded by the police, S and I kept on talking. As I was reflecting on their unnoticing of my puns and *wrong* words, and thus imagining *dysleXia* as a critical and poetic form, S once wrote back

“The anarchitect’, (they/them or all) trans and illegible can certainly only be dyslexic in language and being.”²⁸

Dysphoria began in Athens, perhaps, too. Paul B. Preciado, whom I had followed there years before, was one of the first poet-philosophers who taught me how to breathe. As I begin to write this thesis, I cannot but feel that, if *Afropea* exists, can ever be located, it has to be somewhere in *Dysphoria Mundi*. Snapshot of our whirling world, portrait of some body, Preciado’s latest monster-piece refuses to think of dysphoria – unease in one’s body, form, gender, as a mental disorder; on the opposite, he urges us to

“understand *dysphoria mundi* as the effect of a discrepancy, of a gap, of a breach between two epistemological regimes. Between the petro-sexo-racial regime inherited from Western modernity and a new regime, still stuttering, that is being forged by acts of

²⁸ Text from S, October 12th, 2023.

critique and political disobedience. *Dysphoria mundi* names the common somatopolitical condition, the pain produced by the necropolitical management of subjectivities invented by modernity, and simultaneously indicates the potential (and not power) of the planet's living bodies (including the planet itself as a living body) to extract themselves from the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist genealogy by practices of inadequacy, dissidence and disidentification."²⁹

In its clashing of forms, spaces and voices, mingling of genres, languages and bodies, Preciado's dysphoric proposition seeks to make sense of our dis/located present and presences, to craft new grids of il/legibility and contribute to the invention of other modes of seeing, thinking of and sinking into transitioning reals. Working with/in those gaps and holes, probing interstices and hesitations, I seek for a language that unhinges rather than captures, frees rather than freezes, stands – or collapses by, moves along, our doubts and attempts, intuitions and shivers. I look for a grammar in tension, a dictionary of ashes and hatches, a tongue for the fugitive and beyond – that in which, perhaps, this new regime Preciado glimpses at, stutters. I, too, (re)turn to disorder and name *dysleXia*, which I rewrite capitalizing the X to index a desire for unknown and disidentification. Playing with its polysemic Greek-Latin etymology, I understand *dysleXia* as both a disruption of language – λείξ, word, and of law *lex*, thus emphasizing language as the prime location of order-making, which becomes *righting*. *dysleXia* thus appears as an insurgent position vis à vis the real, which it rejects in its very form, communicative proposition, that is realness, wor(l)dability. As a critical method, *dysleXia* works with language in its shape and matter, disturbing words and reading through the insertion of signs or the practice of the echo, playing with homophones or homonyms so as to suggest, reveal, dis/orientate and blur meaning. *dysleXia* is the practice through which I, throughout this piece, will be animating language – setting it into motion and emotion. In this, it comes to echo a number of attempts at wording illegible, illegal, im/possible existences and experiences, marked by what Christina Sharpe, in *In the Wake – on Blackness and Being*, defines as *anagrammaticality*. Thinking along Spillers and Moten, Sharpe

“arrive[s] at blackness as, blackness is, anagrammatical. That is, we can see the moments when blackness opens up into the anagrammatical in the literal sense as when ‘a word, phrase, or name is formed by rearranging the letters of another’ (Merriam-Webster Online). We can also apprehend this in the metaphorical sense in how, regarding blackness, grammatical gender falls away and new meanings proliferate; how ‘the letters of a text are formed into a secret message by rearranging them’ or a secret message is discovered through the rearranging of the letters of a text. Ana-, as a prefix, means ‘up, in place or time, back, again, anew.’ So, blackness anew, blackness as a/temporal, in and out of place and time putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made.”³⁰

Like anagrammaticality, *dysleXia* operates as a challenge of meaning, as a revealer of secret messages hidden in language – as a path, that is, to otherwor(l)dly spaces and realities. Afropea illustrates well how distorted or invented words – and words always are invented, function as both the maps, compasses and territories they guide us to. In the same moment that they call for it, they begin to enact, make possible, something and somewhere else. They animate language and the real it tells. There lies the utopian function of language which I describe, inspired by Muñoz' utopian feeling³¹, as that which, through the rearrangement of words, grammar, letters and sounds, through the (un)making of senses, urges us to hope and reach for *something else*. This is how I offer to work with language in my search for Afropea – which appears only in so far as I, in the first place, allow myself

²⁹ Preciado, Paul B., *Dysphoria Mundi*. Paris, Grasset, 2022, p.25

³⁰ Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake – on Blackness and Being*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p.76

³¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p.1-18

and find the ways to see. For Afropea, as this other way and place of being, being in and with, feeling, worlds, just like queerness, may not be quite here yet – only desired and felt “as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality (...) Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present”.³² I thus will be tracing Afropea queerly, practicing modalities of feeling and relation that refuse and see past the realism of nation-state-bound (post)colonial geographies to (at)tend to intimate, desired and re-membered cartographies, relational and fugitive coordinates expressed through their own language.

Therefore, in the playful form *dysleXia* allows and calls for, I here write *(home) sweep (home)* and ask what centering sweeping as a gesture, practice and poesis do to the thinking of home, suspended and unsettled by the brackets. Sweeping, from one (home) to the other, it points to the instability the somewhat naïve formula “home sweet home” may conceal and challenges it, sweeps it away. As a method, finally, sweeping names the very textual movement we will follow, moving from one space-time to another to access and wo/ander about and around the idea of home as this original and often fixed place of dwelling and belonging. Stopping on the threshold of memories, buildings and rooms, just swept or about to be, we will ask what is being opened and made available each time, prepared and awaited for. Searching for those who are arriving or have left, we will wonder who is here and where is whom.

Banda

“My grandfather said he knew what people we came from. I reeled off all the names I knew. Yoruba? Ibo? Ashanti? Mandingo? He said no to all of them, saying that he would know it if he heard it.”³³

Searching for the *Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand begins with a recollection of oblivion. Growing up on the small island of Trinidad and Tobago, a child is seeking for a name – a people to belong to, a place where to dwell. A dot on the map where to point the finger, a picture to look back at. A memory, older than her, a dream, that is, to hold on to. Anxiously asking her grandfather every day, she gets no answer. The old man has lost the word, the way. He has forgotten the name.

The first place I want to stop at has a name – Banda. A village of the Niaria department, Congo-Brazzaville, located some 150 kilometres away from Dolisie, Banda is where my father’s family comes from. Today, Banda also is the name of one of the three guesthouses my aunt and uncle built in their manor of the east of France. Some forty-five square metres, a bedroom and adjacent bathroom. The window opens into the park and pool – through which you may, if you take a look, see a huge, energetic and hairy creature running around. Banda is the second and youngest dog of my aunt and uncle. He is a lively and affectionate animal who will jump around and on you unless you start petting him. Banda is where I am asked if I will go, as I am packing for Congo. Banda is where I am asked if I have been, upon returning. Banda is what I am told about, all throughout my being there – the bamboo hedge shading the road towards the village like a crown. The mud and holes, the broken tracks and stuck trucks – Banda is far away, after the flood. The two biggest houses, of my grandfather and great-uncle, facing each other somewhere in the center, rivals to the grave. The minister and the forester, the politician and the businessman, the state and the capital. Banda is where I am told not to go on my own – the scary faces of men, the unknown languages, the gossiping and the stares. Banda is quiet and hard – there are the stars and wifi but no noise, my other aunt later recalls. Inaccessible and

³² Ibid., p.1

³³ Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, p.3

unescapable, I hear in the words of my uncle, sent on-site as the family envoy to organize and oversee the building of my grandfather's final abode.

The first place I want to stop at is a name – Banda.

In this I hear an echo – through space, from Niari to the Vosges, and form, from location to place and animal, mediated by language and naming. Let's return to Chen's animacy and, more specifically, animacy hierarchies, that is, according to linguistics, the arrangement of

"human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority. Animacy hierarchies have broad ramifications for issues of ecology and environment, since objects, animals, substances, and spaces are assigned constrained zones of possibility and agency by extant grammars of animacy."³⁴

Thus considering, with Chen, "language users [as] 'animate theorists'"³⁵, that is as creators and challengers of the order of things and beings, regime of space, affects and intimacies, through their use of and working with language, I reflect on this iteration of Banda. As a village become house become dog, it indeed is both brought closer – geographically and linguistically, and endowed with a particular animacy, in that a village's actions are more limited, than a building's and a dog's. Banda, as a village, can, for example, in a sentence, be located at a certain distance from Dolisie or Brazzaville. It can be referred to as the setting in which an action takes place. It can be described as having a set of properties – size, population, climate and history.

Banda is three-hour of car away from Dolisie.

Banda is home to a few thousand inhabitants.

Banda gets much flooded during the rainy season.

Yet, in all this it remains, as a space, quite a passive and fixed object, in both language and concept. Once made house, however, it already acquires a new capacity. Banda first is owned and has been made by one, to some extent, and thus can be referred to through the possessive form, as 'mine', 'my house'. It thus also can be acted on and changed according to one's desire, to become more 'spacious', 'warm', 'furnished'. It can be said to be 'open' or 'closed', 'inhabited'; it is made available and can be explored and invested with a certain unconditionality, by way of words and body.

Banda is one of our houses.

Banda is comfortable and sunny.

Should we go sleep in Banda tonight?

It is more likely to be affected by and to affect its inhabitants – Banda, when naming a house, speaks to domesticity, ownership and intimacy. While the village is public, shared, distant and perhaps inaccessible, the house is private, appropriated and ruled, close(d). The lost land thus is recovered by way of language: from a place of belonging, it turns into a place that belongs. Finally, as a dog, nonhuman living entity, Banda becomes, linguistically and affectively, a subject – who (inter)acts, feels, does and makes, who is, literally, animate and can be, in a sentence, that is, in the world, my grammatical and interspecies companion, my equal. Banda is there, around, next to, me.

Banda is barking loudly in the garden, he must be hungry.

³⁴ Chen, Animacies, p.13

³⁵Ibid., p.13

I went on a walk with Banda this morning.

Banda loves me.

Banda, as a beloved dog, thus is now not only one whom I name and call, (*que j'appelle*), but one who calls and names me as well (*qui m'appelle*).

The older of my father's siblings, my aunt V. is the one to have spent the least time in their native country, Congo-Brazzaville. Yet, she may be as well the one to call on the name of their family village, Banda, the most. And in the same way that a child, as we will see next, is named after their grandfather or aunt, and thus placed under their protection, inscribed in the genealogy, marked as belonging to the family, reproducing it through the passing of time and generations, the naming of a house, or dog, after one's lost hometown, childhood summer oasis, summons it through kilometers, climate and language. Banda, where my aunt may not have been in decades, suddenly finds itself just there, a few doors away or jumping around, animated through the body of her cherished dog. A word she utters every day, multiple times, Banda thus is made both the performance and location of memory, brought closer and back. I argue that this travelling of a name is a first instance of Afropean (home)-making through animacy, that does more than reiterating and commemorating loss, conjuring time and distance. Through this renomination, another arrangement of bodies and beings is opened, complexifying if not freeing space, here, Banda, from its "constrained zone of possibility and agency"³⁶. Let me now sweep to another place, empty room, to further elaborate on the specifics of the play between places and names, space and language, in what we are starting to uncover as an Afropean animacy.

L and I's room

Not far from Banda is another room of the castle that keeps on being swept. Windows opened, curtains drawn, twin beds made. Yet – dust returns, no one comes. This is Lucien and Irène's room, which I have not stepped foot in but passed by, and been told of. Thus, I am left to imagine – the pillows and the desk, the closet. The silence and stillness of a life that awaits. Two children brought over the ocean. Lucien and Irène are cousins I have never met. They were born in Libreville, Gabon. They are siblings. They have a large room and two beds waiting for them in a room located not far from Banda, a guesthouse and a dog, in the Vosgian castle of their Congolese-Swiss great-aunt. As Banda is being brought there, through names, stories and gestures, enacted and summoned, I wonder where the children are, how they arrive, or don't, and why. In this, I want to read the children's room as invested with a certain animacy. Departing from its linguistic origin, I read the room itself as an active space, whose seeming emptiness is not so much interpreted as a lack but sign and hold of another mode of presence – incoming, suspended. Dis/located, I argue, for the children are there, already, although not quite yet. The silence of the room where they are not sleeping, playing, bored, is an animated one, that calls (for), and, perhaps even, as we will see, names them. I return to Sharpe to now work with her analyses of both the repetition of life patterns within families as an "instantiation of the wake as the conceptual framework of and for living blackness in the diaspora"³⁷, and the ship, historical cradle and coffin of black bodies, label stuck on a child's forehead – sign of the im/possibility of both house and name.

Introducing *In the Wake* with the recollection of deaths of relatives, Sharpe notes that their circumstances, premature deaths due to illness, precarity or murder, far from being anecdotal,

³⁶Ibid., p.13

³⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p.2

evidence the conditions of Black lives in the contemporary United States, that is in the wake and through the afterlife of slavery.

“In the wake, the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to the regulation of Black people in North American streets and neighborhoods, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, to the brutal colonial reimaginings of the slave ship and the ark; to the reappearances of the slave ship in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, the school.”³⁸

Standing by the empty bedroom’s door, I want to reflect on those movements which, although not (explicitly) forced, somewhat desired, repeat through time and generations – the departure of my ten-year-old aunt from Dolisie to Paris in the 1960’s, that of my three cousins from Gabon to the USA in the 1990’s, that of Lucien and Irène, now, to come. Inaugural of this series of departures was that of my great-uncle, leaving what was then the colony for the metropole, through the Atlantic and then Mediterranean. In an interview I conducted with him in the preliminary work of this research, he told me that, for years on after his leaving, when one of his nephews would be asked about him, he would reply: ‘Uncle F. is on the ship.’ I reflect on this repetition of exiles through the animacy of both spaces that push or call, and names that mark, situate. In this, I consider dis/location – movement, displacement as the prime Afropean condition, and uncover its terms.

At the beginning and center of Sharpe’s book is a face – that of a young Haitian girl, survivor of the earthquake that hit the country in January 2010³⁹. Taking most space of the black and white picture she was captured in and that Sharpe stumbled upon during her search in the archives of the event, the girl has no name but a sticky label on her forehead reading – *Ship*. Looking right through Sharpe and our eyes, the girl is lying, some unknown where. Refusing to focus on “that word *Ship* [which] threatened to obliterate every and anything else I could see”⁴⁰, she yet asks what this word and its inscription on a Haitian child’s face speaks to. Sharing another instance of “wake work”, Sharpe thus chooses to stay with the anonymous girl and all those others that her apparition summons through lands and ages. A second little Haitian girl playing with a boat waiting to leave the island for the United States, photographed in 1992; young Phillis, poet named by her owners after the boat in which she was brought to America; or Delia and Drana⁴¹, whose eyes, only remains of their pictures redacted by Sharpe, finally stare back. “Where is she looking?” Sharpe keeps on wondering.

“Who and what is she looking for? Who can look back? Does she know that there is a piece of tape on her forehead? Does she know what that piece of tape says? ... Does she know that she is already linked to a ship and that she is destined for yet another one?”⁴²

Writing in the presence of those missing girls, I look at the empty bed of my cousins from Libreville and wonder if they themselves know – that they are, if not forced, somehow meant, still, to go. Like their aunts and uncles, like their cousins and siblings before them – do they know that they are already linked to a f(l)ight, and that they are destined for yet another one? Here again, I argue that this biographical reproduction is not incidental but the evidence of lives that seem to only be considered, that is realized, through movement, departure and displacement – which language, through naming, announces and mediates. I remember smiling at the names of those two children, whose existence I discovered through their absence in the room – another example of the complex play between

³⁸Ibid., p.21

³⁹Ibid., p.44

⁴⁰Ibid., p.44-5

⁴¹Ibid., p.119

⁴²Ibid., p.118

presence and absence in Afropean and diasporic relationalities. Hearing their first names, indeed, much common in France some decades ago, I imagined Lucien and Irène, aged six and eight, like 1950's French children, and wondered if those sounded amusing, outmoded and exotic when resonating in the playground of a Gabonese school. Thinking back to it now, though, I see in that naming, beyond and along with the heritage of French colonization, not only a trace of this past they are born in and of, but a sign and marking for the future they are called to as well. As the nameless Haitian girl is marked by the ship – her belonging to a collective history and body in the wake of slavery reinscribed in her forehead, my cousins may bear the journey they are born on in their very name, meant for and destining them to an *ailleurs* – this large and cold room in a Vosgian castle.

The last name we share, my unknown cousins and I, coming from a lumbu word whose signification still is up for debate within the family, was altered, a few generations ago, to integrate the *muted* French letters -h and -d. A common colonial practice, I understand it as an attempt at *passing* – through language and space rather than race. Does passing here mean move to? succeed at? Or even sweep through? And, if yes, what? Frenchness? Whiteness? Civilization? Sitting in Courtroom n°1 of the courthouse on Jarvis Street, Toronto, Dionne Brand, sketching her *Map To the Door of No Return* through Caribbean islands and Canadian cities, looks at the three girls standing there, bored, rebels, waiting for their written sanction to be handed by the clerks – and she thinks of their names, too, as “the mystery of this city, its hybridization”⁴³. They are the sign of the movements that preceded and brought them in the same way our family name bears the trace of the arrival and passage of a Frenchness we then absorbed, have become. Brand attempts at guessing how the three of them came together, as

“friends, co-conspirators, co-defendants. They met as outsiders, no doubt. Outsiders to the city and outsiders in their own homes; the homes, the families that gave them the last names, the same families that gave them the first names to protect them from the last names.”⁴⁴

As I imagine my cousins finally *there*, a small village of the Vosges, where they long to be (but do they? Or is it others who long for them to be? To leave for in order to begin to live?), rather, perhaps, than will ever belong, I wonder how their names will sound, if they will feel protected by them, and from what. I wonder if this will be enough – for them to know who and where they are, where to go and, perhaps, someday, return. For there indeed may be, as Dionne Brand notes from the beginning and I realize on the road one evening, within our names, some kind of a hidden map to be found.

Ana/sthasie

Night is falling on my father's hometown.

We have been driving all day long – we are going further. Into the forest mountains dark – to the ocean. I do not know how afraid I am. I have been – sinking. We passed by my father's childhood house. The place he had settled his office in. The hospital my mom used to work at. Le Grand Hôtel (title of a book I may write, some day) where they met. The high school which bears our name. We had lunch on the way at another of my father's 'petits' (how many are them ?). Right before entering into Dolisie, he asked the driver to turn right and go until he'll say so. Something important to accomplish, before moving on, he said. We followed the road until a sign known by him alone. Went back, slowly. I looked through the grass, a little upper on the side. I looked at my father as he got out

⁴³ Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, p.106

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.106

of the car, crossed, climbed a few stairs I had not realized were there – to the graves. I started feeling my throat ache. I followed. I joined him in front of them

*three
stones dead warm
there.*

*Tante.
Ancêtre.
Grand-mère.*

I remained quiet as he cried, walked around, talked to them. Said he was here – with me. Told his sister I was the one bearing her name –

Anasthasie

(το ξέρω).

Note to S.
November 1st

The last place I want to stop at is a name – yours? Mine? A way, too, somehow. A suspension, in-between, a return and beginning. “Ana-, as a prefix, means ‘up, in place or time, back, again, anew’”⁴⁵, Sharpe recalls. A resurrection, quite literally.

We visited the graves on November 1st, All Saints Day. This was a coincidence. We visited the graves before others came to take care of them – change flowers, sweep around. We stood in the red dust, somewhere along a road which, if you do not stop, can take you to Gabon – where my grandmother, lying there underground, once was born. In this apparent middle of nowhere, through the grass, my father found his way. He guided the driver all the way to them, with no map nor sign, through the blur of his eyes. After a decade away from Congo, my father returned, twice, last year – to bury his father, first, and then, the younger of his sister, the one whose name I bear. It is how he would start each time telling me about her. It is what he said, again, on the day of her death. As I was leaving the kitchen, he asked “You know, your aunt, the one whose name you have.” I nodded, not quite sure if this was a question. He had spoken slowly – at the pace of pain, his voice weary and frail. I nodded and I knew it was not a question but a sentence – by which I mean more than a mere succession of words, a death penalty. My aunt Anasthasie had had a stroke in the night, she was in hospital. “People recover from such things”, I tried. “They do”, my father replied, “but she is *there*” – far, that is, away, in a place where ‘life’ means and is something else, and fades so easily.⁴⁶ In Afropea, (home) might as well be called hole, for one, more often than not, returns to bury.

In my aunt and I’s shared name, I once more hear echoes. If it is to the return, persistence and renewal of life that Anasthasie speaks, there is more. It also hints, I believe, to a specific way of holding oneself *still*, that is, in resistance and motion, dignity and tension. It is a paradoxical practice of standing up on a collapsing ground, dwelling in movement, that I get pointed at by Tina M. Campt as she, too, stares at and listens to images and gazes encountered in her archival wo/anderings.⁴⁷ Thus Campt writes

⁴⁵ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 76

⁴⁶ See thesis’ Chapter 3 – *Further and Suns*.

⁴⁷ Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, p.47-67

“sta-sis:

1. an act or condition of standing or stopping.
2. a state of balance or equilibrium among various forces.

Sta-sis (my definition):

1. tensions produced by holding a complex set of forces in suspension.
2. invisible motion held in tense suspension or temporary equilibrium; e.g., vibration”⁴⁸

It is after a close visual and sonic study of and attention to ethnographic portraits of South-African women, taken in the early 1880’s by the members of an Austrian Trappist Mission settled in contemporary KwaZulu-Natal, that Campt arrives at her own definition of stasis. Thinking with Fanon, that is attending to the affective dimensions of those colonial photographs to point at the muscular tensions of those women’s faces, busts, bodies, Campt here names “stasis” “a temporal modality of diasporic motion held in suspension, in ways that hover between stillness and movement”⁴⁹. Afropea lies there, up – she floats, trembles. I wonder how my aunt looked, on that day – how she moved and stood, still. Did she shake? She had gone back from church with a friend. Did she break? She went home on her own. Did she call? She spent a few hours at the hospital, holding on – *there*, that is where it is almost impossible, to persist and remain, to return from. For the first time, on that day, thousands of kilometers away, in the quiet bedroom of a house, in a small French town, I saw my father stagger.

“What appears to be motionlessness is in fact an effortful placement that never arrives at a true state of stillness.”⁵⁰

There may never be a home in Afropea – there, much likely, never was. The ground is not to be trusted, let alone broken – or perhaps? In this first chapter, I have thought through places and names, the first becoming the latter and the latter the first. I worked with Chen’s interpretation of animacy, linguistic feature speaking to the degree of liveliness and agency of a word and the object it names, to reflect on the way language, through naming, in Afropea, arranges and makes space, orders things, places and beings, bridging distances and recreating intimacies through loss and dispersal. Thus, the naming of a house and dog after a hometown, Banda, seems to allow for its recovery, daily summoning and, in this, dis/located, reappropriated and reimagined, presence. Meanwhile, the names of children, Lucien and Irène, whose beds are made thousands of kilometers away from their night, sound as both the trace of a colonial past and call to a (post)colonial future, inscribing them in a dis/located spatiotemporality, intending them for an elsewhere, a life that seems to only be realized, possible, in and through movement. Finally, as one returns to vigil over those who passed, what was once home turns hole land, place of grief and absence. It is in the collusion between and mingling of those affective layers, intimate plate tectonics, that Afropea begins to loom, as a juxtaposition of spectral and material places, objects, animate and inanimate entities, linked by and interacting through language, names, calls. Marked by their vibration, imperceptible tremble, hesitation between memory and dream, they do not stand still but rather move, mutate, navigate through and (re)make emotional landscapes. In this, I understand daily practices such as sweeping, naming, as Afropean performances of re-membling, composing of a collective, lived and transmitted space, or, to paraphrase Tina Campt, “practices of homemaking that function as a kind of ‘home-o-stasis’—an active and effortful balancing of multiple flows that produces motion even in stillness”⁵¹ and, I would add, stillness in motion .

⁴⁸ Campt, *Listening to Images*, p.51

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.51

⁵¹ *Ibid.* , p.65

This first chapter sought to understand how geographical distance and borders were engaged with to allow for closeness and intimacy through the mediation of language – naming and calling, so as to bring far-off locations, memories or beings closer. Through this, putting into question, brackets, the idea of ‘home’, convoking Chen, Sharpe and Brand, I attempted at making sense of Afropea through its spatio-linguistic animacies. In the following part, I change spatial form and scale. I turn to social distance and borders as produced in a domestic context. For, as told in the introductory note of this chapter, as some sweep, I lie there, pretending to sleep. How – and where are those functional and political distinctions operated in Afropea? How does one – object, human or animal, make and navigate a house, and under which terms? Leaving the Vosges castle’s empty rooms to sit by the closed window of a crowded house in Dolisie, I now offer to grasp Afropea through its relationalities.

Waiting for a batteryless car that has not been on the road for three years in a dark Brazzaville lane.

My cousin squeezed himself in the car so as to fit the four of us on the backseats until we reached his place, somewhere in a labyrinth of nameless streets.

Dust and songs in the distance –

the reddish glow of my father's cigarette.

Shadows of men – and a tree.

Two friends chatting in front of their shop.

Gentle breeze.

I write.

A group of young boys passes.

I record noises, smile.

Listen to the TV news in the background.

Gaza.

Attempt at deciphering the painted letters on the walls.

Look up to the first evening stars.

I feel good, funnily, as I walk a few steps back and forth, swinging.

I feel like a child.

Strange, out of place, outworldy.

Odd.

I am a magical child.

Note to S.
October 31st

p the.b.e?)!Ullng.,\l.:a.5 the P?.

'In the beginning was the noise.'

Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Chapter 2

breaking noise

cartography of a para-site

I enjoyed a great night of rest and peaceful organs, woke up to a seaside holiday atmosphere, for some reason. Something about the wall-fenced silence, gentle air and sun, and the colours, perhaps. Just missing the water. Spent the morning working the logistics out and discovering the rather peculiar mechanics of Congolese masterhood (a term that itself requires (re)definition) as I have found/am finding myself surrounded with some kind of a court of people supposed to serve me but whom I also happen to have to look after, somehow, a situation which I was not aware nor informed of and still struggle to understand the extents of. So - thought-provoking morning. Other than that, I am glad to be here, smaller, slower, city once called home. I realized we had gone to do groceries right next to the place my father's family used to live in - now turned into a bakery-café-children-playground and gym.

Note to S.
November 22nd

Sound, noise, parasite

Dolisie felt noisy. Upon arrival, I am told of the red soil that turns mud under the pouring rain, of the green hills deep forest and high trees. I remember the dust, stains on my skin and clothes, and the days of flood, I still can feel the Mayombe's cool night breath, its impenetrable fog. Yet – what remains most is a lingering feeling of noise. Thinking back to it, I wonder if it has to do with my wanting to write, throughout this period of my fieldwork, and thus experience of every and any thing as potential interruption, disturbance, but, it is not quite that. Would it be, then, about the specific conditions of my being there during more than three weeks? Invited by a family friend to stay over at her secondary house, I indeed found myself rather confined to a thankfully large and comfortable room and its adjacent bathroom, themselves part of several units making a larger decomposed house, standing at the end of a lane, perpendicular to one of the city's few tarred roads. Living there, my movements in and out the house were being watched and regulated by my several co-inhabitants, commissioned to look after and serve me for the length of my stay by my host, herself living most of the time in the capital city. I thus first found myself with both few occasions to leave 'the plot' – the groceries and logistics being taken care of by others, and little desire to spend much time in the outer spaces of the property, where I would quickly feel spied on. In those hours spent in my room, whose main large window, impossible to open, was covered with thick dark curtains, my main relation to the outside thus was one mediated by sound.

Sound

1. a sound is something that you hear.
2. sound is energy that travels in waves through air, water, or other substances, and can be heard.⁵²

I would hear voices: shouting, humming, calling my name; doors: grating, banging; cars: passing by in the lane, honking, parking in the yard, at times; people: sweeping, cleaning, arguing, speaking on the phone, praying. I would hear noises.

Noise

1. noise is a loud or unpleasant sound.

⁵²Online Collins Dictionary, "sound": <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sound>

2. noise refers to the unwanted parts of a situation, especially ones that make it more difficult for you to do or understand something.
3. noise in an electric circuit is unwanted electrical signals.⁵³

After having reflected on the interactions between language and place in Afropea, words and (home), I now, in this chapter, wish to travel back to and dis/locate Dolisie by the way of sounds and house, thinking together senses and architecture to move further into my affective mapping of Afropea. I return to one of my temporary bedrooms and, sitting by the closed window, I attend to sounds, memories of what I heard, and noises as well, understood in their specific character of nuisance, disturbance. In choosing to work with these notions, I once more unfold the two questions articulating the method of dis/location: where is here? what is left? Writing from a specific location and house-making tool, my bedroom's window, through Siegert's 'cultural technique' lens, I question its function and meaning in the making of the household's architectural and relational order. It then is through this perspective that, building on the sonic memories of my time in Dolisie, I ask what they are and leave the traces of; I stop at their residual, unpleasant, undesired and unintelligible parts. I take the noise out – I break it, somehow. After a written sketch of the window, dis/locating the scene, the sonic memories will take the form of three short texts narrating sound-based experiences extracted from research notes of my time in this Dolisian household. Following Serres' rats, here become cockroaches, perhaps, I hear noise in the language of electric circuit and communication theory, that is as unwanted signal, unregistered message, dis/located sense. In conversation with Siegert and Serres, I hear noise and seek for parasites.

Parasite

"I must put three things together: habits or customs, animals, noises. At first glance, they are unrelated. Yet I am not putting them together haphazardly. I am forced to do so by my tongue: Latin, Greek, Roman. In this somewhat fuzzy spot, a parasite is an abusive guest, an unavoidable animal, a break in a message."

Michel Serres, 'Rats Meals – Cascades', *The Parasite*⁵⁴

In each of my discussions of the research material described above, I indeed will search for parasites – abusive guest, unavoidable animal or break in the message, as a revealer of the relational dis/order at play in the situation. Meanwhile, the window, around which those scenes took place, once put into question, reveals itself as a para-site, that is as an invitation to step aside, imagine other ways these space and bodies could organize - as a tool for dis/location.

Over the window

The window of my room in Dolisie is a 1.30 x 1.20 x 0,11m rectangle located on the wall to the right of the doorway. It is the only window in the room, set on a white wooden gridded frame composed of nine glass squares. Six metal pieces operate as keys to unlock two openings on each side of the central window panel.

para-site

The window is dressed, on the inside, by two heavy brown curtains covering it from thirty centimeters up the wall all the way down to the floor, which are knotted most of the day. It moreover

⁵³Online Collins Dictionary, "noise": <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/noise>

⁵⁴ Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr. Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, p.8

is augmented, on the outside, by a thin gridded mosquito net, almost imperceptible to the untrained eye, whose tiny nylon squares create this typical blur, optical illusion which reveals the filter. Ornamental-securitarian metal bars painted in white complete its outside dressing, made of twelve identical squares, each enclosing two C-shaped curved forms. All window square glasses are stained with white paint dots, brush or dust cloth traces.

The bedroom window gives access to and can be looked through from two successive and embedded outer spaces. The entire house being separated into some smaller independent units comprising one or two rooms, the window opens up onto another inside – a short semi-exterior corridor leading to one of the two doors of the main house living-room. The surrounding walls of the latter are themselves opened by two wide glassless holes that let the air come and go through another mosquito net. Two exterior chairs and a sofa surround a coffee table, itself set under a small TV screen on which music plays, hanging on the wall. An air-conditioning unit cools the air, making of this space a pleasant relaxing shady space in which visitors may sit and wait before entering the main house. In such cases, the brown curtains are to be closed, unless both passers-by and the bedroom inhabitant wish to gaze at one another. The corridor's semi-circular window facing the bedroom's, finally opens onto part of the inner yard, where another sofa, chairs and coffee table are set against the wall. From the bed, located in front of it, one thus can follow passages from the entry yard to the secondary yard, that is from the property gate to the main house entrance. Depending on the time of the day, light, exposure, and curtains' position, incomers may look back from the yard or corridor into the room.

The window of the bedroom cannot be opened. The metal keys situated at the bottom and up the window frame and panels' articulations are not locked – the two window's openings have been sealed up. The window lets light and muffled noises come through – but no wind. The only source of air in the unit thus is the small bathroom window, through which a little bit of wind may blow all the way to the bedroom if one leaves the bathroom door open. The small bathroom window has bars but no mosquito net. It opens on another small semi-closed space – one meter and a wall.

para-sight

According to the first definition of the online French Larousse Dictionary for the word *fenêtre*, a window is an “opening comprising a glass closing, carved into the wall of a building so as to allow for the entry of light, the vision towards the outside, and, usually, ventilation”.⁵⁵ Concealed by heavy dark curtains, its pane dirty and stained, the bedroom window, which opens onto a double-inside, gives access to a bare piece of sky. Day or night, regardless of the weather, multiple lights have to be turned on in the room. Sealed up, it cannot be opened to let the wind blow in – an air-conditioning unit is fixed on the perpendicular wall, facing the bed, towards which it constantly streams artificial cold air. In spite of its presence and size, its covering two-thirds of the side-wall, the only window of the room thus does not fulfill two of its defining functions – light and ventilation. One can thus assume that it is only meant at insuring the third – “the vision towards the outside”. Yet, as we have previously mentioned it, the outside here is not the radical one, outside-of-the-world, that is the property, onto which one may look so as to check on any potential threat coming from the street or neighboring houses. Here, the outside is a relative one, outside-inside that is, opening into not only one but two other spaces integral to the property, inner waiting-hall-corridor and outer secondary yard. One question thus is raised – can a

⁵⁵Online Dictionnaire Larousse : <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/fen%C3%AAtre/33252> - translation is mine.

window that prevents light and air to come in, and opens onto an inside be considered a window? Is the bedroom window still a window? And, if it is not, what is it, then? Rather, what does it do? To the one lying or sitting on the bed? To the one sitting on the corridor sofa or yard chairs? To the passers-by on their way to the main house's living room? What does this object do? What does this walled hole or holed wall allow for or impede? Reveal and conceal? Who or what is it open to? Who or what is it entrapping? Which border does it erect? Which passage does it open? What does it stand and speak for?

Following Bernhard Siegert's⁵⁶ reflections on doors and grids as cultural techniques, articulating the real, I offer to analyze the above-described window as a creator of the real of the house. For, as Siegert notes in the last chapter of his *Cultural Techniques – Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real*,

“every culture starts with the introduction of distinctions. Speaking in systems- theoretical terms, this presupposes both an observer who observes this distinction and a set of techniques that process the distinction and thereby render observable the unity of the things distinguished. Thus the difference between humans and animals is one that depends on the mediation of a cultural technique.(...) The door appears much more as a medium of the coevolutionary domestication of animals and humans.”⁵⁷

I extend this analytical proposition to the window, additionally arguing that it, not only, orders and borders movements, but senses as well – allowing more or less sound and sight to go through and facilitating communication between both sides whether it is open or closed. I thus offer to look and hear the house through it in this chapter, as the “observer who observes this distinction”, itself mediated by “a set of techniques” the sealed up window is a key-element of. It indeed was from there that, for a month, I engaged with my co-inhabitants. I would hear their conversations and arguing while not understanding them; listen to the maid's daily humming who, as she was wiping the window, never appeared to see me sitting on the other side; be searched and hailed through the window by both my housemates or guests when the door was closed. I thus consider the window to, not only, reveal, but make, the micro-social order, the ‘real’, of the house – that is constitute one of its material conditions of possibility, a medium by and through which it is formed. In this, it operates as a space of invention of meaning and distinction, a threshold between worlds and beings, sorting them into species, genders, class, naming some hosts, guests, and other parasites.

Parasites: bugs, witch, child

1. a bug is an insect or similar small creature.
2. a bug is an illness which is caused by small organisms such as bacteria.
3. if there is a bug in a computer program, there is a mistake in it.⁵⁸

I now look back at the household's interactions through my bedroom's window turned para-site of observation: seeking for the mechanics of bordering and distinction at play in the three following

⁵⁶Siegert, Bernhard. *Cultural Techniques – Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, New York, Fordham University Press, 2015.

⁵⁷Ibid, p.193.

⁵⁸Online Collins Dictionary, “bug”: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bug>

accounts of sonic memories, I question race-species, class-status and gender-sexual assignations and performances to understand Afropean relationalities.

cockroach

Ran inside, chased by the storm. Opened the door - distinguished a big dark running form on the ground. Turned the light on. Saw him just there. Tried to get him off with quite a violent foot kick. He ran faster, disoriented, threw himself under my backpack - which I grabbed, held high. He ran in circles, crazier and crazier with each round, then rushed ahead towards my suitcase, the bed, the wall. And disappeared again.

I woke up from a very troubled and strange night - actual or fantasized encounter with a cockroach in the dark?

Slipping in my bathroom. Looking at the cockroach lying on the floor agitating its legs in the air. Listening to my housemate speaking too loud on the phone - for the last time.

Notes to S – November 23rd, December 2nd, December 18th

Throughout my time in Congo, I encountered a number of cockroaches with whom I had to learn to cohabit more or less peacefully. I had been informed – warned about their existence prior to my arrival, told about their size, shape and incredible speed and resistance. I believe that I did not see but heard the first of them – one afternoon in the living room of the flat I was at the time sharing with my sister in the city-center of Brazzaville. It was to be the first of many confrontations announced by this quasi-imperceptible tapping, which had me quickly develop a particular anxious hearing sensitivity. I still vividly remember that very faint and brief sound, almost imagined, and yet so certain. Stopping any activity I would be in the middle of – pen in the air, headphone dropped, nap aborted, call interrupted, dance step suspended, I would wait for it to repeat. I would then focus my entire attention and start screening the room without moving myself, attempting to locate the motion. With time and experience, I learnt to immediately look to the cupboards, my backpack or any corner where some food had been left – the cockroach would indeed often be giving itself away through the sound of its feet scrapping against a paper bag, biscuit package or can. As the tension increased in the room, and once the intruder, still invisible, had been identified, I would have to make a strategic choice – scaring the cockroach away with the risk of its running to another spot, or attempting at either catching it with some tool – box, jar, broom or pushing it towards any possible exit – window, door, shower hole. In any case, I would have to act fast – and yet always too slow, and be noticed right away. It was only a matter of seconds before the cockroach would start running in all directions, as terrified as I, inaugurating a more or less lengthy and absurd inter-species waltz.

Thinking back to my tumultuous relationships with cockroaches in Congo – their presence in my notes and conversations at the time, occasional haunting of my dreams, provocation of ethical dilemmas, and the keenness of their memory, that is their affective impact and imprint, I understand them as an account of the parasite as a polysemic and multidimensional paradigm of relationality. My cockroaches are Serres' rats:

“The city rat invites the country rat onto the Persian rug. They gnaw and chew leftover bits of ortolan. Scraps, bits and pieces, leftovers: their royal feast is only a meal after a meal among the dirty dishes of a table that has not been cleared.”⁵⁹

Coming out at twilight or in the silence of the empty room, the cockroach makes a dinner of my crumbs. It does not have to work – it only waits a while, approaches and enjoys, sometimes with company. An avoidable animal, that keeps on appearing, disappearing, reproducing, multiplying, it also is an undesired and thus by nature “abusive guest”, an invader. The cockroach is a parasite. Not only a but one’s, for parasite is a relational condition, characterized by the living of another body: “that is the meaning of the prefix *para* in the word parasite: it is on the side, next to, shifted; it is not on the thing, but on its relation.”⁶⁰ The cockroach, here, thus is *my* parasite – eating from and next to me. Yet, it may well not be the only one. In my Dolisie room, the cockroach comes to eat from my supply. I indeed have there with me a bag where one can find some pasta and rice, a bottle of olive oil, some bananas, at times, and biscuits too. They were not always there, neither must they – the house has two kitchens. Yet, I am told to keep them in my bedroom, locked, when I come back from the groceries. The reason for this is that, left unattended in the communal spaces, they could be stolen – by my co-inhabitants, each of them accusing the other. In that, the cockroach reveals only one of many potential and competing parasites, eating next to and of one another while reading and naming the other as the “abusive” guest, illegitimate and anti-social element.

In this chain, however, the cockroaches and my co-inhabitants, eating of my supply, potentially or effectively, appear in a same relation to me: they are *my* parasites. What am I to be, then? Their guest, invited there by a person they both live with and work for, and are entangled with in more or less loose kinships? Their host, the guest of another, whom they have to serve and wait for? Or another parasite, the first and final one, theirs, whose historical situation turned ontology, whose *guestness*, is predicated upon a systemic eating of the resources they, as citizens of a former colony, work to produce to the benefit of the country-metropole I happen to come from?

“The relation of the guest is no longer simple. ... There is no exchange, nor will there be one. Abuse appears before use. Gifted in some fashion, the one eating next to, soon eating at the expense of, always eats the same thing, the host, and this eternal host gives over and over, constantly, till he breaks, even till death, drugged, enchanted, fascinated. The host is not a prey, for he offers and continues to give. Not a prey, but the host. The other one is not a predator but a parasite.”⁶¹

What interests me here is to consider the parasite in relation to the postcolonial context of Afropea – which it, according to me, marks doubly. As an imagined, experienced and, even more so, utopian space, that hegemonic maps do not recognize, Afropea constitutes, by definition, a para-site, that is a form living in the margins, by the side of, and beyond, normative cartographies and experiences of space-time. Furthermore, as a world emerged from the colonial, that is asymmetrical and abusive, relationship between two others, Europe and Africa, it can be said to be some kind of a parasitic creation. This is the echo I find in Léonora Miano’s attempt at a subjective definition of Afropea, in the first pages of her essay, too.

⁵⁹ Serres, *The Parasite*, p.8

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.38

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.7

“The West is also the way that the mind that gave birth to that phenomenon [capitalism], spreading throughout the planet through colonial influence, adapted to transform the vision we had of the world, of ourselves in the world.”⁶²

It is that transformed vision of both the world and one's dis/location within it that this chapter tries to explicate through the weaving of narratives. Those tell the story of a place peopled with parasites, indeed, where the act of eating next to, living with, another, is marked by the threat of poisoning or theft. It wonders how, in such a situation, to distinguish between host, hostage and guest; enemy and friend; stranger and self. Where is the boundary to be traced, threshold crossed? Where does the relation begin, fail and end? Or is it altogether abolished, made impossible by the breaking of truth and language, crisis of the real itself?

witch

Had lunch listening to D telling about the latest domestic drama - involving a young woman B took in, from her family, who has spent most of her life in the streets and is said to be uncontrollable and create problems with everyone since joining home. She also is masculine-presenting, which adds to the suspicion and condemnation. She bullies the new maid, disrespects everyone - even her eldest and steals money. D tells the story in French - for me and in munukutuba, for the maid. The latter asked B for money to go to evening French classes so as to be able to communicate with me. I said I was the one who had to learn.

Note to S – November 24th

We are five co-inhabitants in my relative's Dolisie house. She, B, is not there, most of the time. Her cousin, D, who also works for her, as a housekeeper I could say, in Brazzaville or Dolisie, is in charge of me for the length of my stay. She looks after me on behalf of my relative who has herself assured my father that she would take care of me. D cooks for me, checks on me, comes with me to do groceries. She takes me around, at times – to her house, where her fifteen-year-old daughter N lives. To her mother, further in the surroundings of the city, who looks after her other children. D attempts at teaching me a few words of munukutuba too. We have some good time. She tells me stories, we laugh. She warns me of the others – F, the new maid, who hums all day long, but X, above all, whose status and function in the household remain unclear. A distant relative of B, she one day has come asking for help, and ever since remained. She lives there when B comes, is supposed to help out with the chores – but does not, according to D. Rather the opposite: she creates trouble. In charge of the keys when the house is empty, she may take advantage of this access to take one or two things she likes – a carpet has disappeared, some tableware too. When confronted by B or D, she shouts, becomes aggressive, accuses the maid.

D calls her evil, bestial. She describes her ways, in and out of the house, her violent behaviors and miseducation from having grown up in the street. Tightening her muscles, frowning her eyebrows, she imitates her walk and attitude, mocks her boyish manners and styles. D calls her evil and I hear three-dimensional parasite. Having imposed herself rather than ever actually been invited, X undeniably is an abusive guest – coming to profit from the food, wifi and shelter and disappearing anytime some responsibility or service arises. Disturbing the household initial dis/order with her behaviour and lies, steering conflict, X reveals to enact parasitism in the form of, not only, an

⁶²Miano, Afropea, p.26-27, translation is mine.

unavoidable animal, impossible to chase off, but a bug as well, social ill she is at the origin of, to my co-inhabitants' saying.

"To chase: push out, drive out, uproot, dismiss, purge, repress. We repress what bothers us. What is repressed, but remains anyway, still parasites communication."⁶³

In that, X, the illegitimate, homeless, child, finally constitutes a break in the message, challenge to a fragile, if not illusory, shared language and understanding, putting the community into crisis in the same movement as it makes and strengthens it. It is on this last aspect, socio-linguistic, that I would like to further elaborate, calling on to another term D has been naming X by. I believe I heard D pronounce it on a few occasions in the course of our conversations – her monologuing and my nodding in the yard. Yet, I could not tell for sure, each time, or did not want to, perhaps. It would happen so quickly, that word, it would feel odd, absurd – and meanwhile so obvious. So was it, again, inevitably, on this stormy and bored afternoon. Ranting at X for the one hundred and thirteenth time of the week, D suddenly turned to me and ask:

Have you heard of lesbians?

If I froze, (*buggé*) it must not have lasted more than a millisecond. I am not sure I made a sound, though, rather played with my facial features so as to indicate curiosity and encourage her to go on. D needed no more, did not pay much attention. I do not remember what she said next. She perhaps even changed subject. I sat there, with a half-smile – or rictus?, wondering. I still am: what if? What if I had answered, then? What if, through this word of mine, noise to her ears, parasite on the line, the system, suddenly, had collapsed? What would have happened, right there, between us and all around, on that damp boring day, in the yard?

"Facta autem hac voce, convenit multitudo, and at this sound the multitude came together, Γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης, συνῆλθεν τὸ πλῆθος, après que ce bruit se fut fait entendre, ils accoururent en foule, hac voce, this sound, ce bruit, φωνῆς, voice or noise, the agreement is suddenly broken, as are the rhythm and the meaning, but the two are mixed and it is both voice and noise, message and parasite, and each one heard them speaking in his own language, audiebat unusquisque lingua sua illos loquentes, et chacun les entendait parler dans sa propre langue, ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν. ... The new meaning spread everywhere starting from wind and noise. Not a single language translated in several languages, but several spoken and several heard at the same time."⁶⁴

It here is the word-sound-noise "lesbian", echoing in several tongues, that arrives to activate or reveal the parasite and moment of dis/location. Disturbing, even if for a fleeting and secret moment, the order of the house, it indeed suddenly brings X and I, standing on each side of its hierarchy of value we have begun to map, dangerously close. While it comes to perfect X as the figure of trouble, disorder and sin, it is offered to me as a question, threat. In this, it is assumed as strangeness and, perhaps, offence, to what I understand to be my integrity as the capital-Guest, itself entailing a specific arrangement-collusion of class-race-sex turned ontological rightness. I am to be protected – from cockroaches, thefts, maids, lesbians; kept at a distance from them by gates, windows and secrets. I am to be right, white, quiet.

⁶³Serres, *The Parasite*, p.77

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p.41

child

We took D's daughter back to the tar - where the lane becomes road. She had passed by after school because she was hungry. She asked where I was - she talks to no one. D replied I was in my room, studying. She only called me once N was heading home. We walked in the dark, in-between puddles. She asked me how long I would stay here. I asked her what she liked best at school - philosophy, Spanish, literature, she said. I smiled. 'N talked to you?' D later asked, on our way back. We walked in the dark, in-between puddles. I told her to let her daughter know she could come, whenever.

Note to S – November 24th

D is happy to introduce me all around as her daughter – to neighbours, grocers, taxi drivers. I am the daughter of many throughout my stay. I am D's daughter for some weeks and thus we travel at night together and late, one day, finally get to the house. I have my own room and bathroom, that of B's daughter who lives in Brazzaville. They are said to be the most beautiful and fancy of the property, which everyone always tries to have a look at. "This is Paris in Dolisie!", D. exclaims with envy as I settle down in the large white flowered bedroom. She is sleeping in one of the three rooms of another outhouse, reserved for the domestic staff, on a mattress on the floor. "Aude!" D goes on. "Maman D's daughter!". We laugh.

I meet N, D's daughter, another time as we pass by their house, where D wants to drop a few things. She shows me around, proud, pointing at the framed pictures and new piece of furniture. Quiet, blasé, N is sitting on the sofa, waiting for us to leave. I ask her how she is, and how school is going. She answers with a few words, says her phone is broken. D moreover has cut the Internet, arguing her daughter uses it too much. As we head back to the house she tells me she worries, about N's isolation and boredom, and her future as well. She feels guilty to be leaving her on her own.

N passes by, from time to time. We have a chat, she tells me a bit about her life, I give her my computer to watch films. Once, she wants us to go dancing. We decide on a time, she says she will come by and we will go together to one of the few clubs in the city center. On the agreed evening, I finish writing early and lie on the bed, waiting. I check my phone regularly – no sign of N. D knocks on my door to ask if I have received any call or text. We wonder, call, keep on waiting. D has a strong headache. We nap, each in our room, as the sun sets. I perhaps even fall asleep. Two hours later, we are woken up by some banging on the gate. N has arrived, with a friend. They are both wearing colorful shirts and skinny jeans, glittery make-up, they look excited. Examining my large T-shirt and pair of shorts, they ask: "Are you ready? Don't you have anything else to put on?" And, without waiting for an answer, they walk into my bedroom and start searching through my suitcase. They are stopped in their stylistic intervention by a call from the other building – D wants to talk to them. After a while without seeing them reappear, I go out myself to check in on the situation. It now is quite late into the evening – too late, D has decided, indeed. Sat on the stairs, bent over their phones, the two girls say nothing. They will be staying over and leaving in the morning to go to school. I wish them good night and return to my room.

A few days later, I am awoken by D's cries at my door. I open shocked eyes, wonder if it is a nightmare, understand it is not, get up - look for my glasses, the keys. Standing on the other side, D looks exhausted, she speaks fast. In my worried half-sleepiness, I finally manage to understand that she needs money to pay for a taxi to take N to the hospital. I give her a few bills and stay there, standing on the threshold, as D and her daughter run away into dawn.

With these last fragments of recollections, I want to point at the orders of life such parasitic relationalities we have witnessed throughout this chapter imply – who gets to be named a child, a human or animal, who is considered welcome or hostile, based on race, status, and gender, assumed, expressed or imposed. Who is looked after and cared for; whose health and safety are considered, attended to, insured, and at which cost. In this I, once again, return to Sharpe searching article news and archives, and, in N and I's example, hear echoes of anagrammatical blackness: "We see that *child* is not 'child'".⁶⁵

In this second chapter, seeking to understand the mechanics of Afropean relationalities, I have sat by a window, listened to sounds – noises and silence, and mobilized dis/location through two exercises. The breaking of a bedroom window into a para-site of observation, that is, following Siegert, an element of a set of "cultural techniques" articulating and ordering the real, first hinted to the hierarchies, distances and borders distinguishing the inhabitants of a house I stayed at in Dolisie. In an attempt at breaking noise, understood as disturbance, failed communication, I then further explored those social dynamics and classifications through the discussion of sonic memories. Those took us back to moments of simultaneous crisis and making of the domestic order – from supply preservation from invaders and thefts, insects or humans, through inter-personal conflict and stigmatization, to naming and performance of childness. I chose the para-site as the paradigm of this moment of thinking of Afropea. Following its understanding as a place in constant making and tension, movement: a (*home*), considering Afropea as a *para-site* now indeed simultaneously speaks to the predatory conditions of its emergence and, as we have seen, present – and utopian potential. It is towards the latter that we shall now walk, leaving the hold of the house to embrace trembling horizons.

"And if the system in question were the collective as such? What relations do we really have with each other? How do we live together? What really is this system which collapses at the slightest noise? Who or what makes this noise? Who or what prevents me from hearing whom, from eating with whom, from sleeping with whom? How can I love, whom should I love? Whom could I love and who will love me? Who forbids love?"⁶⁶

⁶⁵Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p.77

⁶⁶ Serres, *The Parasite*, p.11

I escaped.

Got lost in town after the class - unconsciously craving to, perhaps.

Got hailed, called names, got smiled and waved at.

Got whiter with the dark.

Bought chocolate paste of a new type and yellow dish product for the house.

December 7, they say. Tears of sweat rolling along the skin from neck to nostrils to breast to toes through hair.

And an evening breeze

- pink sky.

Took pictures almost for the first time.

Locked eyes, waved back, gave smiles.

Did not answer to all the names and hails, asked a man for my way.

Sat on the front seat in the woua-woua - we were two, there, one on each side, I had never seen that.

The driver showed me a little hold to grasp. Backpack between my legs.

No window between my skin sweat and the wind night streets.

Trees tar beasts - beats?

I breathed.

Again.

Finally.

Eyes wide open as if drinking the sky clouds mud.

I breathed as if for the first time, perhaps.

He thought he was just driving me.



Chapter 3

further and suns

Afropean mo(u)rnings

On New Year's Day, the kids – my father's friend's B's nephews, and I, got on the back of B's truck. We drove through the city, all the way from the centre to Mpiala, the kids' neighbourhood, through the markets and mud. It had been raining for some days, so much so that we had had to postpone Christmas' festivities – the killing of the goat, its cooking and sharing among the family. We had been forced to stay home on December 25th, only visited by a few, listening to music and watching cartoons while the sky was pouring. I had stood at the balcony's window for a while, mesmerized by the lightnings. The storm had calmed down in the evening and we had slowly seen people emerge, children dressed up in their fanciest clothes hopping around the puddles. I then had gone touring the city with B. and the boys, looking for a chicken for dinner - which we had ended up buying from a shop at the corner of our street after a half an hour drive. A few blocks away, some houses and plots were flooded with rain – yards immersed, plastic chairs floating in brown silt, people standing on the threshold of their houses with water up to their knee. Meanwhile, as the rain had stopped and the sun was setting, the city was just about to wake up – markets and shops opening, children getting out in their suits and dresses, families partying on squares and crossroads.

Pool off - leaving the main road

I begin on the road again. I get out of the car, bus, woua-woua, and start walking a path unknown to any map. I now depart from the very idea of ground, towards another matter, feel, form – water, ocean, pools. It is another *dyslexic* pun. I use it, through its many definitions, as a compass to dive into the multidimensionality of cosmoecological experiences conditioning Afropean futurities. I choose “pool” as the medium of this last dis/located exploration, too, recalling that, in Cong-Brazzaville, the Pool is a department. Situated in the southern part of the country, it was one of the main and most wounded zones during the civil war that tore the country apart from the 1990's to the early 2000's, with some resurgent fights happening as late as 2016, year of the last ceasefire⁶⁷. Today, as a press video I found shows⁶⁸, former militia fighters of the Pool have settled there, and become farmers. While spades have replaced guns, craters have become furrows. I thus question and explore Afropean land(e)scapes, weather and times. I once more return to Sharpe, understanding the “weather” in her tongue, as

“the totality of our environments; ... the total climate. ... The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.”⁶⁹

Where hers, in the United States, is “anti-black”, what defines the Afropean weather I am exploring? How does it un/do, allow and shape life, possibility, futures? In this third and last chapter, I write standing in the mud, under two suns. I wo/ander from one pool to the other, collecting stories, feelings, images and memories to constitute an affective landscape of contemporary Congo-Brazzaville, account for an Afropean atmosphere, emerging from the entanglement of pieces and layers of time, space, wounds and dreams. I adopt this fragmented written form in an attempt to render the specificities of the presence and narrative of historical and daily events and conditions I have observed throughout my fieldwork – elusive, anecdotal, oblique, in a general context of surveillance and repression of speech and behavior. I thus imagine a navigation through and in-between outcrops,

⁶⁷Yengo, Patrice. *La Guerre Civile du Congo-Brazzaville (1993-2002)*. "Chacun aura sa part". Paris, Karthala, 2006

⁶⁸Congo: psychose dans le Pool après les bombardements', *Africa News* (YouTube), April 23rd 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc3lBn8hKGU>

⁶⁹Sharpe, *In The Wake*, p.104

walking round shadows of looming mountains. I write as I ask what it is and does that to hop through pools of rain or in between craters on the way to work and school, and how the night feels when the moon turns oil red above the Atlantic. Summoning those who passed and yet remain, present in the warmth of the air and salt of the ocean, in the cracks and nutrients of the ground, I write and ride in the search and feel of Afropea as a historical form inhabiting the wake's "residence time".

"The amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean is called residence time. Human blood is salty, and sodium, Gardulski tells me, has a residence time of 260 million years. And what happens to the energy that is produced in the waters? It continues cycling like atoms in residence time. We, Black people, exist in the residence time of the wake, a time in which 'everything is now. It is all now' (Morrison 1987, 198)"⁷⁰

Roads must fall

As I begin writing this chapter, in Amsterdam Spring, one of my cousins, Jess, eighteen-year old, is hit by a car, somewhere in the streets of Pointe-Noire. Or was he one of the passengers? Riding the bus? My father is unsure, on the other side of the phone. The only thing he can tell me, two days after the accident, is that the young man, whose existence I discover as it is vanishing, was left for dead on the side of the road. We try to remember if he is the cousin I met, briefly, when we were together there, who passed by the bakery we were having some meetings at. He had come to pick up some clothes and electronic devices sent by my aunts from France. We had talked a bit, he had drunk a coke, we had taken a few pictures and later shared them on the family group chat. I believe it was his brother. I believe I have not and will never meet Jess. Each day of coma costs 400€ in oxygen. I remember people telling me how they, in Congo, have renamed the hospital: CHU, standing for 'Centre Hospitalier Universitaire' (University Medical Centre), is joked as CHtue, meaning 'the Hospital Kills'. My father asks my siblings and I if we, by any chance, have some old microphone or camera we could give away for some youth he knows there to start an awareness campaign on road safety.

A few hours later, as we walk around the quiet streets of the Dutch capital, pet cats and smell roses, S asks how I am feeling. The sadness seems to be located in some depths of my lower belly – it is latent, weary. I heard it in my father's voice as well, I think, through the precipitation of his speech, futile attempt at warding powerlessness off – in projects and gestures. Exercise in 'keeping one's head cold'. I think that I wanted to end this thesis with a reflection on Afropean futurity, which names ways of inhabiting layered temporalities, transforming landscapes, upside-downs; practices of projection, craft and imaginings of worlds and beings to-come, kins. I think that I wanted to end this thesis embracing oblique horizons, sketching possibilities. Metamorphosis and *beyondings*. I type with a sighing smile. I still do, will, end this thesis with thoughts on Afropean futurity - writing from the hospital bedside of my unknown eighteen-year-old Congolese cousin.

Jess.

On the following day, I text my brother Yvan to ask how he is and if he has received any news. He replies that he has a strong headache and no energy, that Jess is at the morgue and that the family is organizing. On the phone, a few minutes later, he tells me that Jess stayed with him for a bit in Dolisie earlier this week, preparing for his high school exam, after what he left for Pointe-Noire and texted that he had gotten there safely. 'Next thing I knew was that he had had an accident, and now he is dead.'

⁷⁰Ibid., p.41

I have, throughout the making of this work, been reflecting on those who passed: before, during and, now, at the end of it. My grandfather Olivier, in September 2022; my aunt Anasthasie, in January 2023; my cousin Jess, in May 2024. The three of them lived in Gabon or Congo, I did not know them well, if at all. I witnessed the sorrow of those who did and were away. I had the strange experience, each time, from afar, of mourning an absence, of losing a possibility, a beginning and encounter, a common yet-to-come. I met them dead, somehow. I return to Sharpe's inaugural tribute and personal family's "deathly repetition", understood as "one instantiation of the wake as the conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding of aftermath of Atlantic chattel slavery"⁷¹, that is under a global regime of coloniality. I believe, too, that, in the case of my relatives, the happening of their successive deaths, two of three at early if not very early ages, has to be read in the necropolitical contexts of the postcolonial authoritarian regimes of Gabon and Congo. Necropolitical, that is historically and structurally organize to favor dying and the creation of

"death-words ... new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead."⁷²

My cousin Jess' passing at the age of eighteen came to echo two other instances of premature deaths I witnessed during my stay in Congo: the death of several tenths of youth in a scramble at a stadium in Brazzaville during the recruitment campaign of the Congolese military⁷³; and that of the niece of a relative, who was in her late teens and had gone to the hospital for some small pain or infection.

Road.

Stadium.

Hospital.

Life dis/locations.

A few days after Jess' passing, I finally manage to reach out to my uncle by phone. It is the second day of the vigil, I can hear visitors, songs and murmurs in the background – the connection often stops, we repeat, one after the other Can you hear me? Allô? Did you say something? At some point, my uncle tells me that he himself has been lucky. On his way to pick Jess up from the road to take him to the hospital, the car he was sitting in had an accident.

I write in the presence of those who pass, and from anger. Yet, I return to Sharpe and, as I keep on practicing "wake work", that is enact "a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives"⁷⁴, I "refuse Necrotopia". In my sketching of Afropean possibles and futures, indeed, I turn to a monograph-in-the-making, whose tentative title is the only part I know of. "Why don't you think in anticipation of it?", S asks. I thus attempt to build this final chapter on an imaginary conversation with Sharpe's upcoming work and choose to pace Afropea up and down as something other than a place of death and absence, loss and violence. Recollecting moments of ecological surprise or trouble, I engage with their poetic potential and follow the paths they begin to trace.

⁷¹Ibid., p.2

⁷² Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2019, p.92

⁷³Congo : au moins 31 morts dans une bousculade lors d'un recrutement de l'armée à Brazzaville' Le Monde, AFP,[online] November 21st 2023 : https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/11/21/congo-au-moins-37-morts-dans-une-bousculade-lors-d-un-recrutement-de-l-armee-a-brazzaville_6201535_3210.html

⁷⁴Sharpe, In the Wake, p.18

Afropean weather – memories from the Pool

Helicopters fly over the forest – there are holes in the ground and school roof and walls, through which one can look at the surrounding trees. The classroom is empty, pupils and teachers gone. The bombs were dropped on their absence.⁷⁵ Those were some of the first images Congolese authorities allowed the press to produce and share after the bombings of the Pool region in 2016, narrated as a response to a deadly attack in the southern neighborhoods of Brazzaville. The latter was allegedly orchestrated by a political opponent and militia leader, who denounced the Constitution revision engaged by the President to allow for his reelection after thirty-two years in power⁷⁶. The fights that ensued once again led to tenths of casualties and the displacement of many families, who sought refuge in neighboring villages and in the forest.

For Sharpe, “the weather” encompasses the places, milieux and conditions of struggle, the atmosphere and breathability of the air, as well as its molecular composition, bearing traces of those who came, fought and resisted before.

“it is not the specifics of any one event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the machines in which we live”⁷⁷

road hospital stadium

Congo River

Atlantic Ocean

Mayombe forest

sand mud oil

Tropical rains, equatorial climate, life dis/locations. In Afropea, trees are shields and skies pour tears.

It is through an attention to the ground and rains, too, suburban planning and monumental politics, that Congolese anthropologist Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga uncovered the silenced memory of the capital city, Brazzaville⁷⁸. Interested in body remains and ancestralisation practices, Bazenguissa-Ganga offered an enlightening reflection on the erection of a huge mausoleum to the glory of the country’s colonial founder, Savorgnan de Brazza, in 2006, in the aftermath of the civil war. He notably pointed at the simultaneous celebration of the return of de Brazza’s relics, and dismissal of the deaths of thousands of civilians during the war. The mausoleum, honoring the remains of the invented ancestor of a united country, stands in all its splendor a few kilometers from the place where hundreds of young men disappeared without leaving any trace after being arrested by the Congolese forces in 1999. Meanwhile, its inauguration took place around the same time as a massive campaign of exhumation of the bodies of civilians killed during the war - in the framework of a state-led public hygiene operation financed by the dead’s families themselves. The remains of those, whom were never given proper burials, were scattered throughout the entire city and country for years. It is the heavy rains that would sometimes unearth them, buried again under rubbish heaps known by all in the

⁷⁵Congo: psychose dans le Pool après les bombardements’, Africa News (YouTube), April 23rd 2016:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc3lBn8hKGU>

⁷⁶Congo : bombardements dans la région du Pool au lendemain des violences à Brazzaville’, Le Monde, AFP [online], April 6th 2016 : https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/04/06/congo-bombardements-dans-la-region-du-pool-au-lendemain-des-violences-a-brazzaville_4896923_3212.html

⁷⁷Sharpe, In the Wake, p.111

⁷⁸Bazenguissa-Ganga, Rémy. ‘Les « os de la République » ou l’ancestralisation contestée au Congo Brazzaville’, Civilisations 63 (2014), p.27-

neighbourhood. Lying under Brazzaville's streets and shops, houses and schools, those invisible bodies symbolize "the experience of political death", according to Bazenguissa-Ganga, "which anonyms' bones inscribe in the symbolical structure of the city"⁷⁹. In conversation with Sharpe, I would argue that those come to make Brazzaville's weather too, transported through sewers, evaporating under the sun, and travelling through clouds all the way to the villages and forest of the Pool.

(oil) pool: subsurface oil accumulation

I met Pointe-Noire in the night. On the third week of my stay in Congo, my father and his associate C visited for a week to take part in a series of business meetings in the two main cities of the country and invited me to join them. Accompanied by a driver, the three of us traveled from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire in one day. After stopping by Dolisie for a few hours to visit some relatives and old friends, we got back on the road at sunset. We had been advised to stay overnight so as not to cross the dense and winding forest of the Mayombe in the dark, but my father thought it best to get to Pointe-Noire as early as possible so as to make the most of the meetings planned on the following day. It had rained in the south, the tar was humid and shiny and the air fresh.

The car radio spluttered, the music faded, as we approached the trees. Through the open windows, I discovered the forest I had been told so much about in smells and sounds – humid soil, heated tar, moist breeze blowing through branches and leaves, insects' buzzes and nightbirds' songs. I am not sure if I heard or saw it first. I remember both my father's voice and the sudden change in the atmosphere – white opaque veil fallen on the night. 'The Mayombe's fog'. Raising from the ground, thick white clouds turned copper-coloured through the car's headlights filled the air, preventing any vision further than one meter on the road. We made our way slowly, orientating ourselves with sounds and memories, looking out for cars coming from the opposite direction, ditches or animals. We screened the fog worryingly – and in vain, suddenly transported to a strange and vaporous dimension which seemed to have no end. It dissipated after some time, letting us emerge back into a calm and rustling night. We drove in silence as the forest cleared up.

The road was calm, almost desert, and we soon began feeling the ocean – in the saltiness of the air, the width of the horizon. It may as well have only been in my imagination. After a while, I came to spot some light in the distance – reddish, glowing. I screwed my eyes up, unsure. 'Is that the sun?' I asked. On the front seat, my father shook his head. 'No, those are the off-shore oil rigs'.

"But even if those Africans who were in the holds, who left something of their prior selves in those rooms as a trace to be discovered, and who passed through the doors of no return did not survive the holding and the sea, they, like us, are alive in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine. This is what we know about those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time."⁸⁰

The oil extracted nowadays from submarine pools, off Pointe-Noire, results from the decomposition of microorganisms that lived there hundreds of million years ago. Before any of us could stand, sail, run away, that is. Before any of us could dance nor sink. Before there was even an ocean, perhaps. The gas released in the process of extraction is being burnt, permanently, setting the sky aglow over the waves, day and night. No human being has become oil, yet. Those who keep on floating around, though, turned algae and sand, carbon and salt, inhabitants of "residence time", may, as they approach the oil platforms, be swept along by the

⁷⁹Bazenguissa-Ganga, Rémy. 'Les « os de la République » ou l'ancestralisation contestée au Congo Brazzaville', *Civilisations* 63 (2014), p.27-44

⁸⁰Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p.19

machines' movement and resurface in a whirl of energy and flames, tenths of meters up. What if they now were the sun we woke up to?

pool: fairly small area of still water

On January 1st, as the storms had died down and some streets dried off, we finally were able to get out and up the back of B's four-wheel drive. We drove through the city, all the way from the centre to Mpiala, the kids' neighbourhood, through the markets and mud. We clung to each other as the car joggled through the holes and bumps of the slippery road, our faces burnt by the wind dust and sun. C was the first to stand up, as he usually would, holding on to a bar on the roof of the passenger compartment. I joined him after a short while as we entered one of Pointe-Noire's busiest markets. Cars buses and motorcycles were massing on the few tarred bits of the road, weaving in and out of the potholes, market stalls and animated crowds. It did not take more than a few seconds for people to start spotting and hailing me. Pointing fingers to the top of the car, they were shouting and asking what a 'Mundele' (a white person) was doing there and why they had not put me inside. The road became less and less passable as we left the market behind and drove away from the centre. The car was slowing down, plunging into deep and sludgy puddles. Upon entering Mpiala, a young relative came up to the car to guide us to the house, through the unflooded paths. Rubbish were floating around, sometimes forming smelly heaps on the top of which a heron would be perched, stoical. Sat around a fire, in the children's house yard, women were peeling vegetables and frying fish, welcoming guests. As P sat to get her hair braided, G, J and I were sent to collect a few more groceries and bags from some neighbours a few blocks away.

We exited the plot, looked around to find the easiest, that is least flooded, way, to our destination. I followed G and her little brother carefully, walking on the emerged edges of the lane, until we reached a patch of rather dry mud at some further crossroads. We stood there for a moment, looking forward. The way we were meant to take had turned into a pool. On the way to Mpiala, one of Pointe-Noire's most remote and poor neighbourhoods, I had been told that some streets barely ever dried. The children pointed at a line of stones and random objects assembled to allow for the crossing of the pond – pieces of cement, buried bags of sand or plastic cans. People would be hopping from one another, their pants rolled up or dresses lifted, holding their grocery bags, carrying their children. Sat in the middle of the narrow way, leaning against the wall, some groups of two or three young men, probably responsible for the construction, would be waiting, brandishing a paper cup clinking with small money – toll.

G had to carry me on her back, at some point, so that my shoes would not get soaked up in mud. Her brother and I, like most of the neighbours we met, were wearing plastic flip-flops. We progressed slowly, finding our balance on the wobbling stones, gathering speed on more stable portions of the course, holding hands from one hurdle to the other, at times. On a picture I took on that day, Jérémie is opening the way. Agile and confident in his gestures and moves, his left arm on the side and the other reaching forward, he is stepping into the pool. His right foot is in the air, his shadow reflected in the mud – he could almost be flying. Followed by his older sister, who is getting ready to step on the first stone, and I, J is himself going after a small and determined girl holding her loincloth up in her clenched fists at her hips, and another child walking nonchalantly on some rectangular piece of wood or brick. Further away, standing in a small island of dry soil in between two ponds, a man stands, waiting.

Can a child become a bridge? As I follow J through the pools of flooded streets, on that first day of the year, I think back to Sharpe's girl-ship, to L and I's empty bedroom, and Léonora Miano's Afropean youth. I wonder what it would take for children-to-come to be named and called not only to leave in order to begin to live, in that way risking to be absent to both worlds, but to stand in and bind

them, navigating their multiple layers and opening new paths of solidarity and encounters. As ocean levels rise and storms intensify, we may want to start learning how to find our way through puddles and mud pools. A few steps ahead, J is waiting by a particularly narrow and hazardous passage along a wall. Standing there, calm, he smiles as I carefully make my way to him. Then, as he did with the previous crossers, he looks me in the eyes, determined and assured, and, without a word, gives me his hand.

a pool of people, money, or things is a quantity or number of them that is available for an organization or group to use⁸¹

We had to wait days for the rain to stop and the road to dry. B, my father's friend, had planned to show it all to me at the beginning of my stay. We finally drove off, B, his wife N and I, on the day before my departure from Pointe-Noire. I would not have wanted it to be otherwise. The road was bumpy and slippery, B had to maneuver carefully through traffic, lumps and slopes, until we reached the first suburbs of the city, and, finally, the tarred road. The portion linking Pointe-Noire to peripheral towns had once been tarred itself – but progressively destroyed by the rains. We drove for some time before making a first stop at the entry of famous and deep Diosso gorges, opening the ground and forest on tens of meters of depth all the way to the ocean. No one was there but this child, who appeared as we parked and offered his services as a guide. B told me that he wanted to go down the gorges, once, and that the legend went that some protective creatures lived there. He said we would come back longer, next time – he wanted to show me many more things, for now.

We drove some more and into a village holding both the siege of the local kingdom, and museum of history of the country. Two French visitors were being given a tour as we entered the small and flowery yard where an employee greeted us. As he was introducing the site, sharing how the museum sought to retrace Congolese history far beyond colonization, B stopped him to ask why he would even mention it in such terms, thus putting it at the center of the narrative once more. A small argument ensued, each one trying to explain to the other that his narrative was the more valid one, that is Congo-centric and historically factual. Although advocating for the same view, I believe, they did not come to an agreement – I went on to visit the museum in the company of this animated guide, while B and N met not far with a geometer. I joined them two hours later, having been taught about Congo's ethnic groups, geographical conditions and transformations through time, slavery and colonization. I got back in the car and we drove away from the village, further into inhabited lands.

Shaken on the track, the car was crossing kilometers of grass and shrubs, stopping in the middle of what looked like empty of humans lands, spread all along the Ocean, sparkling in the distance. As we got closer, I realized that the place was not quite so desert – tenths of houses-in-the-making were slowly appearing, their bare walls or piles of bricks standing by groups or isolated in a field. A metal hut shining under the sun would sometimes be seen too, indicating that the plot was taken. B parked the car by the road, we got out and he opened wide arms embracing the area of his future house. He then turned to me and asked: 'So, what do you think?' We gazed at the Atlantic, walked from one corner of the plot to the other, following the geometer who took some measures and explained to us where and how to ensure the best house-building. Pointing at the neighbouring imaginary buildings, B told me that he was keeping one for my aunt and another one, perhaps, for my dad. 'We could be all there!', he exclaimed, before adding 'Give me one or two years and, when you return, you will find us there.'

⁸¹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pool>

What is the horizon B is pointing towards? As Afropeans like him, having spent decades in Europe, choose to return to their home-countries to start businesses and build houses⁸², hoping for their children to later join, I wonder what returning means, in Afropea. If (*home*) challenges both origin, departure and arrival to offer a place of being in motion and tension, recreating past territories, in collusion with new ones, through collective memory, language and imagination, could it be that the idea of return becomes, itself, irrelevant, unnecessary? At a moment of ecological distress, putting ecosystems in crisis, forcing entire communities to move towards other countries and continents, requesting all to attend to lands and oceans in collective and sustainable ways, could Afropea invite us to reconsider our relationship to the ground, ancestral places and transgenerational heritage? And where do those who pass go, become rivers and rains, when currents change flows? While the buying of a plot, in the postcolony, may constitute a gesture of recovery, of a land that one was once forced to relinquish to an invader or leave in order to survive, it nonetheless renews the commitment towards individual property, that is, the naming and marking of land, ground – “country”. In imagining a groundless horizon, I turn to Moten and Harney’s undercommons and wonder if one possibility could be to choose inhabitation over dwelling. In inhabiting I hear performance, action on and invention of a shared space, rather than brick-building and bordering of a location. As the sun sets on this field of house sketches, I hear them sing in the distance.

“We plan to be communist about communism, to be unreconstructed about reconstruction, to be absolute about abolition, here, in that other, undercommon place, as that other, undercommon thing, that we preserve by inhabiting.”⁸³

In this final chapter, pulling off the road at night, I have once more gone through Afropea – underground, horizon and clouds; forests, ocean and rains. Feeling with Sharpe’s weather, “refusing Necrotopia”, I have wo/andered from pool to pool, operating as our last dis/located tool, to listen to her winds and times, memories. We have watched her two suns rise. Each time, in conversation with fugitive or imaginary works, I have gone on the paths opened by scenes of my time in Pointe-Noire, selected for their cosmopoetical potential. How to elaborate capacious narratives that do not give in to catastrophic and martial hypotheses? How to both account for the ecocidal disasters caused by oil extraction, deforestation, (post)colonial wars, while trusting that other modes of engaging with and inhabiting them are being invented and enacted every day? Can Afropea be a space of inspiration and experimentation of the latter, following flying children, aspiring farmers and ancestors become sun? Writing in the presence of passing worlds and bodies, I have attempted an exercise of ecological fabulation, travelling from flooded streets, through refuge-forests, to oil or empty grass fields, to give a sense of Afropean futurities. Blurring the lines of space and time, I have arrived at an Afropean mo(u)rning – moment of possible and re-membling.

⁸² Soumaré, Marième. ‘Paroles de « repats » : ces Français d’origine africaine qui ont fait le choix du retour’, Jeune Afrique [online], March 6th 2022 : <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1308007/societe/paroles-de-repats-ces-francais-dorigine-africaine-qui-ont-fait-le-choix-du-retour/>

⁸³ Harney, Stefano and Moten, Fred. *The Undercommons – Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoe-New York-Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2013, p.82

Afterwor(l)ds

Emerged on shifting grounds, shaken by questions and shivers, this thesis set off for a landless place, moving form, inner world – a dis/location. Mingling autobiographical reflections, sensorial experiences lived between France and Congo-Brazzaville, and fragments of Afrodiasporic literatures and theories, it offered itself as both compass and territory, map and hut. This thesis was a quest and a poem, a flight and an exploration – a wo/andering, experiment. In engaging with such an emerging and polymorphic notion as that of Afropea, which travelled from 1990's cosmopolitan circles to contemporary essays, artistic projects and cosmopolitical claims, I began with this simple question:

How does Afropea emerge through intimate and collective narratives and enactments?

Inspired by Johnny Pitts' Black European roving and Léonora Miano's post-western utopia, I wondered what such a word and place could mean, from the other side – and from within. I flew off to Brazzaville and travelled through my father's country for the first time – stopping by his hometown Dolisie to end up by the Atlantic, in Pointe-Noire. My wish was to get an insight into, grasp, sketch a map of Afropea, understood as an imagined and experienced space-time born from the colonial encounter between 'Europe' and 'Africa'. The 'how' thus spoke to both Afropea's form, feel, and the practices and ways through which it comes into being. Dismissing hegemonic geographies, I attempted to get a sense of intimate spatialities, sensorial cartographies, mental and affective landscapes – from rooms to pools through roads and windows, ruins and plans of houses. Inspired by Muñoz' cruising, it is an exercise of parageography and utopian poethics I offered. To specify my inquiry, I asked several more questions.

Which language, world-making practices and imaginaries is Afropea conveyed by? What modalities and configurations of space and time does it rely on? What method of research can be elaborated to attend to and account for Afropean forms?

I answered those questions throughout the piece, elaborating my argument by summoning a diversity of angles, materials and concepts – from Black poets and thinkers to postcolonial and queer theorists. I engaged with the last one from beginning to end as well. Staying with Afropea's specific form and promise, Afropea as both other name and space, Afropea as wor(l)d, I argued for and crafted an original method: dis/location and writing: *dyslexia*. In conversation with Preciado's *dysphoria* and Sharpe's anagrammaticality, I worked with both as tools of inquiry into and narrative of belonging, longing to be, and *beyonding* in the urgency of both postcolonial forced movement and expropriation of communities. While so many, throughout the world, attempt to claim their homelands back, the increasing pressures and ongoing devastation of entire regions and reconfiguration of others through climate change now demand a collective rethinking if not relinquishing of imaginaries of ground and roots. Dis/location - in conversation with fugitivity, disorientation, abolition, thus was tentatively defined and applied as the systematic asking of and working with the two following questions. Where is here? What is left? Wo/andering along desert roads, through castle corridors and empty bedrooms, stopping on the threshold of crumbling buildings and memories, I offered to dis/locate them so as to account for their Afropean sub/sur/un/reality. That, which I had seen emerge through quotidian gestures, encounters and enactments, and which, to me, called for a specific sensoriality, dis/lexicon and method of study. Troubling language, space-time and bodies, this piece thus aimed at constituting both a reflection on and demonstration of Afropean poethics, with each part revealing the fragment of an original experiential map of Afropea.

In the first chapter, *(home) sweep (home)*, I began with an interrogation of home, original and grounding space where one belongs or longs to be. Suspending it with brackets, playing with the colloquial formula “home sweet home”, I chose to focus on sweeping to index both mundane crafting of space and movement as the Afropean terms of (home-)making. In conversation with diasporic thinkers and poets Dionne Brand and Christina Sharpe, notably, I discussed the naming of places, beings as orientation and space-crafting tools through Mel Y. Chen’s concept of animacy. Words ‘sweep’ and ‘Banda’ both operated as dis/located tools in this chapter, one encompassing one of the practices studied as well as the movement through the text, and the other exemplifying the inhabitation of and presence to multiple places at once in Afropea. In this, I demonstrated how language dis/locates, shapes distance and closeness, through the investing of agency and liveliness in objects, places and non-humans, to reconstruct one’s location in and presence to the world through distance, displacement and loss. In this chapter, I moreover demonstrated how some existences, in Afropea, are, from the beginning, marked by and destined to movement, seem to only be considered possible through exile, which is experienced and enacted even when it is not realized. In this, movement appears as a condition rather than practice, situation or moment. *(home) sweep (home)* speaks to the inhabiting in motion, tensions, “home-o-stasis”, to say it with Tina M. Campt - to the dwelling beyond and independent from land or even ground, that characterizes Afropean experiences. This first chapter thus served as an introduction to a cosmography of Afropea, making sense of it through its spatio-linguistic animacies.

After reflecting on the interactions between language and place in Afropea, words and (home), I chose to travel back to and dis/locate Dolisie by the way of sounds and house, thinking together senses and architecture to move further into my affective mapping of Afropea. In the second chapter, *breaking noise – cartography of a para-site*, I thus left language for noise as a the starting point of my inquiry into Afropean relationalities, marked by (post)colonial dis/orders of race, gender and class. Returning to a Congolese household I stayed with in Dolisie, I chose to sit by and write from a specific window and summoned both Bernhard Siegert and Michel Serres to make sense of the interactions, kins and (dis)affections that took place around me. I read and used as a para-site, element of a set of “cultural techniques” articulating and ordering the real, that is establishing and mediating not only geographical but social distances and distinctions. Working with this window as the chapter’s dis/located tool, I sought to break the noise coming through, that is to analyze moments of disturbance and failed communication in this domestic context, chosen as a laboratory of Afropean relationalities. Reflecting on sonic memories from my time at the house, I sketched its hierarchical order, which I understood as predicated upon assumed and/or performed race-species, class-status and gender-sexual positions. Following its understanding as a place in constant making and tension, movement: a *(home)*, considering Afropea as a *para-site* allowed me, in this second moment to give a sense of it as a social form and space, organized along hierarchical lines, ruled by social borders and forbidden intimacies.

It thus is each time a discussion of nearness and distance, whether they be geographical or social, overcome or reinforced by language, gestures, objects and imagination, that I wove, in a desire to attend to Afropea’s multidimensionality. The third chapter thus brought another and final layer to that sketch by engaging with Afropean spatiotemporalities.

I indeed chose, with *further and suns*, to go out and engage with landscapes and ecological experiences that marked the end of my Congolese time, in Pointe-Noire, to discuss Afropean futurities. Leaving the ground once more to turn to water, I worked with ‘pool’ as the tool of this last exercise of dis/location. Hopping from one to another, I reflected on Sharpe’s “weather” in the context of Afropea – her rains and oceans, and the inhabitants of her “residence time”. Building on an imaginary conversation with Sharpe’s upcoming monograph, tentatively entitled *Refusing Necrotopia*, I looked up to a red sun at night, followed some children jumping through flooded streets and listened to family

friends sharing with me their dreams of houses and family dwelling by the Congolese Atlantic. What is the “weather” in Afropea, I asked - how does it un/do, allow and shape life, possibility, futures? Where is here? I went on, what is left? To come, invent, abolish.

At the end of this critical and poetic journey, I arrive to Afropea as another name for those complex moving and sensible worlds we navigate through, create and are together. Those, that come to be through language, imaginaries and gestures and speak to, not only, a resistance to or accommodation of, but departing from straight time and space that govern hegemonic narratives of experiences, knowledge and being. As one of the first attempts at engaging with Afropea with the tools and methods of social sciences and critical theory, this research constitutes a proposition and prototype, whose intuitions and findings are to be challenged, confronted to other postcolonial and diasporic spaces, forms and languages. A following step for this work could moreover be its more thorough engagement with the current anthropological literature on the Congo Basin, with stimulating discussions to be opened, notably, with Joseph Tonda’s *Afrodystopia*⁸⁴ or Florence Bernault’s colonial transactions⁸⁵ as well as Achille Mbembe’s earthly community imaginings⁸⁶. Poethical companionships, secretly running through those works, could be joyfully unearthed and further explored – from Glissantian trembles, through Fanon’s (non-)senses, to Ferreira da Silva’s own reflections on dislocation. Another necessary encounter is that of Afropea’s wor(l)ds with Gloria Anzaldúa’s *fronteras*. Throughout my making-up of words and maps along a sinuous and meandering way, I nonetheless sketched bridges between Afropea and a number of other fugitive and insurgent worlds – Brand’s maps, Sharpe’s *Wake*, Muñoz’s *cruise*, that have been and are yet-to-come. Joining abolitionist poets, they and I invite us all to embrace dis/location, marooning and *beyondness*.

⁸⁴Tonda, Joseph. *Afrodystopie – La vie dans le rêve d’Autrui*. Paris, Karthala, 2021

⁸⁵Bernault, Florence. *Colonial Transactions - Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019

⁸⁶Mbembe, Achille. *La communauté terrestre*. Paris, La Découverte, 2023

Afropea: some tentative wo(r)lds

(home)

place of neither departure nor arrival, but of life in and through movement, and, in this, perhaps
forever in-the-making desti/nation

para-site

space of struggle and f(r)iction, whose inner borders, enclosed bodies, remain to be crossed,
abolished, freed, so as to allow for other encounters, alliances and intimacies

mo(u)rning

ensemble of attempts at, collectives of and movements towards, re-membering, that take us to those
places whose names we don't know yet

‘More Maps’

Books

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology – Orientation, Object, Others*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2006
- Bey, Marquis. *Black Trans Feminism*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2022
- Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return – Notes to Belonging*. Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2011
- Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017
- Chen, Mel Y. *Animacies – Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2012
- Harney, Stefano and Moten, Fred. *The Undercommons – Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoe-New York-Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2013
- Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2019
- Miano, Léonora. *Afropea, Utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste*. Paris, Grasset, 2020
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break – The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia - the Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, New York University Press, 2019 edition
- Pitts, Johnny. *Afropean, Notes from Black Europe*. London, Penguin Books, 2020
- Preciado, Paul B., *Dysphoria Mundi*. Paris, Grasset, 2022
- Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr. Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake – on Blackness and Being*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2016
- Siegert, Bernhard. *Cultural Techniques – Grids, Filters, Doors and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. New York, Fordham University Press, 2015
- Touam Bona Dénètem. *Sagesse des lianes*. Paris, post-editions, 2021
- Yengo, Patrice. *La Guerre Civile du Congo-Brazzaville (1993-2002). "Chacun aura sa part"*. Paris, Karthala, 2006

Articles

- Martin, Niall, Rosello, Reij M. ‘Disorientation: An Introduction’. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 57(1), 2016, p.1-16
- Steyerl, Hito. ‘In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective’, *E-Flux*, Issue 24, April 2011: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>

Press articles

‘Congo : au moins 31 morts dans une bousculade lors d’un recrutement de l’armée à Brazzaville’ Le Monde, AFP, [online], November 21st, 2023 :

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/11/21/congo-au-moins-37-morts-dans-une-bousculade-lors-d-un-recrutement-de-l-armee-a-brazzaville_6201535_3210.html

‘Congo : bombardements dans la région du Pool au lendemain des violences à Brazzaville’, Le Monde, AFP [online], April 6th 2016 : https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/04/06/congo-bombardements-dans-la-region-du-pool-au-lendemain-des-violences-a-brazzaville_4896923_3212.html

Soumaré, Marième. ‘Paroles de « repats » : ces Français d’origine africaine qui ont fait le choix du retour’, Jeune Afrique [online], March 6th 2022 : <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1308007/societe/paroles-de-repats-ces-francais-dorigine-africaine-qui-ont-fait-le-choix-du-retour/>

Video

Congo: psychose dans le Pool après les bombardements’, Africa News (YouTube), April 23rd, 2016 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc3lBn8hKGU>