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Finding Place: The art of Wangechi Mutu, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and IngridMwangiRobertHutter

A Dissertation Presented

by

Eva Susanne Hericks-Bares

to

The Graduate School

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in

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation examines the issue of "place" in the lives and works of three contemporary women artists of the African Diaspora: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, IngridMwangiRobertHutter, and Wangechi Mutu. Place as a *location* is a core challenge of globalism: though fundamental to our existence, it has ceased to be permanent or definite. However, place is more than location—it is cultural, gendered, historical, interactive, personal and social, among other things—and can only be fully understood in considering several of these different facets. Each of the artists in this dissertation has had to navigate through instances of bias (such as racism and chauvinism), and physical displacement in order to create, find, and represent their *places*. In three case studies, the artists' works and interviews serve as points of departure, illustrating how insights from Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty and Casey) and from Humanistic Geography (Tuan, Relph, Massey) as well as from the discourses of feminist geography and contemporary art historiography can help us understand *place*. As there is currently no systematic study of *place* in art, nor an art-specific *place theory* to use in analysis, it provides a summary of the geographical and phenomenological insights and proposes a "lens" of *place* to apply to art works and artists.

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Introduction

"Place" is one of the trickiest words in the English language,
a suitcase so overfilled that one can never shut the lid.
Dolores Hayden[1]

We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place.
Edward S. Casey[2]

A beginning

One of life's great accomplishments is to have *a place of your own*. For artists, this goes beyond the physical structure of a house or apartment. It means finding their respective places in the art world (and its hierarchy).[3] For anyone who has ever left his or her hometown, finding place takes on yet another meaning of reorienting and "reimplacing" oneself in a new place. To find *a* place, one can look on a map, but to find one's place is not as simple.

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[1] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 15.

[2] Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 39.

[3] A brief note on my title and a disclaimer that "any resemblance to real titles, published or not, is purely coincidental." When I began my research I had a range of concepts that my selection of artists all seemed to address in their work, but as I progressed, "place" emerged as the most interesting and relevant and thus the title, which is reflective of my own journey, "Finding Place." It wasn't until a year into my research that I encountered an article by Olu Oguibe written years before my own academic study of Contemporary African Art, titled "Finding a Place: Nigerian Artists in the Contemporary Art World." (*Art Journal* 58, No. 2 (1999): 30-41). It is a great article, but unlike the approach suggested in this dissertation, it does not look at place as a complex concept let alone a lens for the analysis of art. As the title clearly states, it considers "a" place in the "contemporary mainstream" of the art world (p. 30). Or more specifically: *A* place in 1) a social hierarchy, 2) the exhibition spaces of the "dominant centers of contemporary art," and 3) the scholarly discourse, not *place* as it is experienced by the artist, re-created and expressed in her art, and shared with us, her audience. A small letter *can* make a big difference.

The experience of the different places in my own life—impacted by moving within Germany as a child, studying abroad both in high school and in college, and finally emigrating for love—has been fundamental in my decision to explore place in connection with contemporary art. At the inception of my dissertation, I lived in a building called *Parkside Place*. The power of words to create an experience was a crucial factor in the naming of this particular structure: a nondescript 20-story apartment tower, comprised of 200 identical units, located next to a reservoir, and intended for transient usage. Among the key populations were seniors, whose homes had gotten too big; students, in town for only a few years; and young families and professionals, saving up for their own first home purchase. With the associations of a *Park* as an urban oasis and of a *Place* as something meaningful, unique, homey (i.e. "my *place*"), the words created what the physical structure could not. Yet, the words alone would have been an empty vessel if they had not been linked to carefully crafted events, which highlight the power of experience. The owners of *Parkside Place* had not only named the building, but had also realized that bringing the tenants together for celebrations, giving them choices for wall colors, and providing different shared spaces (gym, club room, toddler room, playground and backyard) actually could create "place." While some of these experiences were planned or intended, many happened beyond such intents and presented more unique or genuine experiences of place than the carefully crafted kinds.

The writer and critic Lucy Lippard captured the allure of place when she said: "I fall for (or into) places faster and less conditionally than I do for people."[4] I know

[4] Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York: New Press, 1997), 4.

this to be true for myself as well. A scenic view, a cozy room, a beautiful restaurant—and I am smitten. Walking down the same street for years, watching new buildings age and old ones being brought back to life, and associating parts of my town or neighborhood with specific memories, has resulted in complex relationships with the places I am in. However, though I agree with Lippard on the appeal of *place*, I question the understanding of "place" as purely loc(ation)al.[5] In the following chapters, I will introduce different theories that underline the complexity of *place*. To facilitate the distinction between simple location and complex concept, I will also use a different visual representation: italicizing the word when it is used to express the comprehensive approach, while using the unitalicized form of the term to indicate a colloquial usage or the limited understanding of place as a "location."[6]

My first place ponderings began with an experience of displacement and the acute awareness of a nine-year-old that her friends, playgrounds, and even certain hobbies would no longer be part of her life—not as a "this is the end of the world" experience, but as a deep sadness of having lost a part of "her world." Not fitting in, even after years of living in the new town (as my parents proudly cultivated their "outsider" status), further brought home the importance of *place*. When I started to regularly spend weeks and months in other places (in England, France, and Canada), I realized that although these places did not share my mother tongue and "culture,"

[5] Though Lippard does look at various other "Senses of Place" in her book, the title "The Lure of the Local" has to be taken as programmatic for her approach to place.

[6] In general, words are italicized in this dissertation to either highlight the word choice or my specific definition of the word. When the word is not italicized it is either part of a common expression, as in "something is taking place," or can be read in a general rather than the specific sense. The use of "scare quotes" indicates that the word is used for lack of a better term as well as underlines my skepticism of its use.

this did not necessarily make me an outsider. There were choices in encountering *place* that I had not been aware of: becoming involved, staying open-minded and willing to experiment, and most importantly, realizing that there were different ways of being an insider. Though I traveled alone, I would stay with acquaintances or friends (though that was more a necessity of age for a 16 and 17 year old girl), which meant a warm welcome each time. And while this affected my first impressions of those places and my thinking about them, the place experiences were very nuanced and not just positive.

This combination of my personal connection to different places over the course of several decades, my subsequent mulling over these place-experiences and the different ways of creating them, and my explorations of recent seismic shifts in the art world lead me to consider these phenomena in contemporary art.

Contemporary art and its others

I would like to begin by elaborating on the seismic shifts. In the early years of the new millennium, *African Diaspora art* was a fashionable label and its representative artists were making a splash in the art world.[7] Maybe today it is no longer needed to justify an interest in artists (and their works) who hail from locations outside Western art centers or do not fit the so-called "mainstream." Maybe there never was a need to do so, though the perception of those who felt they disturbed the status quo would indicate otherwise—but if that is the case, it is a recent development. Three decades ago contemporary art exhibitions rarely featured

[7] More on the use of categories in the art world and the links between commercial interests of collectors and artist success follows in Part 1 and the case studies of Part 2.

artists who were not from the U.S. or Europe. Other groups considered minorities were *Women artists* and *African American/Black artists*. They were included to a degree, but not in numbers that were representative of the actual ratios of these groups of artists in the art world. While each of these three minority groups faced barriers to their participation in the art market, any combination of minority markers, i.e. African American Women, Non-Western Women, Non-Western Black Men, significantly increased the challenge and decreased the number of participants. The historic development and changes that have taken place over the past three decades are discussed in more detail in Part 1, allowing us to skip ahead to the point when artists fitting all three minority markers—female, non-white, non-American or European—first became more visible in the art market. Survey exhibitions, geographically or gender-themed group shows, and the rise of biennials increased floor and wall space to allow for a broader artist representation. No longer seen merely as tokens or exotic fetishes of the art world, audiences began to relate and interact with these new groups of artists.

Still, the increased publicity and awareness did not usually translate to financial success. This is what websites like *artfacts.net* or *mutualart.com* aim to capture for its subscribers: up-to-date "rankings" of artists, roughly based on something referred to as "exhibition success" (a presumably complex set of factors turned into an algorithm known only to the organizations behind the sites)[8] and

[8] As the *artfacts.net* web site states: "An artist's career depends very much on the success of his or her exhibitions. Exhibitions listed on ArtFacts.Net™ rate the different artists with a points system, which indicate the amount of attention each particular artist has received from art institutions. These points help to determine the artist's future auction and gallery sales. The ranking method is a valuable tool that enables users of

understood to measure financial success. The number of exhibitions, results of sales and auctions, and other measurables are translated into a chart of the artist's performance. When examining these sites' top 500 artists lists, it is curious to note that many top-selling artists are in fact not only white and male but also dead (about a quarter of the total figure).[9] However, the majority of successful artists belongs to the group of white, male, and still alive, and it clearly dominates the top 100. Only a handful of women and even fewer non-western women artists have broken through the art world equivalent of the corporate glass ceiling (among the latter are Marina Abramovic, #35, and Mona Hatoum, #48.)[10]

And yet, a number of non-western women artists have made it into the top 1000—a drastic change compared to three decades ago.[11] While the art world has focused on highlighting difference—for example in the obsession with "identity" in

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ArtFacts.Net™ to track upcoming trends in the market." Accessed online June 3rd, 2014, http://www.artfacts.net/about_us_new/?Company,Introduction

[9] The groups of successful non-western male and of successful female artists are also populated by a number of deceased artists—of the total figure, dead non-western males account for about 10%, while slightly more than 10% are dead and female.

[10] In the top 300 list of artists a larger number of living women and non-western artists can be found, for example Yael Bartana (#159), Shirin Neshat (#212), Cao Fei (#230), and Wangechi Mutu (#295), though they are still few and far between, making financial success appear to be a white male artist privilege.

[11] For those decades few numbers exist outside of old-fashioned, hard copy exhibition catalogues and auction records. Perhaps the most well known effort to assess gender equity prior to the new millennium comes from the Guerilla Girls 1989 campaign *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, which recorded just 5% of the artists in the museum's Modern Art section as female. The numbers are easier to obtain since *Artfacts.net* was launched in 2001, and with the addition of *mutualart.com* in 2008. Another site, *arttactic.com*, also founded in 2001, aims at entire "markets"—defined by region or even continents (its list reads: China, India, Latin America, Middle East & Turkey, Russia, US & Europe), in which individual artists and works do not seem to matter.

the 1980s and 1990s—artists often have more in common than the use of distinct categories would have us believe. In her January 2003 letter to the editor, the artist and philosopher Adrian Piper reminds us of this.[12] After she has provided 88 iterations of "Please don't call me [insert discriminating and limiting category here]," Piper concludes: "I write to inform you that I have earned the right to be called an *artist* [my italics]."[13] With this in mind, in this dissertation I will depart from the convention of assigning artists to a category. Instead I will approach the art of three individuals through the lens of *place*, which not only underlines its integrative function, but also helps throw the individual achievements and nuances of each artist into sharp relief. The changes in the art world seem to justify my decision of comparing and contrasting the artists not in connection with a category but in their respective approaches to the complex concept of *place*.

The triumvirate I have chosen to be featured in this dissertation is comprised of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Wangechi Mutu, and IngridMwangiRobertHutter. They are included in the top 2000 artists out of the 100,000 artists worldwide that are ranked on *artfacts.net*, indicating a degree of financial success that marks them as serious contenders in the global art market. Though born between 1959 and 1975 and despite the fact that they began exhibiting at different times during the last two decades of the 20th century, the art world stars of Campos-Pons, MwangiHutter, and Mutu started shining very brightly within just a few years of each other, at the

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[12] Unlike previous letters, this is not directed at a particular publications or persons, but at the "editor-at-large," the ominous figure who decides who is who, and what is what. Her letter is part of her archive, accessed online, June 3rd, 2014, http://www.adrianpiper.com/dear_editor.shtml

[13] Ibid.

beginning of the new millennium. This is no mere coincidence but related to the seismic shifts discussed below. The first major shows for the more senior Campos-Pons began in the late 1990s, indicated by her participation in the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997)[14] and the video installation *Spoken Softly with Mama,* which was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, NYC as well as at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1998). By 2001, Campos-Pons was included in the Africa showcase at the 49th Venice Biennale (*Authentic/Ex-centric)* and in a major traveling exhibition of contemporary art titled *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam, Kyoto, and Sapporo)*,* which served as indicators that she had fully "arrived" in the art world.

In 2003, the significantly younger Mutu and MwangiHutter both participated in the traveling exhibition *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (various locations through 2006), followed by the traveling, grand show *Africa Remix* (various locations, 2004-2007). Over the next five years all three artists were featured in numerous solo shows as well as in continent/country-of-origin-based group shows. In 2008 the exhibition *Black Womanhood* (Dartmouth and San Diego) brought Campos-Pons, MwangiHutter, and Mutu together in the same show—a postcolonial gender and race themed exhibition, whose subtitle *Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* served to highlight the perceived connection between black, female, non-western individuals not just as subjects of art, but also as the makers of art, i.e. the artists chosen for the show. Thus, depending on the theme or context of the exhibition within which these three artists were shown in, they were examined through the lenses of gender, race, post-colonialism, "identity,"

[14] Wangechi Mutu also participated in this biennale, though she had just finished her BFA and not yet completed her MFA.

or a combination of the above. In all instances, though, they were understood to be examples of a particular experience in the global, post-millennial world—not art world tokens as such, but still category representatives and oftentimes hyphenated to allude to the complexity of their assumed experience: black-women-diaspora artists.

While these artists indeed share certain experiences of displacement (along with countless individuals who have experienced migration, exile, diaspora, etc.), they share other experiences that are not deemed crucial for purposes of "labeling," but are important for understanding the artists as individuals: they all have attended rigorous art schools, have switched art media, have spent a significant amount of time experimenting, have become mothers, and have made a sole living as artists. Even in their displacement, which is often used to justify their classification as *Diaspora artists,* each of their stories is unique: IngridMwangiRobertHutter is part Kenyan and part German (she has mixed national parentage and formed an artist collaborative with her German husband) and has spent a significant amount of time in a smallish community in Southern Germany with her relatives. Cuban-born Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons first visited and then fell in love both with a musician and with New England and ultimately married into her new home community, while Kenyan transplant Wangechi Mutu first came to the U.S. as a student, and has since made the globally urban neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY her home and work base. Unlike the stories of the anonymous mass of exiles and immigrants, which are generally not recorded and thus forgotten, the information we have about these artists is plentiful. We can trace *place* through their biographies and the analysis of

their work, and in the process not only understand their experience of place, but also witness them finding their *place* and showing us how it can be done.

Place and Phenomenology

The entire dissertation explores the complexity of *place* and its use in art, with separate discussions illuminating specific aspects, but at this point it is important to consider why it makes sense to look at *place* and not, for example, home or site, terrain or space or locale. These terms relate to art and are a part of *place*, but they are neither equal nor interchangeable concepts. Working through these and other terms on the following pages will help define the outlines of *place*, which are slippery — or as Tim Cresswell notes: "no-one quite knows what they are talking about when they are talking about place."[15]

One term that is similarly as problematic as place is *home*. Like place, home is "wrapped in common sense," which means we are all familiar with the term and assume to know what we are talking about.[16] Scholars like Edward Casey have considered many of the underlying meanings of the term—specifically relating to the fact that historically most of us never had to "distinguish between house-as-built-object and home-as-hearth,"[17] yet this perspective proves to be naïve in an age where *home* is not the same for everybody. While *home* might still be associated with a

[15] Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1.

[16] Ibid.

[17] This is most recently true for the European Pre-War and American Post-Depression generations. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 299-300.

specific building, it can also take other forms of temporary shelter and often extends beyond the boundaries of such a structure (into a garden or sidewalk, for example). Although most might agree with an idea of warmth, comfort, shelter, and yummy food, the understanding of *hom*e runs the entire gamut of experiences from a nurturing haven to hell on earth. Complicating the use of the term *home* is the fact that even as a positive concept, it is also not a single entity: the *home* of one's childhood or as a place of origin, the *home* founded with a partner, and the *home* returned to as an adult are among several distinct "home" experiences. Lastly, *home* is also tied to relationships—whether determined by biology or by choice—though they also do not need to be positive or nurturing. Crucially, *home/s* cannot fill in for *place*. While they are in places and shape our understandings of *place*, they are more limited than *place*—at most, a home could be considered a specific kind or subset of *place*.

Many of the other terms are less complex and easier to define, thus revealing their limited usefulness as lenses for art analysis. An *area* is a mathematical term that is applied broadly to any measurable 2D space, including a painted canvas or a drawing. It is also used more colloquially to describe a particular segment of a larger unit—from an "area of town," to an "area of expertise" or an "area of my life." One defining element of an area is that it has (assumed) clear boundaries. Unlike place, it is impermeable and static: the square is 5x5, the house has 1700 square feet, etc. (though an area could be redefined or extended, this turns it into a "new" area).

Space is similarly specific, though the same word can be used to describe everything that exists around Planet Earth, the multi-dimensional environment of

objects and events, and quantities that can be measured in centimeters or inches. On a basic level, there is *physical space*, which has to be distinguished from "area" because it has 3D qualities, though it is also still measurable. Extending *physical space* into *outer space,* we lose much of this definite boundary (until we obtain the sufficient means to measure it). Curious, though maybe not surprising, is the fact that in various scientific contexts (physics, mathematics, psychology) *space* is associated with an idea of "boundlessness"—an amorphous unit without clearly defined endpoints. Most important in the context of this dissertation, however, is the understanding of *space* as a neutral, generic unit—a blank canvas of sorts, which is not compatible with our experience of the world, and thus not a useful lens.[18] Even in the closest art world approximation to such a blank canvas—the white walls of a gallery before an exhibition is mounted—we have "anti-blank" features like texture and shadows, and variable sizes that end in ceilings, floors and more walls.

A large number of place-related terms are associated with the geophysical aspect of place as *location*, which itself is defined as a specific point or position in physical space, especially in our era of reliance on the absolute truth of the GPS. *Site* is primarily defined as a physical location. It can be pinpointed on a map, although it can also have historic context (as in an archaeological site) and the potential for change and development (for example a building site). Still, it is not as encompassing and permeable as *place*. The term *terrain* expands the area of a site and focuses

[18] In his essay "How to get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," Casey considers the possibility that "the world comes configured in odd protuberances, in runs, rills, and flats [...]" as a more likely scenario than the "mute and blank 'space' [...] to which placial modifiers are added, sooner or later." (In: "Space to Place," 15). Earlier, he questions the notion of a "blank environment" that precedes place: "But when does this 'to begin with' exist? And where is it located?" (Ibid.: 14).

specifically on the surface features. Even though it can refer to an abstract area (an area of knowledge or expertise), it is more closely linked with another space/place concept: landscape.

The *landscape* is a prominent form of visual art, which serves to highlight one of its key aspects: it is a visual representation of a visual experience of physical features. The landscape off the canvas—or what could be considered the inspiration or "original" source—is not yet re-presented, but could be said to only come into existence in the moment of experience, in other words: as we get to the top of the mountain, the vista "unfolds" before our eyes. *Landscapes* provide some of the complexity of *place,* as they too consist of many different features. They can be vast or small, imagined or represented, capturing one moment in time or many combined, and bring together the so-called "natural" environment with the human or cultural environment.

Yet, there are serious limitations: landscapes do not include the observer—neither the artist nor the viewer—they simply extend outwards. Usually, we are presented with a "view" that places us into the same position of the observer without really being able to understand anything about this position. In this, landscapes differ from Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's installations, which have measurable spatial qualities, but what matters is that they immerse us in her own experience as we move through them. They also differ from Wangechi Mutu's collages, which have clearly defined areas, but it is in fact their combination of elements, their unsettling mixture of stereotypes into a beautiful and luscious new aesthetic that opens our eyes and minds. Though the *landscape* uses our aesthetic and spatial understanding, and

our sense of perspective, it requires no further commitment. In other words: the *landscape* provides us with a window, but Mutu and Campos-Pons offer us a door.

Yet another set of terms—territory (geopolitical area), region (a large area defined by shared physical, human, and environmental features), environment (a system, ranging from cultural to biophysical or constructed, that surrounds and interacts with a particular person or entity), realm (a real or fictional territory, usually ruled by a monarch), locale (the "place" where something happens in a narrative), or milieu (a social environment)—also captures aspects of our experience in *place*, in particular the situatedness of this experience, but fails us by excluding many of the facets that also belong to *place*.

In order to examine a concept as complex as *place* and understand its many overlapping and interrelated layers, an equally complex and comprehensive approach is required. The discipline of phenomenology provides such an approach by foregrounding the importance of *experience*—especially the experience of *place*—not just as an acquisition of knowledge but also as a means to comprehend events, such as the experiences of displacement, of becoming an artist, of encountering the contemporary art world, and of understanding processes, which include the experience of *finding place* that is shared by all of the artists in this dissertation. Experience is a crucial part of our lives. We see this understanding reflected in the writings of thinkers like Immanuel Kant ("there can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience"), Bertrand Russell (the body provides us with "knowledge by acquaintance"), and Edward Casey ("There is no knowing or sensing a

place except by being in that place and to be in that place is to be in a position to perceive it"), though we also come to this knowledge through learning from our own personal experiences.[19] This approach allows us to understand the life-experience of the artist and the experience of creating the work *in* and *through* our own experience of the work.

Over the past 25 years phenomenology has been used as a theory and method in fields ranging from anthropology, ecology, and geography to pedagogy, sociology, critical theory, and diaspora studies.[20] One reason for this lies in the broad scope of the discipline: as its name implies, it studies phenomena—i.e. the structure of various types of experience through all stages, from perceiving to processing and expressing them—and allows for many different pieces of physical, mental, intellectual, emotional "knowledge" to emerge from this study. Applied to the artistic process, we could say that the perception of phenomena occurs as the artist's life experience is filtered through the lenses of awareness and intentionality, while the processing and expressing of said experience can be found in the art works she creates. Another reason for the popularity of the phenomenological approach is that the three traditional methods used by phenomenologists—description, interpretation, and analysis—are also familiar to many other scholarly disciplines. As for the first

[19] All cited in Casey, "Space to Place," 16, 18 & 34.

[20] Though, as has been correctly pointed out by David Seamon, many scholars use the theory and methods of phenomenology as a kind of "grounded theory" or a general "qualitative inquiry" without understanding the intimate connection between the observer and the observed—or "person and world." See Seamon, "A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research," In: *Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research*, ed. S. Wapner, J. Demick, T. Yamamoto, and H. Minami (New York: Plenum, 2000), 159.

method, according to the scholar Andrew Edgar, a phenomenologist "attempts to describe how the world must appear to the naïve observer, stripped of all presuppositions and culturally imposed expectations."[21] While this is a very simplified definition, it does relate well to the quintessential art historic form of knowledge acquisition: the visual description or *formal analysis* of an artwork.

Although highly trained, the art historian similarly attempts to turn herself into "the naïve observer" and just like the phenomenologist she has to reduce the noise of cultural expectations and presuppositions in order to focus on just on what "is." Interpretation and analysis follow from this initial description. However, it is not merely the complexity and depth of the approach and the fact that it shares common ground with many disciplines that makes the use of phenomenology so appealing. As stated by Casey, one of its key advantages over other approaches is that it is "honoring the actual experience of those who practice it."[22] Thus, the artist's experience and the description of this experience in both verbal and visual terms are at the heart of a phenomenology-based analysis of her work. Her experience of *finding place* helps us understand the power of and the need for *place,* while also presenting us with new ways to look at *place*.

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[21] In: *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*, ed. by Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 271. More nuanced definitions are provided in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* available online, accessed June 15th, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/

[22] Casey, "Space to Place," 16.

Overview of the Dissertation

Writing about a complex concept and tying it to three contemporary artists is a challenging undertaking. Adding to this the forging of a new path, or rather "the shaping of a new lens," means taking risks that may or may not pay off. The research for this dissertation starts with a handful of key thinkers (see Part 1) and the assumption that *place* is so significant a factor, that it is bound to emerge through analysis.

A key first step is to extract the crucial, distinguishing aspects of *place* from the respective literatures of phenomenology, of humanist and feminist geography, and of the current understanding of place in art (which is predominantly *locational*). A similarly important step is to capture the most relevant moments in each artist's career—up to the present day. A third step—bringing the two components together—should be compared to weaving a complicated pattern.[23] The warp threads are the different aspects of *place* laid out in part 1, while the weft is composed of the artist case studies in part 2. Although they are mostly kept distinct in the dissertation, like different colors in a weave, many of the patterns that emerge reveal their underlying similarities, and will be highlighted at the end.

The artist case studies combine firsthand information (coming directly from the artist and an analysis of their art work) with secondhand sources and an examination of the material through the lens of *place*. Contemporary artists are

[23] After having spent a week learning to weave Ghanaian *Kente* cloth at the John C. Campbell Folk School in May 2014, the connection between writing and weaving is more apparent to me than ever before, though there are numerous proverbs and expressions that link the "crafting" of language to traditional crafts—from blacksmithing to weaving.

great because they can—at least in theory—be interviewed with specific questions, providing clarification, feedback, and the much valued "authoritative voice." Yet, as contemporary artists keep on creating and exhibiting, their secondary literature grows more steadily than that of deceased artists, which makes it tricky to stay on top of all the publications. Regardless of this literature, my most valuable source of information for each case study remains the artist talking about her work. Some of these talks are videotaped and posted on the web, others are lectures which I attended at different art institutions, and yet others are personal interviews, carried out in the artist's studio, her home, or at an exhibition opening. Other interactions (such as phone and email conversations) yield some insights, but remain side notes to the "quality time" that I spent talking to and transcribing the artists' answers, thoughts, and comments.

Just as the construction of a new theoretic approach or interdisciplinary lens to explore *place* in contemporary art requires starting from scratch with the choice ingredients of key thinkers and fundamental concepts, a similarly basic yet fundamental approach has to be used for the art itself. The use of visual analyses is the art historic equivalent of starting from scratch, and as such it is crucial to this dissertation. Each analysis serves to highlight the validity of the proposed lens and ties together the theory and practice of *place* and art.

As indicated before, this dissertation is divided into two main parts. The first part examines *place* as a complex concept, its relevance to art, and as a lens through which we can gain a better understanding of the work, the artist, and ourselves. The

second part uses the insights from the first part and applies them to three artists in their respective case study.

Part one explores *place* as theory and as practice in art, geography, and philosophy. It is divided up into two chapters: the first focuses on *Place and Art,* while the second reviews existing *Place Theories,* extracts key elements and proposes a new, interdisciplinary lens for art. In *Place and Art,* I take stock of existing taxonomies, beginning with a survey of the different kinds of art that exist *in* place/s: Sections on Public art, Street art, Environmental art, and Land art/Earth works help highlight the importance of the *place experience* in art. The next section examines art *of* place, specifically how art reflects on place through the form of Landscape art, through Art Literature, and through artists and works grouped together as Diaspora art. While each of these categories or labels has received varying degrees of attention in the study of art, they have not been previously grouped together as aspects of the larger concept of *place*. In Art Literature, the review of publications on the subject matter illustrates the shortcomings and existing gaps in scholarship. Evaluating the *place* component of Landscape art, i.e. going beyond "location," provides a good starting point to understanding the importance of *place in and of art*. A second important step is the consideration of *place* in the unique experiences reflected in Diaspora art. This section reviews the developments in the art world that resulted in a seismic shift or sea change, and it examines the concept of *place-making* and its impact on art-making in the 21st century.

The chapter titled *Place Theories* distills the main ideas of *place* found in Humanist and Feminist Geography as well as Phenomenology to suggest a new,

interdisciplinary approach that can be used for understanding art. It begins with a short review of the history of *place* in the particular disciplines, continues with an overview of important thinkers and researchers—Edward S. Casey, Doreen Massey, Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan—and augments their respective contributions with analyses of specific place concepts that are crucial to the experience of *place* in art and by artists. These subsections examine the *Body as Place, Place and Home, Virtual Place,* and *Non-Places and Interplaces*. All highlighted ideas and components are eventually combined into a new whole in the concluding section titled *How to Understand Place in Art*.

Part two introduces the artists in the context of the contemporary art world. Wangechi Mutu's case study looks at the body as *place* and examines the representation of *place* through the use of collages as her medium and of the female body as her subject. In Mutu's hands the medium of collage is turned into a metaphor for the global experience, which she applies to every level—from the artwork to the exhibition space. The artist also addresses the control the mighty and powerful have over place through her revealing visual commentary on the social and colonial "positioning" of women.

IngridMwangiRobertHutter's chapter focuses on different aspects of the *place experience*, from displacement, to accepting difference, to *homesteading* and *homecoming*, and to extending *place* into the virtual realm. The artist explores a broad range of exclusions based on gender, race, eccentricity, and socio-economic

status, and attempts to use her art-making (especially her performances) to turn these into inclusions.

Maria Magdalena Campos Pons is the subject of the third case study. She is examined with an emphasis on *place-making*, in particular her efforts to link the *places* of her past with those of her presence and her (re)creation of *places* in her art. Campos-Pons also utilizes the body as *place*, though in a performing rather than Mutu's "reformatting" manner. In addition, she uses the bodies of her audience, as she creates installation art that provides us with our own *place experience*.

The conclusion revisits some of the common manifestations of *place* in the works and lives of the three artists, but primarily focuses on the insights gained from the previous analyses. Using *place* as a lens to understand art and artists is a valuable tool for this age of global migration and the final pages of the dissertation will provide brief examples of other artists to highlight this fact.

PART 1 PLACE

From being lost in space and time (or, more likely, lost
to them in the era of modernity), we find our way in place.
Edward S. Casey[24]

The catalyst that converts any physical location—any environment
if you will—into a place is the process of experiencing deeply.
Alan Gussow[25]

Introduction

The experience of place occurs on different planes and levels (such as the body, geographical location, memory, virtual site, etc.), and is crucial to a broad range of disciplines—from geography to philosophy, from urban planning to ecology to postcolonial studies and to the arts. Considering the large number and divergent origins of stakeholders in the term "place," it comes as no surprise that, even given the common factor of *experience,* there is no single agreed upon definition of *place*. A comprehensive overview of the many academic notions of place would exceed the scope of any single study, let alone this chapter.[26] Yet, in Art History, place can be an especially useful tool for analysis, offering us a perspective unlike any other method. By limiting my analysis to aspects, planes and levels that are relevant to *place* as reflected by or created in art—especially the recreated, invented, altered, and

[24] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* 29.

[25] Alan Gussow, *A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1997), 27.

[26] Place has also been the contested subject of many debates over primacy, which is usually afforded to space. See Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* and "Space to Place;" and Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 12 and 19ff.

reinvented places of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, IngridMwangiRobertHutter, and Wangechi Mutu—the initial broad lens can be focused on what matters for both the discipline and for these artists and their works. However, before we can focus this lens by using tools from geography and phenomenology, it is necessary to first take stock of how place as concept and context has been used in art and its history so far. A survey of art *in and of* place provides a crucial first step to understand the significance of *place* for art and gives a contrast of existing practices versus the proposed interdisciplinary lens.

CHAPTER 1: PLACE AND ART

Art in and of Place

To begin, there is currently neither a classification system for *place and art* nor a comprehensive overview of the subject matter. Where place is featured in art historic literature, it serves as a theme with variations in contemporary art (as in Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel's aptly titled *Themes of Contemporary Art* 2005, and Lucy Lippard's *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered society* 1997) or as an organizing principle for a particular art form (albeit limiting the use of the term to its spatial/locational aspect, for example in Miwon Kwon's book on site-specific art *One Place After Another* 2002, and Malcolm Andrews' *Landscape and Western Art* 2000).[27] Attempts to organize the different aspects of *place* are also limited to themes within the theme, such as Irit Rogoff's *Terra*

[27] Some, like Robertson and McDaniel, also try to give place at least defining characteristics—if not an actual definition—to help the reader situate the material.

Infirma: Geography's visual culture (2000), in which the author looks at "Luggage," "Mapping," " Borders," and "Bodies" as reflections of place.[28] Or the Thames & Hudson "exhibition in a book" series *Art Works*, in which the book *Place* (Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar 2005) features the (briefly defined) subheadings: urban, nature, fantastic, myth/history, politics/control, territories, itinerancy, heterotopias and non-places. Due to the lack of a suitable introduction to the subject matter, the following sections will provide an overview of the history of art *in* place and *of* place.

There are two basic aspects to place that structure any examination of the intersections of art and place: the first is the physical and metaphysical aspect—an *emplacement* or being-in-place—as it pertains to the art works and the artists; the second is the thematic or content aspect, in which *place* finds its reflection in a work or is being expressed by an artist.

The first aspect has a particular history, which includes art forms and media that specifically work with place. These "place-based" forms (represented primarily by *Public Art, Street Art, Environmental Art,* and *Land Art*) will be discussed below. Another important part of the emplacement aspect—especially for artists from the "diaspora"—is tied to fundamental changes in the art world during the past quarter century. A history of these fundamental changes will be sketched out in the section on *Place in Diaspora Art*. These changes can be traced through a chronology of exhibitions (in particular temporary ones, such as biennales, and thematic surveys aka grand shows) and through the actions of curators, collectors, and scholars.

[28] To be fair, in Rogoff's publication, there is no goal of a comprehensive survey of place and the author acknowledges that she is breaking new ground, describing her writing as "a subject-in-formation." In: *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

Together, they can provide the background for understanding both the current ideological and physical manifestations of *place* in the art world—in other words: the *place* accorded to a particular artist/art work in the exhibition space and the roster of contemporary art, and the actual and conceptual *place created* by such exhibitions. Both of these types of *place* manifestation are important, because they in turn affect the artist's experience and perception of *place*, and thus the way *place* is carried into their works.

The second, thematic aspect concerns the form *place* takes in works of art: as representations/creations of *place* in a landscape (commonly done through photography or painting), as recreations/inventions of place as an experience (commonly done through installations at various scales), and as alterations/ reinventions of place by a work of public art. Yet, as the case studies will reveal, the form of *place* is not restricted to these three basic settings: aspects of *place* can also be expressed through performance, sculpture, collage, and other media. The work need not even depict a "landscape." The different forms of expression are featured in a number of recent publications, introduced below in the *Place in Art Literature* section to highlight the breadth of the emerging discourse. A final concern for the thematic aspect of *place* is the *idea* or *sense of place* an artist expresses through the work.[29] These concepts are tied to the individual and will be discussed as they emerge in the individual case studies to follow.

[29] The term "sense of place" has undergone a revival since of Feld & Basso's edited volume *Senses of Place* (1996) and Lippard's *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997) to become somewhat of a buzzword both in popular media—as evidenced by the Fall 2013 New York Times *Style magazine*, NPR's *World Café* segment "Sense of Place" and articles in a broad range of publications, such as the

Art in place(s)

A survey of the many different manifestations of place in contemporary art reveals just how ubiquitous *place* has become. Before delving into the specific *place* notions of the artists in this dissertation (which will be discussed in the subsequent case study chapters), it will be useful to look at examples of the following four general, place-specific types of art and how they differ:[30]

- Public art vs. art in public spaces (sculpture and performance art respectively)
- Street art
- Environmental art
- Land art/Earthworks

Another type of art dealing with place—Landscape art (which is historically Landscape painting)—is best understood as a *thematic* aspect of place in art and will be featured in a separate section, even though it originally did have an "in situ" component—from being carried out fully *en plein air* or in an outdoor studio to simply making a sketch or taking a snapshot for later execution in a studio—still, for most artists the initial "experience" was merely what motivated the work (and neither has to be the case for landscape artists in the internet age).

In contrast, the first of the place-specific types of art—public art—does not have to start with a landscape or even outside, though it most often occupies an outdoor space. And while it is useful for the artist to have experienced the site first-

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Economist, Traffic, Eye Magazine, WNC Magazine, and *National Geographic*—and in the realm of exhibitions, conferences, contests, and online courses.

[30] As indicated above, a fifth type of place-specific art, the art involved with the *place* of "diaspora" will be presented in a separate section below.

hand, it is not a necessary prerequisite. Much of the work is created in a studio or workshop, where secondhand information (images, plans, measurements, verbal descriptions, etc.) can suffice until the artwork is ready to be set up. This clear split of "inside/outside" and of putting "place into a work/work into a place," disappears entirely in the next three types of art in place (or, for that matter, in any work that spans across these categories).

Street art has only recently gained the attention of a larger group of scholars, as graffiti, posters, stickers and a range of mural projects that once straddled the divide of legal/illegal use of public space have become "collectible" works of art. Though it still is an emerging field—as indicated by two major 2011 publications, Anna Waclawek's survey text "Graffiti and Street art" and the exhibition catalogue "Art in the Streets" (Museum of Contemporary Art, LA)—the work associated with Street art is most clearly tied to a particular place and has a strong, often polarizing effect on the experience of that environment.[31] Environmental artists and artists creating Land art/Earthworks can—but do not have to—use the materials found at the site; still, both do need to work mostly at the site, where they are "integrating" the work into the environment, albeit with widely differing impacts on the ecosystem and concepts behind the respective works. Both may also spend a significant amount of time in a studio, preparing or researching for the work as well as producing tangible documentation after the actual work has been made. Yet, their interactions with *place* are based on different premises which manifest themselves in divergent

[31] Anna Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011); Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose, *Art in the streets* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli 2011).

works and reveal as much about the relationship between artist and place as any other concepts or ideas for the work. While the following overview will focus on the relationship of *artworks* with *place*, it is important to note that each type of art also differs in regard to the position of and relationship with the *artist*.

Public art

> Simply because public art has to speak to a larger group of people, the artist needs to realize oneself not only as an independent creator who makes art of its own merit and power but also a service person who raises community issues and creates a sense of place.
> Mo Bahc[32]

This type of art and the subsequent types play an important role in the discussions of *art and place* due to their specific interaction with place(s), but they differ from the traditional landscape formats in two key aspects: first, the works themselves are actually not (just) depicting a landscape, but are placed/created in a "landscape"–for example an urban, rural, natural, or wilderness setting–and second, they are not limited to the traditional landscape medium of painting (or other 2D formats, such as photography, drawing, printmaking, etc.). The ideas behind public art or—more broadly speaking—of *art in public areas*, are as old as history itself. These were works that underlined existing power structures and promoted specific ideologies and religions. The ancient Babylonian stele with the law code of Hammurabi, the pillars of the Mauryan king Ashoka in India, and the triumphal arches of the Romans are not structural elements but sculptures placed in the public

[32] Artist statement from Mo Bahc's 1994 *Percent for Art* project at PS69 in Queens, accessed October 31st, 2013, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcla/html/panyc/bahc.shtml

realm, fulfilling very specific purposes.[33] However, their importance goes beyond the original purposes and can be seen in the fact that many of these very monuments were removed from their original location during wars of conquest and brought back or integrated into the victorious culture's public spaces. Examples of this are: the well-known Egyptian obelisk in St. Peter's square in Rome — which left pharaonic Egypt for pagan Rome, was redefined by Renaissance Christianity and finally became a contemporary tourist monument; again the stele of Hammurabi — plundered by Elamites and taken to their city Susa; and the Mauryan pillar placed in the Quwwat al-Islam Mosque of Delhi, as well as the large numbers of antiquities that were removed in the 19th and 20th century to "protect and preserve" them in major western Museums. Again, Hammurabi's stele is a good example, as it was uncovered by archaeologists and is now housed at the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

Historically, public art was a mix of art and monument, dedicated to specific persons or ideologies, and an important part of the state propaganda machine, but in the 20th century its role and function changed.[34] Increasing urbanization had become coupled with the architectural and ideological aftermath of two world wars, prompting a re-evaluation of public art. Two very distinct branches emerged: public art as memorial and public art as "art" in public places.[35] This change is made visible

[33] Generally this involved a combination of functions that included propaganda, cultural archive, and maintaining of the status quo.

[34] We could say that public art starts with "monuments as art" and changes to "art as monuments."

[35] As Barbara Goldstein put it "Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, modern artworks were place in public plazas, and they assumed the same symbolic function as the older style of civic monuments had fulfilled, but with the artwork rather than a statesman or a politician now playing the role of hero." Goldstein, "Preface," in *Public Art by the Book*,

in the regulation of official involvement in works of art by means of particular agencies. From the Works Progress Administration of the Depression era, to the one-percent-for-art models that were instituted in large cities in the 1950s and the founding of municipal art commissions, to the reappearance of individual entities (corporations and developers/collectors), change meant not only an unprecedented availability of resources and opportunities (though the traditional system of patronage had changed so much, that these new avenues were much needed), but also the introduction of a wide range of artistic freedoms and restrictions.

Despite the fact that these developments represent significant changes on the levels of planning and financing as well as the levels of concept and purpose of public art, the works themselves still engaged with *place* as before: they became a part of it, generally vacillating between being ignored and admired, interfering with or disappearing in the experience of the place. Although public art appears to come with a mandate for permanence and often does remain in that location "forever," works are also regularly removed from their places as a result of a diverse range of causes — from revolutions to majority decisions or temporary exhibition status. Thus, the statues of rulers and dictators are among the first "heads" to be removed in revolutions past and present; individual fame does not protect from dislike either, and some works are "hated" to the point that they become boycotted and removed — as for example Richard Serra's *Tilted arc* (1981); and finally, some works are only "publically displayed," which means they part of a temporary exhibition of one or more artists that is limited in duration, such as the displays on Rockefeller Plaza in

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ed. Goldstein, (Seattle: Americans for the Arts in Association with University of Washington Press, 2005), ix.

New York or the famous art shows Documenta and the Venice Biennale temporarily utilizing public spaces to show art work.

Ultimately, the relationship of a work of public art with the particular place in which it was set up depended largely on the artist's planning for such an interaction between artwork and place, on his or her familiarity with or research of the place, and to an extent also on the willingness of the "audience" to engage with this new "participant" in their experience of place. One of the most prominent examples of this kind of interaction is Maya Ying Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Using the physical features of the rather flat site, it presents the visitor with a low horizontal gash rather than a towering vertical structure, while the polished surface of the black granite wall reflects the environment of trees and grass that surrounds it, further integrating the work and the site. Since the two axes of the memorial point toward two other monuments (the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial), they effectively connect the work with its environment both visually and contextually. Visitors to the memorial similarly get situated *in place* by walking along the axes and moving down to the center of the gash (and go up again, when they exit the site). Similarly engaging are the engraved names of the fallen soldiers: they are tangible and concrete, and encourage interactions such as tracing them with ones' fingers or making a rubbing with paper and pencil, providing a much different experience from the visitors encounter with the largely symbolic soldier sculptures.

The interaction of art and place also does not have to be permanent. Over the past three decades, public art has come to embrace more ephemeral art forms, such

as non-durable 2D works and artists' performances.[36] The latter has such a broad range of manifestations that it stretches the limits of the definition of public art: these include Public Art Performance Projects, like the Los Angeles Korean Cultural Center's *art is me, art is you* (2010) or the Atlanta based *flux projects* (2010 to present), to artist performances carried out in public, like *Eastleigh Crossing* (2009), *The Cage* (2009), and *Generationzzz* (2012), all by IngridMwangiRobertHutter.[37]

Street art

> Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better *looking* place.
> Banksy[38]

One of the most ubiquitous and visible forms of art in place (and also the one that most obviously connects a work and place) is a range of different media and forms subsumed under the label *Street art*. The literal "poster child" of this movement—the introduction and spread of posters for advertising, announcements, and propaganda—dates back to the 19th century. Like several subsequent street art forms, posters started their career as illegal objects ("posting bills" was and

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[36] Examples range from works on paper, like Tatyana Fazlailzadeh's 2013 *Stop Telling Women to Smile* project, which went on a national tour with appearances in Brooklyn, Boston, Chicago, among other cities, to non-weatherproof media such as chalk/crayon.

[37] Visual documentation accessed online September 28th, 2013: *flux project* in Atlanta's Castleberry Hill Arts District neighborhood, http://fluxprojects.org/flux-night http://www.kccla.org/english/calendar_view.asp?cid=1107&imonth=4&iyear=2010 For IngridMwangiRobertHutter, http://www.ingridmwangiroberthutter.com/ingrid_mwangi_robert_hutter/complete_work.html

[38] In: *Banksy – Wall and Piece* (London: Century, 2006), 8.

continues to be prohibited in a number of places and for different reasons.)[39] The first permitted posters featured mostly text, though according to poster expert John Barnicoat this changed with the printmaker Jules Chéret in the 1870s.[40] Chéret's posters became popular for three crucial reasons: first, he used the vocabulary of fine art—specifically that of the mural—and not the language of advertising to create "magnificent works of art [by means of] re-interpreting the great murals of the past for the public of his day;" second, instead of "creating large salon canvases, he found a new place for his work—the street;" and third, he altered the face of the austere walls of the new, post-revolutionary urban landscape of Paris, where his "posters appeared as a new vital art form."[41] His success with this "public display of fine art" led to the classification of posters "as the art gallery of the street."[42] The new medium was quickly embraced by artists like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec—whose style changed the appeal of posters from Chéret's pleasure and delight to a more awkward relationship that ranged from feeling uncomfortable with the design to thinking of it as ugly—by the Symbolists, the Pre-Raphaelites, and artists of the Art

[39] Examples stretch across the globe and through history: from the seventeenth century French ban directed at "posting bills without permission" {in: John Barnicoat, *A concise history of posters: 1870-1970* (New York City: Harry N. Abrams, 1972), 8}, to the familiar Victorian era phrase "Stick no bills," the guerilla political poster artist Robbie Conal (and his documentary *POST NO BILLS*), and the contemporary ordinances of countless U.S. cities (generally limiting the location, but occasionally even the very act of posting). Naturally, these prohibitions are just as often ignored as they are adhered to.

[40] Barnicoat, *A concise history*, 12.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

Nouveau movement.[43] The popularity of this new visual art form—Barnicoat documents an actual fin-de-siècle "craze" for posters[44]—also increased its appeal among advertisers, and the subsequent transition into the commercial production of posters becomes one factor in moving it from an alternative art form to a mainstream medium. Another factor in this process is related to the ubiquitous use of posters. Images of late 19th century streets in big cities like London, Paris, and Berlin, feature posters covering entire façades or other walls of buildings.[45] The very landscape of the urban environment was altered by the use of posters with their varying kinds of imagery. An important third factor in the acceptance process of "posters as art," and one which is highlighted by Barnicoat, was the changing demographic among art collectors: the establishment, whose conservative taste tied it to classical art forms and the art of the 18th century, now had competition from an emerging middle class with no "preconceived attachments" as far as art works were concerned.[46] All of the different places represented in the poster underscore the integral role of art and place in *street art*: the physical place or location of the work (i.e., the city, buildings, walls), the historic and economic place of the emerging middle class, the place of technological development/technologies in creating this medium, and finally the

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[43] See ibid., 26.

[44] As he puts it: "In the 1890s the poster boom was at its height. Special editions were made for collectors; posters were sometimes stolen from their position on the walls. There were exhibitions of posters in Paris and in 1890 a show at the Grolier club in New York." Ibid., 42. The same adoption of art world institutions will be part of the transition of some forms of graffiti from being considered illegal/vandalism to legal/art work. In fact, the parallels are more than striking – down to the most recent stealing of graffiti art during the "residence" of Banksy in NYC.

[45] See, for example, photos in Barnicoat, *A concise history,* 44-45 and 219.

[46] Ibid., 48.

artist's place at the intersections of high art and popular art, of the single work and the mass produced work, and of the representation of and the commentary on contemporary society. These same factors also apply to current *street art,* especially if we consider the emerging middle class as a more generic group of "newcomers to the art world," which translates into a generational as well as economic status difference.

Though posters introduced and initially filled the *street art* category, it was the emergence of graffiti—and in particular its transition from being perceived as vandalism to being understood as an art form—that firmly ensconced the position of *street art* in the art canon. While graffiti can be traced back to ancient civilizations, its present, primarily spray-painted form entered the public awareness in the 1970s and 1980s. In major urban areas this was directly related to the use of public transportation, particularly subway cars, as canvases; the rest of the United States would have learned about it through documentaries like *Style Wars* (1983) and the very public anti-graffiti campaigns of New York City Mayors Ed Koch and Rudolph Giuliani. Graffiti had increased over the years from the first tags to full "top-to-bottom bombings" of the respective surfaces. It is more than a curious fact that at the same time that graffiti was being targeted as a nuisance in New York city, one of the major artists in the New York art scene not only came from a street and graffiti background but also would continue to use some of the same techniques and tags (even some of the same surfaces) in large scale canvases that sold for thousands of

dollars: Jean-Michel Basquiat.[47] Thus it is not a stretch to posit that Basquiat was probably more influential than any other artist in transforming graffiti (even something as simple as monochromatic tags) into an accepted art form.

The transition from alternative to mainstream becomes apparent in the creation of dedicated organizations traditionally associated with the Western art world: Museums and Galleries. The founding of the *Street Museum of Art* (in 2012), the making of plans (though they ultimately failed) for an actual structure called *Museum of International Street Art* (in Los Angeles), and galleries such as *UP Art Studio* (Houston, since 2012) reveal the quest for legitimacy and the use of established institutions to attain that goal.[48] However, the anti-establishment roots of the art form required an equally unorthodox approach, since neither the artists nor their works were good fits for the conventional exhibition format. The "museums" of *street art* therefore present us with a broad range of alternatives to physical institutions: The *Street Museum of Art* exists nowhere in particular, but rather appears in curated "exhibitions," which take place in the original location of Street art: the urban environment of buildings and streets. A website and smartphone app titled *streetartlocator* (since 2008) allows viewers to create their own "show," looking up street art as they travel around the globe ("visual tourism"); and online galleries such as the *St. Art Gallery* (based in the Netherlands and the

[47] Interestingly, this pales in comparison to the figures his works fetch a quarter century after his death. According to an article in the Huffington Post, one of his works recently sold for $48.8 million at an auction. Accessed online, October 31st, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/basquiat-painting-dustheads-fetches-record-graffiti-art-christies-auction_n_3284836.html

[48] See http://www.streetmuseumofart.org and http://www.internationalstreetart.org

worldwide web) make street art accessible anywhere, anytime.[49] Other institutions, such as awards/prizes and artist residencies, have also made their way into Street art. The 2011 TED prize went to French street artist JR, who for his "wish to change the world" chose to launch a participatory art project (*Inside Out*, ongoing) that has since become a global phenomenon. British street art legend Banksy embarked on his own *Better Out Than In* (unofficial) "residency on the streets of New York" in October 2013.[50]

Still, *street art*—and in particular graffiti—retains an aura of undesirability and illegality, as the example of the *5pointz* buffering in Long Island City makes clear. *5pointz*, known as the "United Nations of Graffiti" and called "the largest aerosol art work in the world," started as a cluster of former industrial buildings in which space was rented out as artist studios. Its owners allowed the exterior walls of the complex to be covered by graffiti artists.[51] Over several decades the buildings became a draw for both sprayers and visitors, with the decorated walls effectively transforming a run-down area of town into a tourist attraction. Yet, as New York City began a process of rezoning many previous commercial properties into residential areas, the building's owners applied to build high-rise residential towers in place of the existing structures. While details for the new construction project were being worked out in

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[49] See http://www.st-artgallery.com/en/

[50] For JR, see Inside Out project: http://www.insideoutproject.net/en
For Banksy, see http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2013/10/graffiti-artist-banksy-takes-residency-on-the-streets-of-new-york.html

[51] See articles by Cara Buckley and Marc Santora, "Night Falls, and 5Pointz, a Graffiti Mecca, Is Whited Out in Queens," The New York Times, November 19, 2013, and Joshua Gardner, "NYC Graffiti Mecca is whitewashed overnight to make way for luxury condos," The Daily Mail, November 20, 2013.

community board and city council meetings, another group formed (primarily comprised of artists and their supporters) to counter the plans. With the looming threat of having the site declared a "landmark," the owners pre-empted any further discussion by having the walls painted over with white paint or "buffered," a technique that functions as a double erasure (both visual and emotional) and highlights the vulnerability of art that is so closely interconnected with a particular place.[52]

Environmental art

> My art has the themes of materials, ideas, movement, time.
> The beauty of objects, thoughts, places and actions.
> Richard Long[53]

The term *Environmental art* is used for two distinct types of art. The first is closely related to Public art and represents an artwork that *creates* an environment or "place." It is the artwork as environment that engages the audience and invites participation and interaction. This understanding of environmental art is also behind the parallel use of the term alongside Land art or Earthworks (which are also very often conceived as works of public art).[54] Today, most of these types of

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[52] According to one of the owners, Jerry Wolkoff, they did in fact like the graffiti work and have offered the artists to begin anew on surface in and around the to-be-built residential structure, however, the artists acknowledge that a specific place cannot simply be replaced by another and that the heartache of losing ones work in this way would not easily heal, see Buckley and Santora, "Night Falls."

[53] In Michael Lailach and Uta Grosenick, *Land art* (Köln: Taschen, 2007), 74.

[54] This confusion of terms is interesting, because it reveals just how useless these classifications are when the definition allows for too many interpretations. The confusion is also wide-spread: most books on land art/earthworks also look at environmental art,

environment(al) artworks can be found in installation art of various origins (including some of the works discussed in this dissertation).

The second type of environmental art is a work of art that *engages* with the "Environment" – from the ecosystem, natural world, and biosphere to our human habitats, urban sphere, and industrial system (which is why it is sometimes also referred to as "Environmentalism" art). This engagement occurs on different levels, from the material used to the site of the work, to its concept or theme. It is important to note that Environmental art of this type can but does not have to be *in* the environment it is concerned with (for example, work on sustainable structures in a slum can be located in a gallery).[55] Within these systems and on these levels a special emphasis is put on the human component, which ranges from interactions with and impact on the natural world, to a creation of its own sets of environments, including the social, economic, and historical. While the former manifestation of environmental art does not have to consider the impact of the materials, process, and the implementation at the site of the work itself, the latter is conscious of all three. These two definitions of the term were initially very much at odds with each other (and were seen either as *included in* Land art or as a *critical reaction to* Land art), though in the present day and context it is possible and increasingly common for one to be a part of the other, as a scan of the index of publications like Linda Weintraub's

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and books on environmental art actually talk about artists who create the contemporary form of land art (see, for example, the survey book *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, 1998/2010, and the edited volume *Art Nature Dialogues. Interviews with environmental artists,* SUNY Press 2004.)

[55] See for example Marjetica Potrč's *Duncan Village Core Unit* (various dates 2003/2004), in Weintraub, *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 249.

To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet (2012) reveal.[56] In some of the early works adhering to the second definition, artists often used their bodies to establish a "relationship with the land."[57] The documentation (photo and video) of these varied performances was the only "permanent" aspect of the work. Artists that exemplify this new way of engaging the natural environment with minimal interference with the existing ecosystem are Ana Mendieta and Richard Long.

Real "environmental" issues in Environmental art enter the discourse with the emergence of the feminist and green movements, and are manifested not only in "environment friendly" works but also in works critical of pollution, exploitation (of people, animals, and resources), destruction of habitats, and a broad range of other factors with a negative impact on social, urban, and ecological environments. These works include reclamation projects and projects that create an interface between art and function, such as Viet Ngo's *Devi's Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant* (1990), which is shaped like a snake and uses a biological system to clean wastewater, as well as Mierle Laderman Ukeles's work with the New York Department of Sanitation (1983-90). In more recent years, Environmental artists have also considered the restorative aspect of art — for example its potential for healing trauma, such as Lily Yeh's *Rugerero Genocide Memorial* (2005-07) in Rwanda, and Pedro Reyes's *Palas por Pistolas* (Pistols into Spades, 2008), or the ability it has for resetting the progress-obsessed brain to reconsider the value of traditional practices, such as

[56] Among the many artists listed as Eco artists within the Public Art genre we find Herbert Bayer, Joseph Beuys, Mel Chin, Andy Goldsworthy, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Allan Kaprow, Maya Lin, Reverend Billy Talen, and Lily Yeh. In Weintraub, *To Life!*, xxi.

[57] See also *Land and Environmental art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 1998), 114.

Fernando García-Dory's work on creating environments conducive to a pastoral lifestyle (*The PASTOR project*, 2004) and on propagating pastoralists by establishing a Shepherd's School (2007).[58]

Land art/Earth works

> The more compelling artists today are concerned with 'place' or 'site'
> Robert Smithson[59]

Like the category of Environmental art, *Land art* often works with "natural" materials, especially soil and rock, which is why it is also often called *Earth art*. However, unlike the former, it was not initially pre-occupied with the impact the works could or would have on the environment or local ecosystem. Land artists had a much different motivation, they sought to challenge *place* (or *places*) experienced in the contemporary, geopolitical realm as well as in the art world. Thus, Land art should first and foremost be seen as a manifestation of rebellion.[60] Created during the era defined by the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war and the European student protests, the works reveal how the initial euphoria of the post world war years had given way to the realization that not much had actually changed, and that a much more radical approach to art making and displaying was necessary. Even the

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[58] See Weintraub, *To Life!*, 153-157, 259-263, and 307-311.

[59] Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 85.

[60] And as with every "rebellion" against the status quo, the "members" of this rebellion would not identify as a "group" (which would have been too "normal") – Heizer, Smithson, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, and Walter DeMaria, however, all did react to the same socio-political and cultural environment in which they lived and worked. See Kastner, *Land and Environmental art,* 13.

celebrated Abstract Expressionists had ultimately become caught up in the web of the commercial art world, consisting of the established system of the gallery, its exhibition space, and the collectors. One important goal of the first generation of Land artists was to move *the work* beyond the confines of this system — or, as Dennis Oppenheim stated, "The work is not put in a place, it is that place."[61] Of course, they were not alone in this, and in fact a number of new art forms similarly tried to explode the boundaries and borders holding "art" back. Thus, in addition to *Land art* and *environmental art* discussed previously, *conceptual art* provided artists with new approaches to creating and the adaptation of *performance* as an art practice offered artist a new "medium." Whether by moving *the work* physically or conceptually (or both), artists removed the traditional art object from the acceptable spaces of the art world. In its first incarnation, Land art was predominantly a white man's art form, yet it has had an enormous and positive impact on numerous artist groups: not always or necessarily through the works themselves (though *Spiral Jetty* is one of the most well-known "contemporary" art works in the U.S.), but through the many reactions the works have inspired (especially in environmental art and feminist art). Land art was figuratively and literally a "groundbreaking" phenomenon.

The landscape art scholar Malcolm Andrews has pointed out that Land art/Earth art is not defined by an object created by an artist (as most traditional art forms would be), but rather through "the relationship between that object (sometimes a mere rearrangement of on-site stones, for instance, or a line drawn on

[61] Lailach, *Land art,* 80.

the desert floor) and the otherwise untouched site."[62] The work of art defined as a *relationship* between an artist and a place is a very useful concept for the material presented in the subsequent case studies of this dissertation. As with the previously discussed forms of art and place (*public art, street art,* and *environmental art*), *Land art* also has undergone many changes since the first generation of bulldozing artists created "bigger-is-better" macho type of works, and the most recent generation of Land artists creates works that fall squarely into numerous categories (really they are their own thing, but for our traditional system something without a category does not work), including land art, feminist art, environmental art and an ethnic/non-western designation.[63]

One of the first generation of Land/Earth artists who did not subscribe to the idea of using invasive means to create a work is the British artist Richard Long.[64] His

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[62] Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204. For example, Andrews describes *Spiral Jetty* as "a work that responds to the particular landscape in which it evolved, its configuration, its strange light and its distinctive colouring, as well as to the proximity of a derelict oil well," (209). The work changes based on water level in the lake, time of year/season and time of day, much like other works do, however, the interaction here—even the unintended aspect—is a key part of the work; a different definition of Smithson's work uses the idea of spatial practices, which correctly identifies the idea of actions and processes, but is more fitting for Long or for the audience experiencing the work. See Brian Wallis, "Survey," in *Land and Environmental art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner, (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 1998), 27.

[63] Andrews has a nice list, which I would like to quote: "Earth Art and Land Art have taken many forms: minimalist and ephemeral intervention in the site itself, the larger-scale sculptural earth work involving heavy construction equipment, the largely unmediated installation in an art gallery of materials gathered from a landscape site, the landscaped reclamation or planned naturalization of industrial wasteland, acts of conservation of natural land that involve decisions about what traditional usages of the land are to be retained, and so on," in *Landscape and Western Art,* 205. The "macho" designation is widespread in literature—Andrews uses it, Kastner uses it (*Land and Environmental Art*, 15), as do countless feminist and eco/environmentalist writers—and it presents a convenient shorthand.

medium (or rather method) of choice is *walking*. Almost all of his works use this interaction with the environment as the impetus for creation — which is most often carried out by leaving a trace on the ground from bending blades of grass, shifting dust or gravel, to moving stones or small rocks, and then documenting the final trail in photography (though he also operates on a more abstract level, documenting his walks in numbers, words, and even symbols, such as arrows that indicate the direction of the wind). This is of course a type of performance in a particular place – though it is generally not documented or done before an audience, and only the end-result can be witnessed (after the fact, through photographs and/or text). Long is in a sense a phenomenological artist, who creates as he experiences – and thus alters his own experience in the process of creating (see phenomenology section below). His work highlights the idea that we can never return to the same place, as it changed even though we still recognize it as the place we "knew."

The new ways to interact with *place* that were enabled by the first generation of land artists and the subsequent discourse and reactions, have certainly impacted the artists in this study. Coming of age as artists from the 1980s through the new millennium, they benefitted from the developments that took place in the 1970s. Yet another aspect of *Land art* had an impact on this particular group: the fact that women artists (in the second generation, also of feminism!) took advantage of this new art form, because, according to author and art critic Jeffrey Kastner, the marginalization of women in the art world gave them freedom to experiment; as he put it: "a foray outside the boundaries of the art world proper was no great liberating

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[64] He famously said "I like the idea of using the land without possessing it" (in Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art,* 215) and is now primarily seen as an Environmental artist.

adventure for most women artists of the day – the margin was already their home."[65] The Land artists of this next generation also no longer fall into one simple and neat category: Ana Mendieta combined performance, as well as feminist, ecological and post-colonialist agendas, while Mierle Laderman-Ukeles created an art form all her own in her *Maintenance art* projects (combining again performance, installation, and various other media with feminism and environmentalism). Being the pioneer women in this next generation proved to be no easy feat for these artists, but they did accomplish yet again to lay the groundwork for the next generation of artists.

Art of Place and Place in art

The presence of art *in* place/s—from the physical, natural, and structural to the historical and ideological—is only the first major aspect to explore in an overview that suggests using the lens of place to examine art. The second, *thematic* aspect of place and art—how and where place has been featured in a work—is at least as important, particularly in the context of this dissertation. The next sections provide an introduction to existing genres and art related fields that have focused on place as their subject matter.

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[65] Kastner, *Land and Environmental art,* 15. Another perspective on this is provided by the *Guerilla girls*, whose 1988 campaign *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* provides the ironic highlights of "working without the pressure of success," "not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius," and "seeing your ideas live on in the work of others," and was followed by a 1995 campaign titled *Top Ten Signs that You are an Art World Token*, which emphasized the inequality of all artists pushed to the margins, viewed October 31st, 2013, http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/index.shtml

Landscape art

> I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place but as a path
> that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet.
> Gretel Ehrlich[66]

This is quite possibly the first and often only art form that comes to mind when we think about art that represents place. Landscapes are not really art *in* place as the previous examples, but what we expect to be art *of a* place. Traditionally, landscapes are defined as "a framed representation of a section of the natural world, a cropped view, selected and reduced so that it can be a portable memento of an arresting or pleasing visual experience of rural scenery."[67] While landscapes are of course not limited to this definition, it does capture a key element that distinguishes a landscape from other kinds of place (re)presentation: the artist takes something that is present in the geophysical world and makes a selection of it (ranging in "creativity" from determining a selection in the viewfinder of a camera to combining various elements of different sites into one composite picture).

The idea of depicting the natural and man-made environments around us goes back to the first human settlements and began to become popular in the interior decoration of dwellings around the Mediterranean in Greek and Roman art. Yet, the western world did not pay much attention to land by itself (that is to say the "mere" natural world, landscape without the presence of human beings or at least signs of human life. Most of the famed European landscapes—whether in the Dutch, Italian or French tradition—featured people and/or buildings) until the 19th century Hudson

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[66] In *Legacy of Light,* ed. Constance Sullivan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 20.

[67] Andrews, *Landscape and Western art,* 201.

River School painters began to capture the grandiosity of the natural landscapes of the Americas. To this day, most "landscape" works of art include a human reference – especially for purposes of scale.

The other defining aspect of a traditional landscape that we will generally not encounter with other place specific works is the "frame." A landscape as a section or selection of a larger setting requires the limitation of a frame, whether it is the edge of the canvas or an actual carved and gilded frame in which the image is placed. As Andrews argues, without the frame "[…] the landscape spills into a shapeless gathering of natural features."[68] The landscape thus does not "exist" before it is framed – even if the process of framing takes place only on an abstract level (a tourist being told which vista to look at is equivalent to such an abstract "frame"). In fact, Lucy Lippard reminds us that the word "landscape" can be used both for describing "a scene framed *through* viewing (a place) and a scene framed *for* viewing (a picture)."[69] While in art we usually use the term to describe the latter, the active role of the viewer in the former enters into many of the works we find in contemporary landscape.

As the above definitions reveal, landscape is something that is usually perceived from a distance – or an "outside" of the landscape. In this it differs from most definitions of place, which is experienced from the inside (even as an "outsider" you are still inside of place). Alas, in contemporary writings about landscape there is much confusion about the connections of landscape to space and place, and

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[68] Ibid., 5.

[69] Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local. Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 8.

authors who get sucked into the dyadic vortex (or even triadic) seldom emerge with any insights.[70] Luckily, we are no longer bound to a system of binary oppositions or claims of primacy and can take the phenomenological point of view suggested by Edward S. Casey. Other writers also eschew the dyadic traps altogether by focusing on what is important for our contemporary analysis of landscape art: "Landscape in art tells, or asks us to think about, where we belong. Important issues of identity and orientation are inseparable from the reading of meanings and the eliciting of pleasure from landscape."[71] This brings the ideas of landscape art into the suggested discourse of place and art.

Place in art literature

Place in the context of art has been a key topic in the discussion of landscape painting and photography. However, it extends further as evidenced in a number of recent publications.[72] One of them, titled "Place" and published in the Thames & Hudson *Art Works* series, features not only different kinds of places (urban, nature, fantastic, myth/history, politics/control, territories, itinerancy, and heterotopias/non-places), but also almost the entire range of possible art media: film,

[70] See for example W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), and Wallis, "Survey."

[71] Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art,* 8.

[72] See works mentioned at the beginning of the chapter by Lucy Lippard, Irit Rogoff, Malcom Andrews, Miwon Kwon, Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel.

video, photography, painting, collages, installation, performance, sculpture, architecture, land/earth works and of course numerous combinations of the above.

Unlike the history of landscape painting, in which the discussion of place in the works generally vacillated between a documentation of the environment and the creation/expression of it and/or of feelings evoked by it, these current publications make it clear that we are now engaged in a different kind of place discourse. Documentation is not concerned with the actual or imagined place, nor with our feelings and experiences, but rather it constantly calls these very traditional aspects into question as observations that are fallacious because they are too close to the surface. (For example: A mountain would not represent an actual mountain or stand metaphorically for our feelings, but would call into question the way we have looked at and interacted with and depicted our environment.) Similarly, artists not only create places of escapism or comfort, but of subversion, confrontation, and exploration. Rather than creating boundaries, the art works aim to push beyond them or reveal the mistake of having them in the first place. This is of course not a new development—Land art, Earthworks, and Environmental Art have been involved in this for half a century—yet the spreading of the topic to other media and the increasing geographical breadth of contributors to the subject is a direct result of the sea-change that will be discussed in the next subchapter.

Among the recent publications are two particularly interesting, pre-millennial examinations of place in art by Lucy Lippard and Irit Rogoff respectively. Lippard's book *The Lure of the Local* introduces the reader to place (and its reflection in art) in our contemporary world and experience. The fittingly titled introduction "All Over

the Place" is programmatic for a book that looks at art *in, of* and *about* place in genres ranging from public art, to maps, contemporary landscape art, art of travel, memorial art and many more. Like Edward Casey, Lippard begins by outing herself as a "placeling" or as she puts it: "Place for me is the locus of desire. Places have influenced my life as much as, perhaps more than, people. I fall for (or into) places faster and less conditionally than I do for people."[73] The author traces our awareness of place (or "lure of the local") through her personal history to the "geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere," which has become more pressing in the decades leading up to our current age of globalization.[74] It is the experience of displacement—once limited to a faceless, disenfranchised, powerless minority—which has now become more "mainstream." Many of us have lost *our place,* because "[…] even if we can locate ourselves, we haven't necessarily examined our place in, or our actual relationship to, that place."[75] Artists, in Lippard's view, can re-establish those lost connections; she sees them as "envisionaries," who act as guides and creators thriving in the "no-one's land" created by "the dialectic between place and change."[76] However, in the years leading up to the publication of "Lure of the Local" in 1997, Lippard thought that "place-specific art is in its infancy. Of all the art that purports to be *about* place, very little can be said to be truly *of* place."[77] This in particular is what has been changed by recent artists like the ones discussed in this

[73] Lippard, *Lure of the Local,* 4.

[74] Ibid., 7.

[75] Ibid., 9.

[76] Ibid., 19.

[77] Ibid., 20.

dissertation. Their experience *of place* is so deep, it permeates their works on every level and scale.

Another book that began to explore the impact of place on art was Irit Rogoff's *Terra Infirma. Geography's Visual Culture*. The book has ambitious goals and ideas (one of them is pursuing a "theory in the making" or emergent theory approach). All the while it tries to remain grounded with the help of specific themes and wants to offer a comprehensive analysis of the examples of art chosen by the author. The balancing act is successful in so far as the emphasis on "flux" or the shakiness of our "ground" implied by the title emerges on almost every page. Yet, the goals of getting away from "universal truths" and from "ideological platforms" through an emphasis on "difference" disappear and get lost behind the jargon of structuralist, post-structuralist and feminist theory and of postcolonial and cultural studies.[78] What is noteworthy about the book are some of the similarities it shares with Lippard's book. The notion of place and "belonging" appear here with the question "Where do I belong?" at the very beginning of the first chapter, though Rogoff then proceeds to dismiss this line of inquiry as a dead-end which traps the individual in "political realities, epistemic structures and signifying systems."[79] Her chosen themes also include "Mapping" and "Subject/Spaces/Places," like Lippard, and "Bodies," like McDowell. Rogoff uses these themes as her lens to analyze the

[78] Rogoff, *Terra Infirma,* 1-3.

[79] Ibid., 14-15. Rogoff did not list or cite any of the previously published place/geography works that would have provided her with a more solid grounding in the field she claims to survey (*Geography's* Visual Culture), such as Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan, David Seamon, or Doreen Massey. She also has no mention of Lucy Lippard's work or consideration of the space/place debate in philosophy aside from Henri Lefebvre.

works, providing interesting (and in most cases *new*) perspectives on artists as different as Mona Hatoum, Joshua Neustein, Houston Conwill, and Ana Medieta. These analyses, along with the author's personal narrative of displacement, emerge as the most intriguing parts of her book.[80]

Place in "diaspora art"

Considering that was has been outlined so far might suggest an already prevalent position of place in art, the question might arise why we should look specifically at place in contemporary art by diaspora artists. And the short answer is: because there is a difference between our simple "being-in-place" everyday—our emplacement in the "real world" and the "art world"—as well as our perception of it, and the way an artist broaches the issue and deals with the experience in works of art. While place can feature in the works of traditional place-specific artists, it takes a *dis-placed* person, one who has had the "out-of-place" experience, to examine the deeper workings of place. Clifford Geertz expressed this more elegantly when he said: "It is difficult to see what is always there. Whoever discovered water, it was not a fish."[81] Of course, it is not a requirement to *leave* a *place* for displacement to occur. A person who has lived in the same house or town since birth, and never ventured far afield, can still feel "out-of-place" due to a number of changes that the larger world

[80] However compared to and unlike the common understanding of displacement, Rogoff describes her own experience as comfortable and a matter of personal choice (see 5ff).

[81] Clifford Geertz, "Afterword," in *Senses of Place,* ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 259.

bestows on the immediate surroundings – whether they are political, technological, environmental or social.[82]

The feeling of displacement may require a large number of changes in the individual's experience of place, or sometimes just a small change (it depends on the "sensitivity" of the emplaced person). In the case of my paternal grandmother, who stayed away from technology that went beyond a rotary phone and a color television with an antenna, who never learned to drive but would ride her bicycle to get groceries until she turned 70, whose town did not significantly change in the seven decades she lived there, in spite of world wars, recessions, and "Wirtschaftswunder", and who was barely affected by the monumental political or technological changes that took place in the 20th century, it was the event of moving out of her house and into a nursing home less than two miles away that presented her with a displacement she could not handle. Leaving the house she had been born in and lived in all her life was literally a death sentence. In contrast to her stands her husband, my grandfather, whose experience as a soldier in WWII—from being sent to the Western Front, and then the Eastern Front, to deserting and hiding out in a safe place (the cellar of my grandmother's house)—had given him a different experience of *place*, and whose well-being actually improved after being moved into a nursing home far away from his hometown.

Displacement is one of the important undercurrents in Postcolonial studies and can be said to have been an aspect of the Eurocentric art world until at least the mid 1980s. There the displacement occurred through the exclusionary and

[82] See Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

discriminatory practices that had served the imperial powers for centuries: artists who did not meet the triple criteria of being white, male, and from Europe had to prove that they were even more talented and skilled than the members of that elite club in order to be given a chance in exhibitions and collections (the only exception was that they could be "anonymous" or "dead"—in those cases they were not perceived as a threat, but marveled at as "exceptions to the rule" of non-European inferiority). White male American artists were the first to break through this barrier, African American and women artists were next (though not quite as prominent or financially successful as the former), and ultimately, in the late 20th century, just before the turn to the new millennium, "other" artists began to be accepted into the art world as well.

Some of the key moments that lead to this sea change in the art world will need to be briefly reiterated here. The last of the "dinosaur" exhibitions—important due to the fact that exhibitions are the physical manifestation of widely held beliefs of the art world—was the 1984 Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) show *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art – Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. The exhibition (in)famously placed works by European modernists vis-à-vis works from so-called "Tribal peoples." The awkward comparison was made worse by the labels, which listed every detail of artist, title, year, and origin for the western pieces, while providing a descriptive title, general culture of origin and no year or even date range for the non-western creations. This discrepancy was enough to draw the ire of those who were experts of the so-called "Tribal objects," but what brought the debate into the media was the idea promoted by the title of the show: that the modernist art was

based on “affinities” with the other exhibited works, rather than a “copying” or “stealing” of ideas from the sculptures, masks, and ritual objects, which artists such as Picasso had encountered in European ethnographic museums. The heated argument both against and in support of these curatorial practices unveiled the deep-seated prejudices of the art world.

Yet, the tide had changed and there would be no turning back (and feigning ignorance as before). Among the *places* associated with the sea change and with the beginning emplacement of artists in the late 20th century is the *Centre du Pompidou* (Paris, France). Its 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* represents one of the first large-scale attempts to counter the curatorial practices revealed by the MoMA exhibit. For the first time Western and non-Western artists were afforded equal space. Though it tried to focus on “self-trained” or “untrained” artists and their work as representative of art in Africa, the Americas, and Oceania, (and versus very traditionally trained artists from Europe and the USA,) it did provide equal space, identification and “participation”—50 artists from the West and 50 from the rest of the world (an uneven balance in terms of territory, still the best attempt at representation yet).

The art world began to find itself in unfamiliar *places* as new exhibition opportunities for artists were created outside the Western centers. On the one hand biennials began sprouting up on all the continents — for “African” artists particularly the founding of Dak’art in 1990 (Senegal) and the Johannesburg Biennales in 1995 and 1997 (South Africa) added potential for exposure. On the other hand existing venues were transformed by the increased acceptance of “non-Western” artists into

traditional exhibition formats, although initially this meant separate shows or sites. One of the first major exhibitions to take this step was the 49th Venice Biennale (Venice, Italy, 2001). It adapted to the new realities of a more inclusive art world by featuring an African (Diaspora) pavilion with works by Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Zineb Sedira, Berni Searle, Yinka Shonibare, and Willem Boshoff, while the title of their exhibition—Authentic/Ex-centric—highlighted some of the fallacies that had been at work in European curating of non-European art.

Other changes in the art world that benefitted the previously excluded artists were related to the make-up and format of exhibitions. This new structure went hand-in-hand with the emergence of a new roster of artists. Sometimes, as in the large scale *Africa Remix* (Dusseldorf, London, Paris, Tokyo and others, 2004), the lineup was extensive and inclusive. On other occasions, smaller group shows' lineups featured selections from the large roster to fit a certain profile, such as a "country" specific show (both South Africa and Ethiopia were popular candidates), "medium" specific shows (for example with a focus on photography), or "gender" specific ones (such as *Black Womanhood*, 2008). Curators for these exhibitions were also no longer necessarily European or American, but often had a similar cultural background as the artists in the exhibition, as numerous shows by Okwui Enwezor, Salah M. Hassan, Olu Oguibe, and Chika Okeke (among others) reveal.[83] Furthermore, the availability of new resources, such as the Universes-in-Universe project, which documents artists, works, and exhibitions belonging to the "non-

[83] Interestingly, these types of shows (surveys of sorts) continue to be curated, as more recent examples reveal: *The Global Africa Project* (Museum of Arts and Design, NY, 2011) and *Who Knows Tomorrow* (Berlin, Germany, 2010).

western" category, and dedicated journals, such as *Nka—Journal of Contemporary African Art* (first published in 1994) and *Third Text* (first published in 1987), have improved the accessibility of information on art outside the Western centers.

There is one more phenomenon, which has increasingly impacted the experience of works and artists and audiences around the globe: the *place-making* feature of these temporary exhibitions. Geographical, phenomenological, and postcolonial writings recognize different actions as *place-making*. The geographer Cresswell states that "all over the world people are engaged in place-making activities. Homeowners re-decorate, build additions, manicure the lawn. Neighborhood organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards, city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places."[84] This type of *place-making* focuses on specific aspects of a particular environment. In Phenomenology our entire place awareness and experience can have the active component of *place-making*, as the titles of Edward Casey's works reveal: *Getting Back into Place, How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time, Representing place* and *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*. Another approach to *place-making* has been taken by the well-known curator and scholar Okwui Enwezor, who used *place-making* as a lens to examine the role "of that particular model of exhibition [temporary and large-scale] for the undifferencing of art formerly confined to its prior institutional margins."[85] Enwezor

[84] Cresswell, *Place,* 5.

[85] Okwui Enwezor, "Place-Making or in the 'Wrong Place': Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Diaspora, Memory, Place – David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z*, ed. Salah M. Hassan and Cheryl Finley (London/Munich: Prestel, 2008), 109.

finds that the increasing inclusion of artists from postcolonial societies in major Western museums has not tipped the balance of the previous "policies of exclusion," but that it is in fact the "temporary exhibition models [that] have been the places where some of the key arguments of global artistic discourse are being staged."[86] The *place-making* Enwezor refers to is the *creation* of a *place in the art world* for all those artists that had previously been excluded.[87] Yet, what is equally important in the evaluation of the biennial model is the *place* each exhibition creates *physically* as well as *experientially*. Audience, works, and artists come together, to create a place and produce its "history:" memories, experiences, knowledge, or in short: a discourse that can only come into being at this place and in this time.[88] This aspect of *place-making* by temporary exhibitions will be discussed again below in relation with the different artists. This combination of changes in the art world has begun to provide a way out of the displacement of so many artists around the (geophysical) world. Yet, one of many outcomes of globalization on the geo-political/economical level was the creation of an abundance of new displacements. And the continued existence of "diaspora/s" in both our discourses and our experiences is a sign that much work remains to be done toward a more inclusive, integrated world.

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[86] Ibid., 110.

[87] As Enwezor puts it: "[…] the biennial model, as the key site for the production of the new discourse of contemporary art, began to disperse the centralization of the discursive framework in which contemporary art was once contemplated […]" ibid., 114, and continues "[…] what has been truly significant about the exhibition venue and its place-making possibilities is the way it grounds the work of the artist with whom I work in the framework of their discursive practices and at the juncture of global and transnational communities" ibid., 116.

[88] Enwezor hints at this with the term he borrows from Hakim Bey: "temporary autonomous zone," and though uses the term "place" a number of times, he does not develop this idea further, ibid., 114.

CHAPTER 2: PLACE THEORIES

The significance of place (as history and geography)

Among the many definitions of place, maybe the most common one is linked to the role *place* has played in geography. While the concept was used interchangeably with *space* in academic discourse for many years, its re-definition has revolutionized the field of humanistic geography.[89] Prior to the 1960s human geography was primarily concerned with "regions" and a twofold purpose: to "describe [a region] in great detail," including everything from bedrock to culture, and to differentiate the region from others thus examined.[90] This approach enabled geographers to parse the globe into categories similar to those used in other sciences, making the world a matter of quantifiable and comparable entities. The ground for *place* was paved in the early 1960s when geographers Philip L. Wagner and Marvin W. Mikesell gave *culture* "explanatory power," arguing that culture was not merely responding to but was in fact based in geography since "habitual and shared communication is likely to occur only among those who occupy a common area."[91] A first attempt at highlighting the significance of *place* for the discipline was made by

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[89] See Cresswell, *Place,* 19ff. Key thinkers of interest here include but are not limited to Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Tim Cresswell. Furthermore there are several feminist geographers who have contributed to the discussion: Linda McDowell, Gillian Rose, Joanne Sharp, Pamela Moss, Mona Domosch and Joni Seager.

[90] See ibid., p. 16. Another common geographical term—terrain—is not included in this discussion, as it an element of physical geography and of the discipline of topography.

[91] Philip L. Wagner and Marvin W. Mikesell, *Readings in Cultural Geography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 3, cited in Cresswell, *Place,* 17.

Fred Lukerman in 1964, when he argued that "Geography is the knowledge of the world as it exists in places."[92] This understanding of place is commonsensical: he defines places as "integrations of nature and culture developing in particular locations with links to other places through the movement of goods and people."[93] Unfortunately, as a definition of *place* it leaves us with more questions than it answers. When the real shift in the significance and understanding of *place* occurred in the 1970s, it was largely as "a reaction to the new emphasis on space in spatial science."[94] The centuries-old fight over the primacy of space over place entered geography as scholars were searching for a qualitative approach and a concept that "emphasized subjectivity and experience" rather than the "empty space" that had been required for scientific generalization.[95] To support their ambitious, universalizing theories, humanist geographers turned to continental philosophy—in particular to phenomenology and existentialism: The pioneering geographical works of Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan were inspired by the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[96] Philosophy allowed them to move away from place as a "particular" location and to *place* "as a universal and transhistorical part of the human condition [...] as an idea, concept and way of being-

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[92] Lukerman, "Geography as a Formal Intellectual Discipline and the Way in Which it Contributes to Human Knowledge," *The Canadian Geographer* 8, Issue 4 (1964): 167.

[93] Wagner and Mikesell, *Cultural Geography*, 3, cited in Cresswell, *Place,* 18.

[94] Ibid., 19.

[95] Ibid.

[96] See ibid, 12 and 15ff.

in-the-world."[97] Due to their innovative nature, the works by Relph and Tuan also proved crucial to discussions of *place* in philosophy and are equally useful to the discipline of art history.

From Space to Place – Yi Fu Tuan

Because Yi-Fu Tuan's works, in particular *Topophilia* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977), fundamentally changed how place is regarded in contemporary geography, I want to provide an overview of the key points. Tuan used the neologism 'topophilia' to refer to the "affective bond between people and place."[98] In the book of the same title—his first major examination of our encounters with *place*—Tuan acknowledges that most people feel utterly indifferent toward the environments that shape their lives, though this can be changed by turning *place* into a charged symbol such as homeland, nation, etc. For him *experience* is a key element for the concept of *place* (hence the subtitle in his subsequent book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*). Tuan defines experience as "a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" – including but not limited to: sensation (i.e. involving the different senses), perception, conception, emotion,

[97] Ibid., 20.

[98] Cited in Cresswell, *Place,* 20; the word "topophilia" had been used earlier by W.H. Auden in the Introduction to *Slick but not Streamlined* by John Betjeman, see *The complete works of WH Auden*, Prose, Volume 2 1939-1948 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 306, and by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xxxv.

thought, and "the ability to learn from what one has undergone."[99] He distinguishes space from place in the degrees of action: beginning with our earliest childhood experiences "places stay put" whereas any kind of "spatial movement" suggests an "experiential construction of space into the basic coordinates of ahead, behind, and sideways."[100] In other words, if space is "that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for a location to be transformed into place."[101] While Tuan generally refrains from making qualitative judgments or siding with one point of view or the other of the primacy debate—which may in fact be the major weakness in his writings—he does qualify *place* as an object which defines space, making the latter the larger "quantity" of the two (though as it cannot exist without the former giving it this "definition" space may actually be considered of lesser "value").[102] According to Tuan it is more often the visceral than the visual characteristics of a place that are most apparent to an individual.[103] He gives special credit to the arts, both visual and literary, in drawing "attention to areas of

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[99] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 8ff. In his definition he leans on the German word *erfahren*, which means "to find out," "to learn," and "to experience."

[100] Ibid., 20ff. The spatial movement turns into spatial knowledge and is translated into the spatial competence, i.e. getting oriented by means of cartography and navigation.

[101] Ibid., 6. This is crucial for the ideas of place-making discussed below.

[102] Ibid., 17. He reiterates this view when he states that "space lies open" whereas "enclosed and humanized space is place" (54). His argument that "place exists at different scales" from your favorite armchair to the whole of planet earth (149), does not negate or change this qualification of place versus space, as the latter expands along with the former.

[103] See ibid., 162.

experience that we may otherwise fail to notice."[104] While language can help us express our experience, the pictorial and sculptural arts can actually re-create *place*. Where words fail, art is able to make "images of feeling so that feeling is accessible to contemplation and thought."[105] Sculptures in particular are able to "create a sense of place by their own physical presence" (the same now holds true for installation art, which has since risen to prominence).[106] For humanist geographers, the transformative power of human beings—be it through the "mastering" of space, or the actual building or conceiving of place—is the new starting point.

And yet, for Tuan and for the phenomenologists discussed below, place is not limited to that which we create—it also exists prior to that: as our body.[107] Not only is our own body fundamental in our experience of and with *place*, but the first *place* in the experience of the child is the body (of the parent).[108] Thus, the importance of *place* lies in part in the relationship we have with it, especially as the relating usually includes one or more other human beings. The notion of relating to *place* helps us understand certain requirements and rituals in our experience of it. Tuan believes

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[104] Ibid., 162.

[105] Ibid., 148 and 162.

[106] Ibid.

[107] With the text's and author's focus on and background in Geography, the "body" is not put into a larger social, economic, and cultural context. The discussion on the way in which differently inscribed bodies experience place will therefore be included below in the sections on feminist geography and on phenomenology.

[108] Tuan's chapters "Space, Place, and the Child" and "Intimate Experiences of Place" emphasize this. Our spatial experience is connected to our experience of place and based on two "fundamental principles of spatial organization [...]: the posture and structure of the human body, and the relations (whether close or distant) between human beings," ibid., 34.

that one "can fall in love at first sight with a place as with a woman."[109] Furthermore, when we say "how long does it take to know a place?" the answer will be similar to that of getting to know a person: superficial (or as Tuan calls it "abstract") knowledge of a place "can be acquired in short order if one is diligent [...] but the 'feel' of a place takes longer to acquire."[110] While the former requires nothing more than visual acuity and intellectual curiosity, the latter is "made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years."[111] Yet, the amount of time spent does not necessarily make for a deeper *place* experience, ultimately it is "the quality and intensity of experience [that] matter more than simple duration."[112]

Another aspect of the significance of *place* is based in its locality or situatedness (not to be confused with physicality or materiality): Tuan states that "place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere."[113] Now, more than three decades after this was written, permanence as an attribute of place seems more important than ever, especially if we consider it in terms of the age of migration and global change—from climate to politics to economics.

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[109] Ibid., 184. Interestingly, this was picked up again 20 years later by Lucy Lippard.

[110] Ibid., 183. Tuan already stated in *Topophilia* that the *place* experience of the senses is easier to express in words than the "feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood." *Topophilia,* 93.

[111] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 183.

[112] Ibid., 198.

[113] Ibid., 154.

Place insiders and outsiders – Edward Relph

An even closer link between geography and phenomenology can be found in Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976). Starting with the common understanding and experience of *place* in everyday life, Relph then creates "a conceptual language that allows us to move outside taken-for-granted everyday experience" to reach an understanding of *what makes a place a place*, and at the same time he seeks to strengthen his argument for the special significance of *place* to human life—especially in contrast with *space*.[114] Relph sides with the primacy of *place* when he states that "space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed [...] it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places."[115] He defines places further as "fusions of human and natural order [which] are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world."[116] In order to be such a center, *place* can be rooted, but this is not a necessary condition. Following Susanne Langer ('Literally we say camp is *in* a place, but culturally it *is* a place'), Relph sought to go beyond such "simplistic notions of place as location" to broaden the analytic power of the term. Applying the methods and ideas of phenomenology, Relph extends the notion of being "conscious of something" (which establishes a relation between the self and

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[114] David Seamon, "A Singular Impact: Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness,"* in *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter* 7, no. 3 (fall 1996): 7; also see Cresswell, *Place,* 21.

[115] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 8.

[116] Ibid., 141. Likewise, the "essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence," ibid., 43.

the world) to mean that that something had to be *in place*—in other words "The only way humans can be humans is to be 'in place.'"[117] Like Tuan, Relph saw a key aspect of *place* in our experience of it.

Relph also expanded the usefulness of the concept of *place* through his qualifications of "insideness" and "outsideness." These terms reflect one's experience of belonging to and identification with a *place*. It is through the varying "degrees of insideness and outsideness, [that] different places take on different meanings and identities for different individuals and groups."[118] As David Seamon summarizes, "if a person feels *inside* a place, he or she is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed. Relph suggested that the more profoundly inside a place the person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place."[119] The modes of experience range from *existential insideness*, which is a situation of deep unself-conscious immersion in place most often felt by those "at home in their own community and region," to *existential outsideness* when a person feels alienated by or out of place.[120] Among the latter, Seamon lists homelessness and homesickness, as well as the unintended

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[117] Cresswell, *Place,* 23. As will be discussed in the Phenomenology section below, *being-in-place* remains a crucial aspect to who and what we are as human beings.

[118] David Seamon, "Place, Placelessness, Insideness, and Outsideness in John Sayles *Sunshine State*," in *Aether, Journal of Media Geography* 3 (June 2008): 4; see also David Seamon and Jacob Sowers, "Edward Relph, place and placelessness," in *Key texts in human geography*, ed. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, and G. Valentine (London: Sage 2008), and Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 5-8.

[119] Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 6. This *inside place* should not be equated with *home*—as feminist research has revealed the contradictory message of the term in the context of victims of domestic abuse (i.e. when *home* is not "safe").

[120] See ibid.

effects of urban development, such as suburban sprawl and the dissolution of "downtown" areas.[121] Giving depth and dimension to what would otherwise be a simple binary opposition are the many degrees in between, which Relph describes in detail. Two particular modes of *insideness* will be important in the following analyses: *empathetic insideness* and *vicarious insideness*.

Empathetic insideness is experienced when an outsider "tries to be open to place and understand it more deeply [which] is an important aspect of approaching a place phenomenologically."[122] *Vicarious insideness*, on the other hand, is a "secondhand involvement with place [as a result of travels of the] imagination—through paintings, music, films, or other creative media."[123] It is important to note that both Relph and Tuan already saw an important role for the arts in our experience of place, whether as a method to help our understanding of it or as a sensual aid to extend our place experience into new realms.

As the outline above makes clear, in geography *place* fulfills an important function, because the concept allows a discipline that relies heavily on the scientific method to leave the facts, figures and categories behind and instead "think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment."[124] Having established the significance of *place* also led scholars to an examination of its absence or the issue of *placelessness*. For Relph and David Harvey, among others, the modern and post-modern way of life has been responsible in increasing

[121] Ibid., 7. These groups include various individuals, from global travelers to refugees.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Cresswell, *Place,* 11.

placelessness, whether for a lack of "authenticity"[125] or due to "time-space compression."[126] After arguing for the importance of experiencing place, Relph became "concerned that it was becoming increasingly difficult for people to feel connected to the world through place."[127] This draws on his notions of *insideness* and *outsideness*, where the desirable position of being an existential insider is no longer available due to the "general condition of creeping placelessness marked by an inability to have authentic relationships to place because the new placelessness does not allow people to become existential insiders."[128] The process is twofold: first comes "a weakening of the identity of places," which leads to "the point where they not only look alike and feel alike [but also] offer the same bland possibilities for experience."[129] Second, is the construction of placeless places such as fast food restaurants, chain-hotels, malls, and tourist destinations like Disneyworld—all of which are created expressly for outsiders, who visit, "experience," and leave these "standardized environments" without needing to become *insiders*.[130] Aspects of placelessness are also discussed by phenomenologists, though ultimately their conclusion is much less pessimistic.

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[125] Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* 78.

[126] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989).

[127] Ibid., 44.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* 90.

[130] See ibid., ii; and Seamon, "Place, Placelessness," 2.

A progressive sense of place – Doreen Massey

While Tuan's and Relph's interpretations of *place* have been reflected in art ranging from the earliest Dutch landscapes to post-modern and quite placeless paintings by Anselm Kiefer,[131] the geographer Doreen Massey has contributed an approach to the notion of that *place* that is more suitable to a twenty-first-century awareness and for contemporary generations of artists. It moves away from "roots" toward "routes" and promotes a "progressive sense of place."[132] Massey's major contribution to the *place* discourse is her essay "A Global Sense of Place," in which she dispenses with the common associations of place with community, with identity and with boundaries, and instead highlights the notion of *place as process*.

For Massey "what gives a place its specificity is [...] a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus."[133] Rather than "thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings [which have] links with the wider world."[134] By conceptualizing *place* not as a *locale* but an *experience*, Massey aligns herself with her predecessors Relph and Tuan, and also goes beyond traditional Western analytic categories that focus on binaries and resolution. She draws our attention to the existing conflicts ("places do not have

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[131] See also Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* xi.

[132] Cited in Cresswell, *Place,* 13.

[133] Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," in *Reading Human Geography*, ed. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997), 322.

[134] Ibid.

single, unique 'identities'") and pursues unorthodox definitions, such as defining *place* not by means of counterposition to the outside (i.e. "what it isn't"), but through linking it "*to* that 'outside' which is therefore itself part of what constitutes place."[135] The uniqueness of *place*, for Massey, is therefore determined by other factors, for example "that each place is the focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations [and] that this very mixture together in one place may produce effects which would not have happened otherwise."[136] The application of real-world examples, such as her Kilburn High Road neighborhood in London or the routes we take between our favorite "haunts", clarify and illuminate the points made by her, and reveal the "progressive" view to be a good match for the contemporary *place* experience.

Massey's understanding that the uniqueness of *place* is related to its interactions is expressed in the performance works of IngridMwangiRobertHutter, such as *Triumph of her Death,* 2008 [figure 31]. A group of strangers (the audience) are witnesses to a deeply personal interaction of the artist with her (by then deceased) sister via a projected video. They get to know Helen, her beautiful voice and her battle with cancer, through empathy they share in the pain of the artist, and carry these external memories and the ones created by the performance onward into their own, individual and separate lives. The site of the performance becomes a memory, but the experience of the place moves on and might be revisited in another encounter with the artist, with cancer, or with another artist's performance.

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., 323.

Gender and Place – Feminist Geography

Before I continue with a summary of the views on *place* in the writings of pre-eminent phenomenologists and integrate them with those stated by artists and art scholars in chapter 1, there is another strand of Geography and another group of scholars that need to be discussed here: Feminist Geography and Geographers. Beginning in the late 1970s, as *place* was reworked by male humanist geographers, it was also quickly brought into the fold of emerging feminist geographical scholarship. This was largely due to the realization that the "idea that women have a particular place is the basis not only of the social organization of a whole range of institutions from the family to the workplace, from the shopping mall to political institutions, but also is an essential feature of Western Enlightenment thought, the structure and division of knowledge and the subjects that might be studied within these divisions."[137] Numerous books analyzing women and place, and even a dedicated journal—*Gender, Place, and Culture*—attest to the significance of the subject to this group of scholars. As Linda McDowell points out, the study of gender and place-related issues overlap in a significant area: "Like ideas about gender, ideas about place [...] are social constructs."[138] The scholar Elizabeth Grosz would also add *the body* to this lineup of "social constructs"[139]—a matter of particular interest to works

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[137] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

[138] Ibid, 31. This has to be seen in the context of *power structures* rather than a universalizing statement. See discussion on subsequent pages.

[139] As she puts it: "The female (or male) body can no longer be regarded as a fixed,

dealing with either *place* in relation to the body or with *place* in relation to travel and displacement.

For geographers *the body* was not an obvious place, but by drawing on insights from other disciplines it became easily apparent as the most *immediate* of all *places*.[140] Establishing this equality allows us to see more clearly the impact one *place* (the body) can have on another *place* (the environment in which this body exists)—and vice versa. However, since the concept of "the body" itself is contested terrain (as is now the case with many other concepts, particularly ones like "identity," "memory," which were previously used to examine "minorities"), as it is "constructed through public discourse and practices that occur at a variety of spatial scales," inequality continues and becomes particularly blatant in the sexed female body.[141] In regards to *place* this manifests itself in the literal as well as metaphorical meaning of "women knowing their place." Linda McDowell has described such "assumptions about the correct place for embodied women [that] are drawn on to justify and challenge systems of patriarchal domination in which women are excluded from particular spatial arenas and restricted to others."[142]

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concrete substance, a pre-cultural given. It has a determinate form only by being socially inscribed." Elizabeth Grosz, "Notes toward a corporeal feminism," *Australian Feminist Studies,* no. 5 (1987): 2. See discussion below in *Body as place*.

[140] See McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place,* 34; Tuan, *Space and Place*.

[141] McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place,* 35. The body became a "fashionable" object of scientific investigation in the social sciences, due not only to advances in feminist, queer, and post-colonial studies which called into question many long-held beliefs, but also as a result of the attention the body was awarded in society in general (36).

[142] Ibid., 56. This also applies to other "constructed" bodies, i.e. queer, immigrant, or other socially undesirable "minorities," though women make up by far the largest of these "groups" and are often also members of one or more of the other "groups."

Similarly, moving from *place* to *place* presents a dilemma of interests (see also discussion on "interplaces" below). Unless this kind of "movement" is linked to traveling for "pleasure," it has been regarded with suspicion. Issues of migrancy, forced relocation, and nomadism were and often still are associated with economic, political, climatic or even intellectual and moral deficiencies on the part of the moving body or bodies. Only the mass movements of the late 20th century, which have affected all levels of society and occur on a global scale, have finally led to serious scholarly attention and to new insights. Doreen Massey noted, for example, that "the interrelationships between scales [produce] the specificity of particular places."[143] At the core of the discussion are the rejection of terms such as "hybridity" and "difference." In the case of the former, it has been argued that as a concept it is "only socially significant if it is practiced, that is if people actively identify as such."[144] In the latter case, it is the notion of a norm (i.e. the "singular bourgeois masculinity") against which all "Others" are measured, that is questionable. Rather, "it is now asserted that all identities are a fluid amalgam of memories of places and origins, constructed by and through fragments and nuances, journeys and rests, of movements between."[145] In moving away from dualistic thinking and binary oppositions, the study of phenomena such as *place* has become more complex, which

[143] Ibid., 205.

[144] Jonathon Friedman, "Simplifying complexity: assimilating the global in a small paradise," in *Siting Culture: the Shifting Anthropological Object,* ed. Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Hastrup (London: Routledge, 1996), 290.

[145] McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place,* 215.

also means more representative of the actual experience, and has created a fertile ground for new insights.

With these developments we have finally progressed beyond the simple organizing principle that links things and *place* as expressed in the proverb "A place for everything and everything in its place."[146] And therefore we have also gone beyond the associated concepts of fixed location and a (pre-ordained) world order that were the result of Western scientific thinking beginning with Enlightenment and continuing on through most of the 20th century.

The experience of place (in phenomenology)

In Philosophy, notions of *place* can be traced to the very beginnings of the discipline's long history—for example, Archytas's observation that "all existing things are either in place or not without place" and Aristotle's statement that "the power of place will be remarkable."[147] However, for much of its long history *place* was relegated to the bench while the concepts of space and time were considered to be the key players. As the details of this history exceed the frame of this dissertation, I

[146] Though often cited, the first uses of this phrase cannot be clearly determined. It appears frequently starting with 19th century texts, but is presumed to have originated in the late 18th century (See Oxford Dictionary of Quotations). Considering the fact that time and place have been linked throughout history, one of the origins of the proverb has to be seen in biblical times, for example in the quote from Ecclesiastes 3:1 "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Initially these organizing principles of time/place may have been applied to mundane circumstances only, such as a household or navy ship, however, they were easily extended from "every *thing*" to "everything" under the sun (especially considering the "objectification" of human beings in colonial history).

[147] Both cited in Casey, "Space to Place," 14; Archytas as cited in Simplicius, and Artistole, Physics, Book IV.

will draw on a series of publications by Edward S. Casey which have covered the philosophical angles of interest and concern to this particular study of *place* in art. Since I have proposed *place* as a) a lens through which artists can be examined and b) as a theme which underlies their work, a review of some key points in Casey's oeuvre—as well as the responses of other scholars—will provide us with a valuable foundation for the subsequent discussions.

The position of *place* (no pun intended) in Philosophy began to improve with the emergence of Phenomenology. It was in this discipline that a first move away from the focus on space was made by Edmund Husserl; a development subsequently reinforced by the writings of Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. However, Edward Casey was the first to make *place* a focus of his work in Phenomenology.

Though he certainly ruffled some feathers with his "heretical" proposition of the universality of place, Casey's argument quickly entered the mainstream.[148] Survey books on the topic of "Place"–such as Tim Cresswell's *Place. A Short Introduction*—now state that "Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world."[149] However, even the place-friendly and focused literature still maintains that "at a basic level, [place] is space invested with meaning

[148] The author himself uses the term "heretical" to imply how his suggestion that "place, far from being something simply singular is something general, perhaps even universal […]" might be viewed ("Space to Place," 19). "Mainstream" refers to the fact that almost any publication about place since the 1990s includes references to Casey's work (from proper citations to unacknowledged quotes/paraphrasing, though in the latter instance listing his work in the bibliography).

[149] Cresswell, *Place,* 12.

in the context of power," thus quietly upholding the primacy of space over place.[150] While Casey acknowledges that his approach also brings with it a fair share of prejudices and ethnocentricities, it does advance past the Eurocentricities of the proponents of space. In fact, it is *globally local*–or as Casey states, it "has the advantage of honoring the actual experience of those who practice it."[151]

In the phenomenological approach to place argued by Casey, place and perception are deeply intertwined: "The dialectic of perception and place (and of both with meaning) is as intricate as it is profound, and it is never-ending."[152] This dialectic also presents the first link to the artist's approach to place: as it is this conversation into which the artist enters by means of creating a work of art. In the case of the philosopher, the entry point is not quite as obvious. The "dialectic" referred to by Casey has two qualifications—the first is that place comes "configured [...] in highly complicated ways," and the second is the fact that "perception remains as *constitutive* as it is constituted."[153] The first refers to what might be called the "pre-existing condition" for place—what is already there and will continue to be there without our presence or perception of it. But place is actually not the only thing that comes (pre-) configured, and as the second qualification makes very clear: we are "configured" as well. Thus, when we perceive places, we can immerse ourselves in them without becoming a subject to them due to the fact that "we may modify their influence even as we submit to it" or, to put it another way, "we are not only *in* places

[150] Ibid.

[151] Casey, "Space to Place," 16.

[152] Ibid., 19.

[153] Ibid., 18-19.

but *of* them."[154] Keeping these two qualifications on the relationship between place and perception in mind, it is clear that the philosopher has to enter into a cycle already in motion before his own existence and perception come to bear on it, while the artist is able to begin with her entry into the dialectic.

Taking the Archytian Axiom—that place is "the first of all things"—as a starting point, Casey challenges the traditional divisions into the "two distinct domains of Nature and Culture" by arguing that "places are at once cultural and perceptual as well as tame and wild."[155] This power of place to "gather" rather than "divide" becomes particularly apparent in the fact that "*space and time come together in place,*"[156] which means "that time and space, rather than existing before place and independently of each other, *both inhere in place to start with*."[157] This provides us with Casey's key argument for the primacy of place, namely that any "spatial relations or temporal occurrences" are always already "*in a particular place*."[158] He concludes: "The binarist dogma stretching from Newton and Leibniz to Kant and Schopenhauer is undone by the basic perception that we experience space

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[154] Ibid., 19.

[155] Ibid., 16 and 35 ff.

[156] Ibid., 36.

[157] *Getting Back into Place,* 288. He continues: "The spatio-temporal matrix, instead of preceding places, is part of their very stability, ingredient in their very permanence." Ibid.

[158] Casey, "Space to Place," 37. He first discusses this confluence on the preceding page where he states: "[…] the phenomenological fact of the matter is that *space and time come together in place*," ibid., 36. In his earlier writings, Casey modified Thomas Reid's "claim that 'created things have their particular place in space, and their particular place in time'" to reflect the highlighted presence and thus priority of place in both: "created things in space and time *have their abode in place*" (in *Getting Back into Place*, 313).

and time *together* in place."[159] Even as Casey seems to establish *place* as the prior dimension, he also calls the "very idea of *priority*" into question by proposing it should "be bracketed along with the binary logic so effectively deconstructed by place itself."[160]

The complexity of place finds a match in the complexities of perception and of experience—the unidirectional approach that is valid for examining space has to be modified into a multi-directional approaches for *place*, due to the fact that in the place-perception dialectic cited previously "perception remains as *constitutive* as it is constituted."[161] Our knowledge of place also has to come out of perception—here Casey juxtaposes *Erlebnis* with *Erfahrung*. The former is the "lived experience," which is crucial to the perception of place as "there is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it."[162] The latter is "the already elapsed experience that is the object of analytical or abstract knowledge."[163] This second-hand knowledge of sorts, hints at the secondary status of *space* that favors such an approach. Place, however, has an immediacy that puts it first and foremost: "To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in."[164]

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[159] Casey, "Space to Place," 37.

[160] Ibid., 44. This conclusion is preceded by a discussion on how "deeply inscribed in places" time and history are (ibid.).

[161] Casey, "Space to Place," 19.

[162] Ibid., 18.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

Place – an interdisciplinary approach

Reviewing the respective advances in the disciplines of philosophy and geography, we have seen that they meet in *place*; both recognize that "place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world."[165] And at this intersection we also find artworks and artists dealing with place.

The lens suggested at the beginning of Part 1 can be created by combining the different insights of humanist and feminist geography with the contributions of phenomenology. As the overview of place in art and art in place has made clear, current art historiography understands *place* as "location." In *Public Art, Land Art, Street Art, Environmental Art*, and *Landscape* the majority of works of art are mapped in terms of their origin and/or finished form. Location-based understandings of place have begun to change with the emergence of Diaspora Art as a field. Because the artist's background is now included, place as it exists in memory and experience (termed "culture") and the creation of place through art works and art institutions are now emphasized.

Much like the present art historical understanding of place, geography has traditionally focused on the "locality" of place, but the work of Relph and Tuan and others has added several crucial aspects. Current geography aims to go beyond the simplistic notion of place as location, instead viewing *place* as a universal, subjective and transhistorical part of the human condition. This becomes obvious when we

[165] Cresswell, *Place*, 11. There is also a longer version of this definition, stating that "place is not simply something to be observed, researched and written about but is itself part of the way we see, research and write" (ibid., 15); while he seems to be stating the obvious here, it is useful to spell it out before delving into the lenses of place in art.

follow the artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, whose understanding of *place* encompasses not only a particular location and her experience, but also history and experiences that extend beyond the personal. While this approach expands, rather than limits, the lens of *place*, it presents important extensions to a purely located place: Geography views *place* both as an experience that is individually determined and perceived, and as a phenomenon that is pervasive and lasting, which means that the scale of *place* is variable. This modified understanding of *place* also considers factors such as quality and intensity of an experience to be crucial in the process of creating a sense of *place* (giving the other Enlightenment binary—"time"—the boot). Interestingly, as highlighted above, a number of Geographers have identified the arts as crucial in both the creation and re-creation of *place*. For Tuan, the arts draw attention to specific experiences—they help make *feeling* "accessible to contemplation and thought." Sculptures in particular contribute to our sense of *place*. For Relph we find references to the same pictorial and narrational journeys mentioned in Casey's text (see below), though Relph designates "paintings, music, film, [and] other creative media" as a "secondhand involvement with place" and thus as a part of the place discourse.[166]

Two further aspects of *place* in Geography are important for the interdisciplinary lens: the progressive sense of *place* (i.e. "place as process") and the discovery of the body as a *place*. The latter is not only important in feminist geography, but also features in the work of the philosopher Edward S. Casey, which we will need to examine a little more closely. In addition to "body as place," three

[166] See above and Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 7.

other aspects of place discussed by Casey are especially relevant to the proposed interdisciplinary lens and to the subsequent case studies: the relationship of place and home, the existence of non-physical (or virtual) places, and of nonplaces or "inter-places." A summary of these particular aspects will help extract the relevant concepts for their use in the proposed interdisciplinary approach.

Body as place

The notions of the body (living) in *place* and the body as a *place* are in many ways the foundation of *place* in phenomenology. The body is a gathering point (or *place*) for diverse sensory inputs, and it actively reaches out (with movement and senses) to seek more. It provides and follows direction, it has concreteness that allows it to interact with other concrete phenomena and it has a uniqueness that makes each situation different from any other.[167] According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is "the natural subject of perception" and it is "our general medium for having a world."[168] This is also reflected in Casey's statement on the acquisition of knowledge outside our own European system: "[…] whatever people may wish to know they are already *doing* at the bilateral level of knowing bodies and known places."[169] We orient ourselves by means of our bodies and landmarks, and if there are no "land"marks then by means of the marks we have left ourselves. Casey

[167] See Casey, "Space to Place," 22.

[168] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 208 and 146.

[169] Casey, "Space to Place," 35.

refers to them as "pathmarks" and says: "I am able to find my way about in a placescape that to a significant degree is marked and measured, as well as perceived and remembered, by my own actions."[170]

The body is the *place* we carry around with us. In general, it provides a constant in our experience of changing environments (though drastic changes to the body exist, they appear less common than changes to our environment). Places and bodies are also interdependent: "Just as there are no places without the bodies that sustain and vivify them, so there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and traverse."[171] This creates a relationship between the body as a *place* and the broad range of other places which can be experienced, such as landscape. According to Casey, bodies and landscape are linked as the "coeval epicenters around which particular places pivot and radiate."[172] They are markers of *place* as its inner boundary (body) and as its outer boundary (landscape).

To this role played by the body in place, we can add the fact that for Casey culture is "embodied"—as it is "carried into places by bodies"[173]—which also ties *place* to *culture*: "Just as there can be no disembodied experience of landscape, so there can be no unimplaced cultures."[174] This is the point where the observations of phenomenology meet the discoveries of feminism and feminist geography. For the

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[170] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* 26 and 28. This also applies to *virtual place*.

[171] Casey, "Space to Place," 24.

[172] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* 29. "Place is what takes place between body and landscape," ibid.

[173] Casey, "Space to Place," 34.

[174] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* 31. He emphasizes this again: "Just as every place is encultured, so every culture is implaced," ibid.

latter, the "embodied geographies" have to be examined in the knowledge that "the body itself is constructed through public discourse and practices."[175] Culture as a performance of scrutiny and regulation by society is an aspect of every place and every body we encounter in the 21st century. The idea of "embodiment" in geography (and *place*) captures "the sense of fluidity, of becoming and of performance" associated with the physical body and unites the social experience with the personal.[176]

All of the three artists in this dissertation take this relationship of *place* and embodiment into consideration in their work—from using their own bodies in performance, to representing the (female/other) body in their work, to determining how the bodies of their audiences will interact with the bodies of work in an exhibition. The artists are also acutely aware of the difference made between male and female bodies,[177] a distinction that feminist scholars still have to contend with and that is evident in the history of gendered places and "place-limitations" according to gender.[178] Another instance of embodiment which affects *place*

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[175] McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place,* 35. See Foucault, who argued that "moral attitudes, legal and institutional structures and personal and interpersonal attitudes and actions produce the forms of sexed embodiment that they regulate." See ibid., 49.

[176] Ibid., 39. While McDowell raises many interesting points that overlap with ideas previously published by Merleau-Ponty, Tuan, Casey, yet she does not cite or reference these scholars, which makes her work appear rather weak.

[177] As another "binary distinction" which Casey sought to dissolve in his argument of space and time coming together in place—we might be able to take this further to include male and female coming together in place (once we have rid ourselves of gendered "spaces").

[178] Curiously, men are seen as unbodied or disembodied – as abstract mind over mundane matter. See McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place,* 44. Once again, the concept of culture also plays a key role in this, as indicated above, because it is culture

experience (and its representation by the artists) is the "othering" of certain bodies by a group of "normist" bodies (such as the colonial white male body othering the native male/female body, or the able-bodied creating a group of "disabled bodies" – Iris Marion Young calls them "group oppressions").[179] This creates boundaries (temporarily), but it also allows for the overcoming of these boundaries (as the changeability of the body is also connected to the changeability of place). The body is thus crucial in developing a lens for place and art. While the case study examining the artist Wangechi Mutu and her work will focus specifically on the complexities of body as place, we will notice its presence and absence in the work and the understanding of all the artists featured in this dissertation—underscoring its preeminent position in our experience.

Place and home

Two relationships that are established between place and home comprise the focus of Casey's section on *moving between places* (which connects us with the suspicious "movement" examined by feminist geographers)—the first he calls "homesteading" and the second "homecoming." Both relationships are important when analyzing artists and their work, because of the impact they have on experience and perception, whether by or of the person, and whether in or of their environment.

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which constructs the "body" and thus the distinction to begin with. And in different cultures this distinction can be more or less pronounced. See ibid., 46-47.

[179] There is also the "mechanism of 'cultural imperialism' that constructs dominant and inferior groups," see ibid., 48.

Briefly, *homesteading* is defined as going to a new place that will become the future home-place, whereas *homecoming* is a return to "*the same place* [… though] the issue is that of returning not to the identical spot in space but to a place that may itself have changed in the meantime."[180]

As artists in general, and diaspora artists in particular, have to (or choose to) leave their original home-place to enter the art world, the concept of *homesteading* is often the first type of place/home relationship experienced. This influences the work to a larger or lesser degree, and often involves some of the place-experiences analyzed by Relph—particularly a transition from "outsider" to "insider." In the case study of Wangechi Mutu we can observe how this process is not only experienced by the body (of the artist), but also projected onto it (in her encounters with "insiders"). Once the artist has stopped and lingered in a certain place, that place, according to Casey, "has become a habitat […], a familiar place" and a kind of ending. Before it gets to this point, however, much happens to our experience: we are displaced and out-of-place, maybe even alienated in the new place—we have "nowhere to go," until we begin "placing and re-placing ourselves" and set out to establish "home" with something "material" and in a particular location, though ultimately "homes […] are not physical locations, but situations for living."[181] In this process, the philosopher highlights the arts as a key tool for *re-implacement*, because "the existence of pictorial and narrational journeys to and between places reminds us that we are not

[180] Casey*, Getting Back into Place*, 290.

[181] Ibid., 300 & 309. For Casey, different objects can create this "hearth" needed for a home—from a stereo or TV to a piece of furniture—I would argue, that for artists it can be their work that can establishes this new relationship, though presumably they also brought some personal paraphernalia.

altogether without resources in our placelessness."[182] It can be said that the experience of placelessness is not pointless but fundamental to our awareness of the power of place and that artists, like Campos-Pons, Mutu, and MwangiHutter, who have processed their own experience in their work can serve as our guides on the journey.

The second type of place/home relationship is "homecoming." In this experience the re-emplacement is often "momentary" and includes a number of events: from the potential initial alienation to a re-connecting and re-knowing the *place*, or rather knowing it "*for the first time*" due to the perspective gained by having left it. Unlike the expected difficulties of homesteading (which involves an understanding that we have to make peace with the new home-place), the experience of alienation in a homecoming is often seen as surprising, because we believe we "know" this home place. The assumption of knowledge, however, means that rather than letting our perception guide the encounter, as we do in the homesteading, what guides us in homecoming are *expectations*.[183]

These two relationships between home and place are reflected in the works discussed in the subsequent case studies. Each artist has left a home, then *homesteaded* and also experienced a *homecoming*. Understanding the respective

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[182] Ibid., 310. Here, Casey references the Hudson River School painters and the haiku poet Bashō, but as this dissertation argues, there is a much broader range of visual art works and artists that fits the bill, and he argues similarly for using "whatever means" are at your disposal (see ibid., 311).

[183] At the end of his section, Casey alludes to this: "In homecoming, I *expect*…" (ibid., 296, my emphasis).

experiences and their impact on artists and artwork also underscores the significance of the creative process and of visual art as ways of finding *our place* and being *at home*. Thanks to these "pictorial and narrational journeys," we are not lost and can turn the disempowering experience of displacement into acts of self-determination.

Virtual place

In creating our lens it is also crucial to consider that *place* cannot be reduced to physical place—or as phenomenologists would say: there is no *most basic level*. One way of understanding *place* is to consider in Casey's words that "place is more an *event* than a *thing* [...]," which leads us to the idea of *place as process* that had been discussed by Massey, and also includes the notion of *place as relationship*. If *place* cannot simply be defined on the basis of *locality*, we have to acknowledge that it also has a psychical, physical, cultural, historical and social level, and thus that it extends beyond the one-dimensional, "classical forms of universality."[184] The power and function of *place* lies in the fact that "a place is generative and regenerative on its own schedule. From it experiences are born and to it human beings (and other organisms) return for empowerment."[185]

While Casey does not discuss virtual places explicitly, the fact that "physicality" is not a necessary pre-requisite for *place* allows for many of his insights to be transferred into the realm of the virtual. In fact, the rather abstract "location" of

[184] Casey, "Space to Place," 31.

[185] Ibid., 26.

place provided by Casey in his preface to the 1993 edition of *Getting Back into Place*, positions *place* between memory and imagination (which simultaneously adds a temporal component, locating it between past and future): "If imagination projects us out *beyond* ourselves, while memory takes us back *behind* ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually *under* and *around* us. In imagining and remembering, we go into the ethereal and the thick respectively. By being in place, we find ourselves in what is subsistent and enveloping."[186] Here, the author provides a definition of place that is equally applicable to "art" (both the creative process as well as the work of art itself and the experience of the work are "subsistent and enveloping"). This is one of the reasons why art is able to provide a "place" for the displaced and ground/give roots to the artists discussed in this dissertation.

One particular type of virtual place has become increasingly important and visible in the art world: the internet. The online presence of many artists and their works attests to the significance of this virtual realm and underlines the differences of actual and virtual places. Access to an art gallery, for example, is limited by geography (or the means to get to a locale), opening hours, and "status."[187] Access to an online gallery is limited by access to the internet, and once this access has been gained, it is open to the visitor regardless of location, time of day, or "status." Another aspect of this virtual place is that the barrier to enter into the art world is

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[186] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* xvii. He picks up on this again in the last chapter of the book, and links it to the body: "Places are not so much the direct objects of sight or thought or recollection as what we feel *with* and *around*, *under* and *above*, *before* and *behind* our lived bodies." Ibid., 313.

[187] The concept of "status" is used here to include various matters of appearance, i.e. of being perceived to belong to a particular age group (not too "young"), a specific class (not too "poor"), and even a specific ethnicity (according to a colleague of mine from Stony Brook, who shall remain nameless, there continues to be a "white-bias").

lower—any person capable of creating a website can post their work, solicit feedback, and even sell it. However, since financial success requires prowess to promote and sell ones work, even in the virtual realm the advantage lies with those who have access to established networks of influential art critics and collectors. Still, in the competitive world of a global art market, the "discovery" of an artist through his or her internet presence can replace the need for curatorial "expeditions" to obscure locations (or at least require them only after initial contact has been made).

Non-places and Interplaces

The idea of non-places has been discussed by geographers, but the kind of places created by the various effects of "globalization"—ubiquitous travel, economic migrancy, and different levels of displacement (from those in the diaspora, to refugees or people in exile)—are quite different and best described by the term "interplaces" or "intermediate places."[188]

Returning briefly to the relationship of home and place in homecoming and homesteading, we can note that both relationships also contain an "interplace-moment," where we are either no longer or not yet at home.[189] Thus a subcategory of dis-placement is the inter-placement that affects a much larger number of people than the politically or economically disenfranchised—it can be encountered

[188] See Casey, "Space to Place," 39. Casey classifies the only true "non-places" as "void," which does not exist because "Being guarantees Place. As a result, the idea of the void is voided out." (in *Getting Back into Place,* x).

[189] As Casey puts it: "If in homecoming I come back to a home that was, in homesteading I come to a home to be. In the present in which I am engaged in both experiences, I find myself in a limbo between a past and future home." (Ibid., 299).

whenever there is "a failure to link up with places," which happens to anybody who is "mobile": from the migrant or the suburban commuter, to the jet-setting traveler or the person waiting at the bus stop.[190]

Interplaces are different from the *places* we generally focus on, largely because our experience of them is usually temporally limited. We often do not have any previous experiences of these *places*, we come without the desire for attachment, and we are generally lacking physical equity in them (beyond the money we leave in exchange for lodging and nourishment). Yet, these *places* are obviously important for the artists in this dissertation, because they are the landmarks on their road to "finding place." Some of these *places* are borders that are crossed or areas that lay between one place and another (the Atlantic Ocean, for example). A more significant set of *interplaces* are those associated with exhibitions as well as the abstract *place* of the "art world;" both consist of many sites, experiences, and include longer or shorter encounters with art institutions (such as galleries, auction houses, museums) and participants (from artists and curators, to scholars, collectors, and audiences).

Casey accords these kinds of pauses on the road (in Tuan's words, "place is pause")[191] the status of being "eventful"—sites, dwellings, and events that are equally

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[190] Ibid., xiv. The latter in particular are interesting to consider in the context of "place" in the Euro/American experience– they are in a location (and it matters little whether it is my hometown or vacation place), much more integrated into the streetscape/environment than, for example, airports, but they are not experienced as part of that location, even though we spend time at them (more or less depending on factors beyond our control) and might do so regularly. Bus stops are also very anti-social environments (unless we already know a fellow traveler) and perceived as inconveniences, which make them great examples of how we have dis-placed ourselves.

[191] Tuan, *Space and Place,* 6. While Tuan's idea comes out of the space/place discussion that is no longer relevant, it is still useful for highlighting the potential and power of place to embroil us if we only "pause" long enough to experience it.

"full of spatiotemporal specificities that reflect particular modes and moods of emplacement" as the places from and to which we are journeying.[192] In the experience of artists and their audiences, these eventful pauses range from the rather specific "one person, one venue, limited viewing" show to the traveling international group exhibition, which presents artists and their works in everchanging layouts, locals, and contexts. These are *places* that can be formative to the artist and can be formed by the artist.

Short pauses are the temporary exhibition type promoted by the biennials and art fairs (and the traditional gallery exhibit), which contrast with longer pauses that are the equivalent of homesteading by the work of art, for example when it is included in a museum's permanent collection or takes up residence in a specific locale as Public Art. Again, even short pauses feature *places* as "areas of possible *immersion* [and as] loci of and for involvement,"[193] and thus we should briefly revisit the concept of *place-making* in our discussion of *interplaces*. As Enwezor has pointed out, "exhibitions of contemporary art over the last two decades [...] have become place-making devices for articulating the empirical evidence of the imaginative practices of contemporary art across the world."[194] The above summary of these exhibitions shows the creation of new realms of art experience, which have exploded geographical, political, ideological, and conceptual boundaries.

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[192] Casey, "Space to Place," 39.

[193] Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* 280.

[194] Enwezor, "Place-Making," 114. Enwezor contrasts this recent model with past practices that effectively allowed putting artists in the "wrong place" (see ibid.).

In the case study of the artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, we can follow along with her process of transforming the site of an exhibition into a particular *place*, over and over again. *Place* encompasses everything in the exhibition of Wangechi Mutu's work, which becomes its own universe of exchanges—connecting not only the artist to her work, and her work with the audience, but also her works with each other, and then, through feedback, her audience with her.

Traveling exhibitions in particular have the potential for artists and their work to take advantage of the uniqueness of each place, while also bringing a shared experience to the different visitors. Though the concept of an exhibition, its selection of works, and artists, and their respective performances, remain the same in each new iteration and locale, they are not identical. In addition, these exhibitions also alter the site (some more so than others), and often bring in a different audience (from attracting new visitors, to more visitors, to alienating regulars). Even though in each instance they are just "a pause" (i.e. of limited duration), they are important in both the experience of the artist and of the audience. In the chapters to follow, a number of "eventful" pauses of the artists Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, IngridMwangiRobertHutter, and Wangechi Mutu, which have had an impact on their place in the art world and on place in their art, will be highlighted their respective case studies.

How to understand place in art

Taking all of these aspects into consideration, we can now begin to create a lens for our analysis. We acknowledge the complexity of *place*: the layers include the factors of location and of experience, the personal and the shared, the moments of alienation and of understanding, and of process as well as of the virtual. We observe the power of *place* in the acts of *homesteading* and *homecoming*, in the experience of displacement and *inter-placement*, and through its literal *embodiment* in the power of the body (as well as in its counterpart of the *disempowered* or *displaced* body). We can reference the presence of place in art history through different forms of place-based art as well as thematic representation of place in art works and through writings about these two types of manifestation. And from this we can move into our own observation, perception and experience of the artist and her work. We witness the transformation of a site, the way *place* is re-created, and how it is shared. As we probe, we become aware of the formative aspects of the re-created place (both in the artist and in ourselves), and—through the specific format and content of the work—we gain an understanding of *place* (both referenced and experienced). The experience of the work affects us physically, intellectually, and emotionally; we can fall in love with *place* or be alienated, we exhibit empathy or assess its effects on us, we might try to distance ourselves from the experience, but we cannot undo nor "un-see." Because the "pictorial and narrational journeys" are crucial elements in *finding place*, applying this interdisciplinary lens to artists and works that have manifestly

gone through this process, allows us to transform them into guides for our own journey of *getting back into place*.[195]

With this I want to return to and reiterate the idea that in order to understand *place* we need to have a guide with "outside" experience to situate our own "inside" information. In his analysis discussed above, Geertz not only pointed out that it may be difficult for us to "see" *place*, but also added that for our study of *place* there is no theory nor is there any data that could be analyzed in quantitative terms. Instead "to study place, or, more exactly, some people or other's sense of place, it is necessary to hang around with them—to attend to them as experiencing subjects."[196] This is more or less what this dissertation set out to do. Though I have just proposed a lens that allows for us to observe, perceive and experience *place*, the full capability of this guide only emerges in our commitment to the experience. Through many personal as well as published interviews with the artists, numerous exposures and encounters with their works, and by reconstructing the respective personal paths and histories, I have "hung around" these three women artists for a number of years. Each of them has found different place/s and has developed a different mode of expression to portray and understand them. Each presents a unique perspective that has enriched my own understanding of both their art and of *place*. As we, and our fellow human beings in the 21st century, face the feeling of displacement at one point in our lives or

[195] Here I lean on Edward Casey's book title and the implied broad reach that encompasses both the discipline and the individual; modifying my discipline to "art history" and the individual as specifically the viewer of a particular work of art.

[196] Geertz, "Afterword," 260.

at many, these artists have valuable lessons for us. Our own displacements need not be that extreme or painful, but beyond mere coping mechanisms, we can see in these works that *place* is ours and that if we are lost, we can find *our place* again.

PART 2 ARTIST CASE STUDIES

For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me
really visible; for the first time I appear to myself
completely turned inside out under my own eyes.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty[197]

I exist in an awareness and consciousness that is
essentially the problematic of this body. I don't have
the privilege of fetishizing some form of invisibility.
Wangechi Mutu

CHAPTER 3: WANGECHI MUTU

Body as *place* as body

When you first encounter the 2D works of Wangechi Mutu—her collages combining cutouts of women, machines, and accessories with watercolor, printed tape and sparkling paint—many associations will appear before the mind's eye, but *place* is not usually among them. Here, place certainly does not seem to be represented in the same obvious and in-your-face manner as in the works of the two other artists discussed in this dissertation. Alas, the reverse can be said to be true: place is so obvious that we actually overlook it. We do not perceive it, because it is too familiar, because it is not distant enough. Mutu's place is *the* place. It is the *place* that might be considered the first among places: the body.

The mural size 2006 collage *A Shady Promise* [figure 1] can introduce us to the complexity of the body as place.[198] Beginning with the title, the work evokes

[197] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 143.

[198] The work is 87.5 x 108.75 inches, double the size of many of the artist's larger works. *A Shady Promise* is also the title of a 2008 monograph on the artist.

different kinds of *place*: it forecasts a possible sexual encounter at a particular place and time, while another place emerges when reversing the order of the words, as the "promise of shade" under a tree. This reversal also extends into the physical quality of the experience: the latter offers ideas of something "cooling down" rather than the "heating up" of a situation implied by the former.[199] A potential third meaning could be discerned, if we associate the *shady* with the meaning of "shades," or sunglasses, worn by an implied protagonist. This layering of multiple meanings established by the title is then mimicked by the collage's two key elements: a female figure and a tree-like form, which are taking up the central position in the right and left halves of the work, respectively. Although the main gender identifiers are not present—the figure lacks breasts and has a torso hiding any potential markers under a cover of imitation wood contact paper[200]—the figure is clearly portrayed as female: from the pronounced luscious lips, to the feminine flowery bracelet, and the pose of the body, which straddles the tree form in a way that is reminiscent of pornographic depictions of women.[201] The straddling pose also already hints at a metaphorical level of the body as a bridge—connecting past and present, linking cultures, places and experiences.

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[199] The additional layer of contrasting thermic qualities of the pair were first suggested to me by Dr. Katherine Zubko. Further associations of the title, such as the colloquial "throwing shade," could also be explored in another context.

[200] Already in the choice of material, the place of this 2D body carries the memory of other places: in a conversation with the author, the artist affirmed that using this material was partly inspired by her encounter with it in East Germany (private conversation, March 21st, 2013). There is a curious lack of gender identifiers in a number of other collages featuring what are supposed to be female bodies.

[201] Lest we should think of it as asexual, the artist herself also identifies the figure as female. Wangechi Mutu, lecture at the Nasher Museum, Durham, NC, March 21st, 2013. Author's notes.

A similarly obscure yet clear presentation is provided for the tree. On both the left and right side the tree is shown with roots entering into/coming out of the ground. Thus, the trunk never extends upwards into a leafy crown, but rather it bends down on either side, entirely without branches and leaves, into a root system. Without these leaves, the promise of shade itself remains a "shady"—because empty—promise. All the while, the straddling pose of the legs, sultry eyes (visible as though there were holes in the sunglasses), slightly parted lips, and the placement of the arms and hands—guiding the viewer's eye to the assumed pubic area—do seem to validate the *shady* promise. Yet upon closer inspection we are foiled again: the torso and arms are created with an imitation-wood material that implies the figure has morphed with the tree (which itself is made of imitation-marble material with various brown accents). With the choice of material, the artist disguises one in the other, creating a mask that denies the viewer clarity on where the human begins and the plant ends.[202] Two arm-like roots extending out from below the woman's hands and thighs confirm the impression that the tree is coming out of her loins and into as well as out of the ground. Both tree and woman are one, surrounded by a nimbus of silver metallic "grass," which ends in whimsical, feathery extensions of translucent fuchsia.

One famous female Kenyan who is linked to trees in a similarly inseparable way is Professor Wangari Maathai, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 and founder of the Green Belt Movement, an organization that has spent the past three

[202] The idea of a masquerade could also be implied by the shades worn by the figure. In fact, as Dr. Leisa Rundquist has pointed out, the figure's outfit and display seems to put on a show similar to a drag performance or a pole-dancing act.

decades planting trees to counteract the effects of environmental degradation (such as drying up of water sources, increasing scarcity of firewood, and food insecurity).[203] Maathai and her work symbolize the importance of trees not only for contemporary Kenyans, but also for the pre-colonial residents of the area, especially the Kikuyu. As is common in Kenya, both Maathai and Mutu have African and Western cultural roots. They are Kikuyu, but received a Catholic school education and practiced their spirituality as Catholics (i.e. by going to mass) rather than in manners associated with Kikuyu beliefs and customs (i.e. involving animal sacrificial offerings). As the anthropologist Bernardo Bernardi has pointed out, the original identification and affiliation with Kikuyu heritage as a complete system—cultural, political, social and religious—no longer holds true in the late 20th century where "a Kikuyu is no longer a mere Kikuyu, but a Catholic, an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Muslim […]."[204] Still, the creation myths and the symbols of the belief system have prevailed into this reordered existence. Most prominent among them is the mythology of the Sycamore Fig Tree, which was considered sacred by a number of ethnic groups in Central Africa, including the Kikuyu, and features in practices ranging from prayers for rain to improving fertility—for both humans and their livestock.[205] Mutu has repeatedly emphasized the centrality of the tree in the different creation stories she heard as a child (both Christian and Kikuyu) and how for her the representations of

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[203] *Green Belt Movement, a*ccessed July 25th, 2013, http://www.greenbeltmovement.org

[204] Bernardo Bernardi, "Old Kikuyu religion 'igongona' and 'mambura': sacrifice and sex: re-reading Kenyatta's ethnography," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 48, no. 2 (June 1993): 181.

[205] See *Green Belt Movement*

spirituality were similarly linked: birds were used as the symbols of spirits in the realm of nature and in the Catholic realm, where the Holy Spirit (as a white dove) descended on the heads of saints.[206]

Returning to Mutu's collage, the title's *promise* thus takes on yet another level of meaning—as a reference to the spiritual background of the artist. It doubles as both the biblical promise (referring to the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life) and the Kikuyu promise of the continuation of life tied to the ritual space of the Sycamore Fig Tree. These two aspects of the artist's experience (being a Catholic Kikuyu) are also represented in the smaller elements of the work: two birds, surrounded by a white crown or flaming halo on either panel; a naked mother-child pair that sits atop one of the birds on the right panel; a sun-like element that radiates its narrow white beams across the entire diptych (only leaving the female figure untouched); a small sun disk-like golden nimbus behind the bird on the left panel, and what turns out to be a hyena head on the same, now presumed "bird." The experience of spirituality is manifested as a *place* through the use of shared symbols—from the birds and their positioning on the figure's head, to the mother and child image that is common in both African and Christian beliefs (Mary and Jesus), as well as through the centrality of the tree. The body as the site of that experience is emplaced in the collage through the symbols and through the body of the artist who has created the collage. And yet, with the flaming crowns, situated above both tree and woman, what seems to be conveyed is a *promise* intentionally left open and vague—one that is at the same time accessible and mysterious. This brings us back to the crucial role of the body, which

[206] Mutu, lecture, March 21st, 2013.

serves as a means to gather all of these *places* into one locus: the physical locatedness of flesh and ground, the memory of experience in places and of *place*-experiences, the history of cultures and of individuals, and of the tangible (such as shape and form) and the intangible (concepts created around and projected onto a body).

The Body as the Place of Experience

The artist has credited her own experience as an immigrant coming to the U.S. with this awareness of *place* and of the body, and specifically refers to the very fracturing of identity and displacement of her own body as inspiration for the style and content of her work.[207] In an interview with Lauri Firstenberg, Mutu admits that "being transplanted changes your notions of self and survival. I'm sure the more extreme your migration story is, the more complicated do issues of personal and cultural survival become for you. Displacement anxiety and a fractured identity are implied in my drawings; there are mutilations and awkward attachments in the collage work."[208]

Added to this personal experience are the more general encounters with the expectations leveled at all newcomers—in an effective double strike which only sees

[207] In her lectures and interviews, Mutu often provides a background of colonial history in addition to her personal history in order to "contextualize some of this work that I've been doing and also just to talk about this idea of broken-up-ness and coming from a fractured space." Wangechi Mutu, Penny W. Stamps Speaker Series lecture, November 18th, 2010; accessed online August 5th, 2012, playgallery.org/playlists/stamps#my_dirty_little_heaven

[208] Firstenberg, "Wangechi Mutu. Perverse Anthropology: The Photomontage of Wangechi Mutu," in: *Looking Both Ways* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2004), 142.

immigrants through the lens of preconceived notions, and at the same time requires them to adapt and conform to the norms associated with the host society—and the perception of the immigrant as an outsider or intruder. All of these can be observed as colliding or clashing with each other in the site of the immigrant's body.[209] As the primary place of experience, each person understands the body most acutely, and, as Mutu points out, for the immigrant or displaced person this awareness extends to a way of knowing "that you have infested or invaded a place where you don't belong."[210] Because this act of "invasion" has been carried out by the body and because the body is also the visible marker of the perceived otherness/outsiderness as well as the object onto which expectations are projected, it is this body that becomes the central element of the immigrant's struggle.[211]

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[209] This is also echoed in Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's article on the intersections of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology and the diasporic body: "I am suggesting that the dis-placed diasporic body can be, and is often, a site of conflict and despair and not this wonderful consumerised, global mish-mash of difference and transgressive hybridity that is celebrated in contemporary theory and popular culture." In: "Rethinking diasporicity: embodiment, emotion, and the displaced origin," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2008): 152-153.

[210] Mutu, "Interview," 119.

[211] In her analysis of Merleau-Ponty's text *The Visible and the Invisible,* Bakare-Yusuf argues along similar lines for the broader diasporic experience: "If possessing a body entails being possessed by a world or being-in-place, being *displaced* or being *out-of-place* may have serious experiential and existential consequences for diasporic subjects." In: "Rethinking diasporicity," 152. This reflects Casey, who argues that "it is evident that our innermost sense of personal identity [...] deeply reflects our implacement. It follows that threats to this implacement are also threats to our entire sense of well-being." In: *Getting Back into Place,* 307. Though Bakare-Yusuf cites Casey's seminal work, she does not take advantage of the argument he develops (particularly in the last part of the book)—nor of similar points made by Relph and Tuan, see discussion above (chapter 2)—and therefore, although presenting a fascinating perspective, ultimately falls short in connecting the diasporic body with the power of place/displacement.

The tally of Mutu's experiences is laid out in an interview with fellow artist Barbara Kruger: Her background (which she terms "middle-class African"), her schooling (Catholic school), and the place she grew up in ("not the richest country on Earth, but a really wonderful sort of place") allowed her to be blissfully ignorant to the way she might be viewed by others, specifically those outside her geographical and cultural environment.[212] Corresponding with international pen pals, this unawareness received its first reality check while she was still a teenager in Kenya. Wangechi Mutu recalls getting asked "insane questions [for example] don't they know that we don't *literally* live on trees?" that opened her eyes to the ignorance of others.[213] As a student in the United States, her experience shifted to constantly having "to explain the fact that I was *African*. [In Kenya] because everyone is black around me … there is not this constant affirmation of your blackness because you are all black."[214]

Today, Mutu largely sees the stereotypes being leveled at her as a lack of contextualization in the popular "marketing" of contemporary Africa as a tourist destination. Beginning with advertisements by airlines in the 1960s that claim "Come to Africa before the 20th century beats you to it,"[215] to recent photography that focuses on the wildlife, the Maasai, and other traditional aspects of life, this marketing practice excludes anything that is perceived as "Western"—the cities, the

[212] Mutu, "Interview," 120.

[213] Mutu talking about stereotypes she encountered as a Kenyan in the West. Q&A after the lecture at the Nasher Museum, Durham, NC, March 21, 2013. Author's notes.

[214] Ibid. (original emphasis in the artist's lecture)

[215] From a 1966 Lufthansa print advertisement that Mutu references in her Penny W. Stamps Speaker Series lecture, November 18th, 2010.

schools, the skyscrapers. While the agenda driving this approach may seem benign, i.e. the positive effects (of bringing in tourists) outweighing the negative (of perpetuating stereotypes), it promotes the continuation of ignorance with which the artist herself then continues to be confronted in her audience, as some of the entries in exhibition guestbooks attest.[216] Thus, her own body serves not only as the depository for her experiences, but also as a reminder of the black female body in history.

Finding Her *Place* in Art

When Wangechi Mutu decided to pursue a degree in the United States she experienced a complete shift—what the geographer Edward Relph identified as being in a position of "existential outsideness" and phenomenologists like Edward Casey have acknowledged as the unique situation of recognizing something as a place, yet lacking any familiarity with it.[217] On every level her previous position and self-image were affected by her relocation to the U.S.—nothing fit with her experiences of class and race, nor with the social, political and cultural conditions she had known.[218] Of her new experience of "race and class" she says: "I became the minority; instead of

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[216] Some particularly poignant examples from the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin (for Mutu's *Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year* exhibition titled *Wangechi Mutu. My Dirty Little Heaven*), reveal how a presumably educated audience is completely missing the point: "Ich stelle die Frage, was soll das Ganze? (I'm posing the question, what's all this supposed to be about?)" and "Disappointing for Deutsche Bank – try harder next time. This is hollow meaningless nothingness hyper elevated to some sor [sic] of modern ok ness. Shame, (from the U.K.)" (In: Guestbook for the exhibition *My Dirty Little Heaven,* 2010, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin).

[217] See discussion above and Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 5-8.

[218] See Mutu, "Interview," 120.

being middle class, I entered the working class because I was an artist and very poor."[219] In order to comprehend this shift, her first instinct was not to focus on art, but on anthropology: "That's why I wanted to study anthropology, because [...] I realized how relative these conditions are and how particular they are to the history of a place."[220]

The place Wangechi Mutu had left before becoming an art student was comparable to that of many of her peers in the U.S. in that it had none of the hardships and miseries that the popular imagination likes to associate with "artists"—in particular with artists hailing from a country Westerners include in their definition of the "Third World."[221] Her family was indeed middle-class—not just in a Kenyan, but a general definition of the term—her mother was a nurse who managed a pharmacy, her father a businessman who became a scholar of African history and literature.[222] Wangechi Mutu grew up with two brothers and a sister, and according to her sibling's somewhat nostalgic recollection, she not only expressed her interest in drawing from a young age, but already liked to use the walls of their home as her canvas—at least until her parents decided to invest in art supplies to save on home renovating costs.[223] She received her first formal art instruction at the Loreto

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[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid. Mutu actually did study Anthropology at the United World College of the Atlantic in Wales, receiving her international baccalaureate degree in 1991, and enrolled at Parsons The New School for Design when she first arrived in NYC.

[221] Still, the artist recalls that living in Kenya during the regime of Daniel arap Moi, she was aware of instances of media censorship and of human rights abuses that could be said to go beyond what her peers in the U.S. or U.K. experienced.

[222] See "Wangechi Mutu – Portrait of an Artist," *Nairobi Star*, May 21, 2011.

Convent Msongari School she attended in Nairobi, but left her home country in 1989 to finish high-school at the United World College of the Atlantic in Wales.[224]

Mutu's stay in the UK and her subsequent decision to study in the U.S. were a result of the realization that she needed to leave Kenya to develop her voice as an artist.[225] She even goes so far as to say that the one thing lacking in the urban environment of Nairobi to this day is "this vibrant, beautiful, hip, edgy contemporary art scene."[226] Even though Mutu professes to have "outed" herself as an artist during her time in Wales, she did not immediately pursue an art degree. Instead, she worked at a graphic design company in Kenya for a year, and when she began her academic career in the U.S. she enrolled in anthropology and cultural studies.[227] Yet before long, the young artist Wangechi Mutu discovered that she needed to attend a dedicated art school to pursue her career goal. This school was Cooper Union College in New York, which attracted talented students from all over the country and around the globe because it did not charge tuition (or rather—it offered each admitted

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[223] Recollections of Karungari Mutu in "Wangechi Mutu – Portrait of an Artist." Later, the artist actually corroborates this recollection in her interview with Trevor Schoonmaker: "I'd end up drawing on the wall even though I clearly remember being told, 'Do not draw on the wall," in *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey*, ed. Trevor Schoonmaker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 95.

[224] Mutu also credits an even earlier convent school trip to France and Switzerland with getting the travel bug, in Schoonmaker, *A Fantastic Journey,* 95.

[225] "And I remember at that particular point, 20 years ago, thinking that *this is not where I'm going to develop*… and I went to school in Wales." (Italics for change of tone) Mutu's recollection, lecture, March 21st, 2013.

[226] Ibid.

[227] The graphic design company was McCann-Erickson, see Schoonmaker, *A Fantastic Journey,* 97; Mutu's first academic institution in the U.S. was Parsons School of Design, see "Interview," 120.

student a full-tuition scholarship)[228] and had a great track record as the alma mater of many successful individuals.[229] Mutu's decision to continue her training with a graduate degree—motivated not only by the desire to expand her horizon even further, but by the need to create a solid foundation for her career—is an equally important step, which the artist acknowledges as "a strategic decision to pick a grad school that had the right name, quote-unquote. [...] You really do have to set yourself up for being successful, self-reliant, figuring things out for yourself [...] I picked Yale."[230]

Though the environment was entirely alien, in her new life as an art student Mutu did not differ very much from her American peers: the costs of living in New York City put a serious dent into the lifestyle she was accustomed to, and required her to take a range of waitressing and nannying jobs to make ends meet. Two particular experiences from this time period would prove crucial to the artist's creative process and career. The first was the discovery of recycling and recombining materials to create her works, which ultimately led to the medium she is most known for: collage (though a number of experiences preceding her time in the U.S. also seem to have lead up to this point and should not be forgotten).[231] The second was

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[228] Accessed September 12th, 2012, http://cooper.edu/admissions/facts/faq

[229] A list of 265 successful alums is posted on the university's website: http://www.cualumni.com/s/1289/indexNoRtcol.aspx?sid=1289&gid=1&pgid=461

[230] See Schoonmaker, *A Fantastic Journey,* 98.

[231] In the spring of 1990, Mutu visited Berlin as an exchange student, where she was amazed by the fakeness of the living environment. Her host family had cut out images of things they liked from magazines and pasted them on the walls—see artist statement in *Wangechi Mutu. My Dirty Little Heaven* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 33. The furniture had been similarly been pasted over with *D-c-fix*® (a German contact paper

her experience as an *outsider*—to American culture, to working class life, and to the history of the African American diaspora. This experience helped her because it allowed her to see beyond the status quo: "this structure [of society] is like any other matrix: It's man-made. Once I realized that, I also realized you can play with it; you can mentally play with the freedoms you do have to transfigure yourself—you can embody something different from what society claims and thinks you are."[232]

Collage as Fact and as Fiction

Although Mutu had picked Yale, graduate school did not mean instant success or wealth—a fact that the artist recounts as her humble artistic beginnings to her audience in Kenya: "I'd scrounge the neighborhood dustbins for discarded fashion magazines to cut out images. I also ate lots of cheap tinned tuna fish."[233] While this image of the artist dumpster-diving or digging through trash cans for scraps of paper may be true, it also aligns with the folklore of the history of collage, which posits that it is the artists' lack of means that drives them into the technique. Whether need-driven or not, Mutu did indeed obtain some great supplies by going through stacks of

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that imitates more expensive materials, from wood to marble—the same material used in *A Shady Promise*). This expression of desire for material things and the particular way in which it manifested itself struck the artist because it had paralleled her own experience as a teenager (and that of every child who has ever cut up a toy catalogue) and also because it appeared so utterly pathetic to the outsider.

[232] Mutu, "Interview," 120. The artist continues by acknowledging the *outsider advantage*: "I know people who can't do that, who don't believe that, who don't see America's social-political-class-race-gender conditions as completely and utterly contrived, because they've never seen outside of it." Ibid.

[233] Mutu's recollection in "Wangechi Mutu – Portrait of an Artist."

recycled print and initially collected discarded material before she began to purchase particular kinds of publications.

Due to her particular choice of medium and its history, most catalogues for Wangechi Mutu's exhibitions contain at least one essay dissecting the technique (often very generally) and discussing the artist's influences. Two of the artists that are always cited as her influences are the German Hannah Höch and African American Romare Bearden. This is somewhat surprising, as they are not the artists Mutu herself cites as sources for inspiration,[234] and it might ultimately be a misunderstanding—traceable to one of Mutu's first major exhibition catalogues, in which she responds to the question of influences by acknowledging the artists mentioned by the interviewer Lauri Firstenberg (though Mutu's praise is quite minimal: she calls Bearden's work "the least reactionary" and says she admires "Höch's work and simple process").[235] In addition to comparisons with Höch and

[234] Among the catalogue essays that reference either one or both as inspiration are ones written by Okwui Enwezor, Matthew Evans, Lauri Firstenberg, Jennifer A. Gonzalez, Courtney J. Martin, David Moos, and Carol Thompson. Wangechi Mutu has said that artists who inspire her are Claude Cahun, Katherine Dunham, Coco Fusco, and Hussein Chalayan (see Firstenberg, "Perverse Anthropology," 141) and that the idea of different perspectives on one picture plane was inspired by Picasso, see interview with Robert Enright, "Resonant Surgeries: The Collaged World of Wangechi Mutu," *Border Crossings* 27, no. 1 (2008): 28-46.

[235] Firstenberg, "Perverse Anthropology," 141. Firstenberg's knowledge of the history with collage not only leads her to the question, but actually makes her claim that "Höch's series 'From an Ethnographic Museum' [is] an undeniable point of departure for Mutu's photomontages and for her fascination with the absurd and abject." (Ibid., 137) Unless the part of the interview that states as much has been left out in this publication, it seems preposterous to make such a claim based on Mutu's printed response. The reductiveness of such comparisons is still only rarely addressed. One of the few authors who have, is Matthew Evans who states "[this] shouldn't pigeonhole Mutu's work; there's more to it than Hannah Höch-referencing feminist readings, or Romare Bearden-referencing racial interpretations." Accessed online in *ArtMag* 59, on July 25th, 2013, http://www.db-artmag.com/en/59/feature/wangechi-mutu-between-beauty-and-horror/

Bearden, another artist is often cited in connection with Mutu's collage works: Candice Breitz.

The white South African Breitz and black Kenyan Mutu did begin producing collages at roughly the same time (in the mid 1990s), but it is the fact that the latter's 2006 series *The Ark Collection* [figure 2] seems to share much of its formal aspects and content with the former's 1996 *Rainbow Series* [figure 3], that has invited comparisons.[236] While the content of *The Ark Collection* will be discussed below, the perception of stylistic or formal similarities can be used to reveal what are actually two very different approaches to the same medium. Among the shared means is that both use photos from magazine and print publications as their main material, and partial bodies as the key component of their collage. For Mutu, this is different from an earlier series, the 2001 *Pin Up* series, which primarily used cutouts just for eyes, lips, hair, and the occasional ornament or clothing clip and watercolor for the rest of the body. For Breitz this differs from her previous work titled *Ghost Series* (1994-96), in which the artist used Tipp-Ex™ to white-out the black African female bodies, while leaving the rest of the photograph intact.

Beyond these superficial similarities, however, the differences become obvious. To begin, Breitz uses photographs of the collages as her medium, whereas Mutu displays the original, cut out materials. For *The Ark Collection*, Mutu has also

[236] See f.ex. Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (Bologna: Damiani, 2009), 48. It is also curious that Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu argue that Mutu's work is "less about ethnographic figurations and their morbid obsessions on the naked black body [than those of Breitz and Höch]," considering the fact that neither of those two artists studied anthropology or ethnology—unlike Mutu—nor were any more qualified to examine those "ethnographic figurations" (Ibid.) Enwezor reprises these comparisons in his essay "Weird Beauty: Ritual Violence and Archaeology of Mass Media in Wangechi Mutu's Work," in *Wangechi Mutu. My Dirty Little Heaven* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 26-34.

limited her sources to just two originals (with few exceptions)—which are overlapped without cropping, thus revealing the other source at the edges. The origin of the two sources is representative of two exploiting views of the black female body: the idea of the "traditional" or "authentic" African woman and the contemporary African American pornographic view. Breitz, on the other hand, combines the "traditional" representation with pornographic photos of white women. And whereas Breitz creates new, although mismatched composite figures, Mutu's mash-ups are intended to obscure the existing figures. Not only is the viewer of *The Ark Collection* denied the complete figure, but even after hours of examination he or she still gets to see the one only in the outline of the other. This is one of many techniques used by Mutu, and along with her other approaches it reveals how she differs from her presumed influences: the binaries in Mutu's work are not intended to be one *or* the other, as in a parallel construction that focuses on contrast or the Western simplistic "black & white" model, but they exist in various stages of interaction.[237] They are one *and* the other, they are *within* the other, and they are one only *with* the other.

As for the actual influences and Mutu's "discovery" of collage it is required to tease these and other fictions out of the narrative of its origins, which has led some scholars to deny the importance of its beginning altogether.[238] However, the fact is that collage is something Wangechi Mutu grew into and that it has been uniquely

[237] In her interview with Firstenberg, Mutu further distances herself from the Hannah Höch comparison by contrasting the German artist's practice with her own: "But the idea of clear-cut binaries—African/European, archaic/modern, and religion/pornography—I've never really believed in that." ("Perverse Anthropology," 141).

[238] Courtney J. Martin states: "It is arguable, and perhaps, ultimately unimportant to locate what ignited Wangechi Mutu's collage practice." Martin, "Fracture and Actions: Wangechi Mutu's Collages 1999-2010," in *Wangechi Mutu. My Dirty Little Heaven* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 52.

shaped by her experiences in different *places*. Thus, it can be traced through her exposure to magazine clippings on the walls of her host family's apartment in East Berlin in 1990, to the inclusion of collages in her application to undergraduate school,[239] to the fact that Mutu augmented numerous sketchbook drawings with collage elements beginning in the mid 1990s, and, after graduating from Cooper Union, to her creation of "collaged" sculptures, which were made from whatever the artist had available—bottles, feather, tar, old umbrellas, and finishing them with fiber and seashells. Actually, Mutu's contribution to her first major group exhibition, the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997), was a sculpture piece titled *Four Square Pillahs*. Collage has thus become embodied in the artist and correspondingly each stage of her education, travels and relocations has become reflected in her approach.

Even though Wangechi Mutu does not use images of herself in her collages, entering the work primarily through translated experience and as its creator, she still encounters the conflation of the fiction of her body of work with the reality of her own artist body.[240] However, Mutu has used her own body in her video works, though she recently also moved away from this practice by featuring the musician/performer Santigold as the protagonist in *The End of Eating Everything* (2013).

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[239] See Enright, "Resonant Surgeries," 28-46.

[240] As she says in her interview with Matthew Evans: "People simplify my work and always see these figures as black women, when it could very well be a purple insect … So people confuse me for my work." Accessed online in *ArtMag* 59.

Symptomatic of her artistic curiosity, Mutu chose not to limit herself to one medium during her time in graduate school, but rather explored and "tried everything out because the resources and equipment and infrastructure were there."[241] Allowing herself this freedom meant Mutu had an opportunity to discover new uses that were outside the established structures of drawing, painting, and sculpture. As it turned out, the assemblage technique of her earlier sculptures could be translated easily from 3D into 2D, though the painted surfaces of her initial, post-graduate collages were rather flat. Since 2003 Mutu's collages have taken a turn toward the three-dimensional again, partly due to the use of a broad range of materials, the addition of glitter and pearls, and in particular through the integration of her collages into her installations. The multi-step process of "discovering" collage as her discipline not only provided Wangechi Mutu with a medium that could take advantage of her disparate skill sets (drawing and sculpture), but it also reflected her personal experiences (especially that of displacement) and her curiosity about the experiences of others.

Comparing her first successful collages in 2001 to her 2003 work *People in Glass Towers Should Not Imagine Us* [figure 4] reveals how the artist's approach to the medium processes her experiences. Initially, Mutu painted much of the image and the bodies in earthy hued watercolors and applied cutouts only for eyes, lips,

[241] See interview with Schoonmaker, *A Fantastic Journey,* 98. The artist does not elaborate on what in particular encouraged her to experiment, rather it is implied that the resources at a well-endowed Ivy League school—like Yale—foster a kind of "it's here, so why not try it out" attitude. In contrast to this, in his 2010 essay "Weird Beauty: Ritual Violence and Archaeology of Mass Media in Wangechi Mutu's Work," Okwui Enwezor tries to establish a clear trajectory from sculpture to collage, which seems to have fallen victim to the clarity of hindsight: "With the shift from found, funky materials built into curious figurative assemblages to the flat space of her collages, the formal parameters of her work took a clear confident turn." (Enwezor, "Weird Beauty," 28).

hair and the occasional clothing piece or ornament. By 2003, the figures no longer appear in an empty or sparsely populated "space," where the background was simply the shade of the watercolor paper—they are now carefully placed in an environment created specifically for them.[242] The bodies of the figures are still painted, although now, in addition to the use of flesh-tones, we can see the mottled, ink stained skin appear that will become a key feature of Mutu's bodies. The cutouts are also no longer limited to the few initial items: the environment around the figures gets populated with various kinds of vegetation and animals, the figures themselves are given various attributes (especially those seen as "ethnic" such as animal skins and art works), and the previously mutilated bodies are now modified with machine parts—primarily taken from motorcycles. And yet, there is continuity in her collages though it is not as visible in the technique as it is in the "content." The set of pin ups from 2001 are Mutu's reference to the then recent history of civil war in Sierra Leone and Liberia, which had resulted in a large number of amputees not as a result of mines but due to the practice of delimbing as an attention getting device and a scare tactic by the militia.[243] For the artist, this connected the present day to the history of colonial violence across the continent. The combination of past/present and of violating/reclaiming the body is one element that continues in the 2003 collage,

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[242] Mutu acknowledges that she initially did not "think about the place these people were in, or these characters, I was mostly thinking about these gestures." Penny W. Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series, November 18th, 2010.

[243] The word "delimb" is generally used in forestry to describe the action of stripping a tree of its branches. Considering the many trees in the artist's work and the fact that this action is limited to "limbs," it seems a fitting descriptor for the horrific practice. In the artist's recollection, this occurred right around the time of her completion of graduate school (actually 1989-1996 & 1999-2003 for Liberia and 1991-2002 for Sierra Leone). Ibid.

although in the more concrete context of U.S. foreign relations. In *People in Glass Towers* Mutu references two recent events—the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the attack of 9/11, though the title was created in reaction to the latter.

As in her previous collages, *place* is literally *embodied* in this work. To begin, there are two bodies, contrasted through both skin tone and pose. While the white figure sports blue eyes, smallish lips, one pink ear, and blond hair and is modified with machine parts as feet and jewelry pieces in lieu of shoulder pads, the brown figure has brown eyes, large lips, and features an assortment of wood carved "African" sculptures and an elephant head instead of hair. Unlike the naked white figure, her body is augmented with leopard skin tights ending in heels made of African stool sculptures as well as a top in a different leopard print. And while the white figure is casually leaning against a tree in the left panel, the exotic coded figure on the right is squatting in what the artist has referred to as a pose used in porn as well as a derogatory way of depicting Africans.[244]

With works like *People in Glass Towers*, Mutu began to provide just enough props to establish an environment for her figures—a place that appears to situate them—and yet immediately removes them from any recognizable place. This helps retain the initial focus on the figure and on body as *place*, as it underscores the idea that the body carries its environment with it. The relationship between the two figures further emphasizes that whether they like it or not, they share the one *place*. The figure on the left is depicted smaller and seems emotionally and physically

[244] Mutu, lecture, March 21st, 2013.

detached from the one on the right, though in fact they are connected by a thin, black, ribbon-like line, which explodes into a handful of red (blood) stains. With her two figures the artist comments on the literally explosive practice of judging others in complete ignorance of their reality—especially when we share the other side of that reality.

Contested Place – the Black Female Body

In the previously mentioned interview with Barbara Kruger, Mutu refers to Kruger's piece *Your Body is a Battleground* to highlight her own use of the body "as a metaphor and as a focal point from which to engage people in the discussion of, […] What do people expect of you?"[245] Though both artists use the female body, interestingly, neither of them uses their own body, and both appropriate images of women's bodies already in circulation (see discussion below). Beyond the obvious meaning of this statement as a key to unlock her work, it also refers to the larger scope of the artist's oeuvre: her use of the black female body as the subject of her work—a body that has been inscribed and re-inscribed many times over by groups ranging from colonial artists and Victorian age moralists, to racist ideologues in the United States clashing (to a larger or lesser extent) with African American intellectuals and a broad range of scholars (including anthropologists, sociologists, and ethnographers), to the more recent manifestations represented by images

[245] Mutu, "Interview," 119. Although Kruger's work is not part of the printed article, it is interesting to note that Kruger uses the dualism of photo positive/negative—split right down the middle of a woman's face—to visualize the "battle" on women's rights (it was designed for a march in support of women's and abortion rights in 1989). The battle metaphor is also applicable to many of Mutu's female creations, who reflect the ravages of war on their bodies.

popularized by hip-hop culture on the one hand and black feminist groups on the other.[246]

An analysis of the long, charged history of (re)presenting the black female body is beyond the purview of this dissertation, however, there are aspects of this history playing into our understanding of Mutu's work and these aspects warrant reiteration in this context.[247] For the 20th and 21st century, the use of mass-produced imagery to impact public opinion (especially in regards to the black female body) can be said to have originated with the colonial postcard in the 19th century. The combination of technological advances (photography and print) with the need to justify and communicate the undertaking of colonizing an entire continent to those who stayed behind, and with the popular scientific practice of classifying, categorizing and cataloging, resulted in making the postcard the turn-of-the-century equivalent of the millennial internet applications Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—all rolled into one. It is hard to exaggerate the power of postcards at this time: they

[246] On the third page of her essay "Decolonizing Black Bodies," Barbara Thompson cites Tara McDowell citing Stuart Hall on this history. What is interesting about this quoted quote, is that she references a larger debate which comes down to gender getting mixed with racism in an effective double strike against the black female body, or as Hall put it: "Just as masculinity always constructs femininity as double—simultaneously Madonna and Whore—so racism constructs the black subject: noble savage and violent avenger. And in the doubling, fear and desire double for one another and play across the structure of otherness, complicating its politics." Hall, "New Ethnicities," in '*Race,' Culture and Difference,* ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992), 254.

[247] A number of publications have already successfully embarked on this analysis, among them Lisa Gail Collins, *The Art of History. African American Women Artists Engage the Past* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image. The History of African-American Women Artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures. Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Barbara Thompson, ed., *Black Womanhood. Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

were the medium that documented the encounters, shaped them to fit with the preconceived notions of those in the position of power and privilege, and then disseminated this manufactured experience as fact among different European audiences. Crucial to these portrayals are two notions that were considered the essence of the "African subject": tradition and eroticism. This dualism could easily be combined into one when the subject was female: tradition as exoticism of custom and costume and the erotic as an exoticism of the body. The colonial representations of African women in postcard format thus became a major factor in the invention, mass circulation, and perpetuation of types (and stereotypes), as has been highlighted by scholars like Christraud Geary and Barbara Thompson, among others.[248] While this practice can be examined as yet another sad and dehumanizing aspect of colonial history, what might be surprising is the fact that the original postcard format survives and gets produced to this day, albeit adjusted for 21st century tastes and audiences. In addition to adjusting the presentation style, the matter of dissemination has also been modified so that images are distributed both as actual postcards and as postcard-sized images in the ubiquitous coffee table book/calendar format as well as in porn magazines (see below).

On the other side of the Atlantic, the advent of photography coincided with the end of slavery, yet the creation of the "Mammy" type in cartoons and advertisements reveals an American adoption of the same ideas of typecasting the

[248] See Geary, "The Black Female Body, the Postcard and the Archives," in *Black Womanhood. Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body*, ed. Barbara Thompson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 143-161, and Barbara Thompson, "Decolonizing Black Bodies: Personal Journeys in the Contemporary Voice," in ibid., 279-311. See also Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

black female body promoted by the colonial postcards. Again, the bodies of women were used to give "rise to a racist dialogue deeply entrenched in notions of gender and sexual difference."[249] When comparing the conclusions of the different studies on colonial era postcards, it becomes clear that colonization did not only take place on a geographical and cultural level, but on the level of the individual black female body.[250]

In order to attack and deconstruct the issues created by Euro-American power structures, artists like Renée Cox, Betye Saar, Alison Saar, Berni Searle, Carrie Mae Weems and Carla Williams, among others, began "confronting and decolonizing the dichotomous relationship between European [sic] cultural imagination and stereotypes of the black female body,"[251] thus striking at the heart of the discourse. In the exhibition *Black Womanhood* (Dartmouth College, 2008), the above as well as the two other artists featured in this dissertation, joined up with scholars and curators to examine the history of the "Black Venus" and other sexually charged representations and responded with the creation of a visual and textual critical counter-discourse. This included the example of artists IngridMwangiRobertHutter, who confronts the everyday life experience of racism, exoticism and identity through installation and performance works, and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, who deals

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[249] Thompson, "Decolonizing Black Bodies," 279; see also Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures,* and Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, "The Body of a Myth: Embodying the Black Mammy Figure in Visual Culture," in *Black Womanhood. Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body*, ed. Barbara Thompson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 163-179.

[250] And thereby also linking these physical places. See Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*; Geary, "The Black Female Body;" Thompson, "Decolonizing Black Bodies."

[251] Thompson, ibid., 279.

with the "challenge of living 'elsewhere in the world'" by creating works that evoke history and memory and take comfort in the plurality of *place*.[252]

In the same context, Wangechi Mutu is highlighted as pursuing yet another strategy. Thompson shows how the artist's collages disrupt the distance created between Europe and Africa ("distance" is a measure needed to uphold stereotypes) "by alerting the viewer to the absurdity of both historical and contemporary racist ideologies [which conflate] African female sexuality and complacency."[253] Here it is helpful to consider the fact that Mutu does use images that are already in circulation (rather than her own body). Although criticism could be—and has been—leveled at the artist that her collages continue the exploitation of the black female body, it is important to realize (as Richard Morphet has done in the case of Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*) that it was "the media's first use that was exploitative, not [the artist's] reuse."[254] While this explanation could be read as an "easy way out," the recontextualization Mutu provides in her work does return agency to the exploited bodies and thus effectively functions as a reversal of the original act.

Any number of Mutu's collages could serve as an example here, but one of the most obvious is her series titled *The Ark Collection* (2006), which combines pornographic images from American magazines with cutouts of postcards from a coffee table book created by photographer and amateur ethnographer Carol

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[252] Ibid., 306.

[253] Ibid., 280.

[254] Cited in Courtney J. Martin, "Fracture and Actions," 52; though Martin uses the quote to draw a parallel to Mutu, she does not claim that Mutu's re-use is a re-versal.

Beckwith.[255] The series is striking in the way it combines the two disparate yet pervasive Western views of the female black body—what the artist refers to as the "fictions" of the "hypersexualized black female" and of the "traditional African woman."[256] For her collages, Mutu takes out some of the obvious sexual markers/ body parts from the pornographic material and in their place inserts Beckwith's richly costumed and ornamented "tribal" women. The hands assumed to be spreading genitalia or buttocks are now placed on the faces, jewelry or clothing of the ethnographic subject. Sometimes Mutu replaces a part of one inscribed body ("erotic nude") with a part of the other inscribed body ("tribal nude"). This presentation not only plays with our expectations (maintaining enough of the original photos to make their source recognizable) but as it thwarts the satisfactory viewing of either image it effectively calls both views into question at the same time, or as the artist puts it: "I

[255] The book, titled *Women of the African Ark,* and the connection between the work of Beckwith and Mutu is discussed by David Moos in his chapter "*The Ark Collection*: Disjunctive Continuity" in the catalogue *This You Call Civilization* that accompanied Mutu's show of the same title at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2010. The *Ark* refers to the *Ark of the Covenant*—shorthand for the idea that different populations in Africa go back to biblical times (especially Ethiopia, but also Zambia and South Africa), which is important to a colonial mindset that equates "old" or "antique" culture with "better" or "less savage." Ultimately using this reference only underscores the fact that this mindset still exists.

[256] And, as her works make clear, the artist takes issue with the agendas behind both fictions. Mutu in "Wangechi Mutu: This You Call Civilization," Art Gallery of Ontario, accessed online on July 12th, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqCH8uFdCG8 As the artist states: "That fiction [of the traditional African woman] together with the fiction of the hypersexualized black female that you see a lot more in the media in the West, especially in America—they're disturbing and they perpetrate a kind of idea that that is who a black woman is […] or can only be in this society: either the traditional African woman with the big earring or […] this other woman, which is a pin-up—a very sort of vile, erotic, hypersexualized pin-up." Ibid.

think it's a fantastic kind of harmony that happens and it makes people reflect on both things without actually replicating the objectification of either one of them."[257]

The implied misconception is further highlighted by the display of these postcard size images [figure 5], for they are arranged in pairs, adding up to groups of eight, in a glass display case reminiscent of those used for biological and geological specimen in an old natural history museum. Four of these cases are set up at a right angle to each other, thereby creating an installation of display practices that align Mutu's collages with the first attempts at classification and categorization not only of plant and animal specimen but of people.[258] To aid in the scientific presentation that requires the perceived objectivity of the photographic document, the collages of the *Ark collection* use only cut material and none of the ink, paint, contact paper or glitter that her large collages employ. Thus, both the subject matter and the form of its presentation disrupt our "enjoyment" of the visual material, which raises more questions than it answers.[259]

The Ark Collection also highlights another integral part of Mutu's work: a taxonomy critique. The artist uses her work to expose the weaknesses and fallacies of the existing systems and to create her own orders—leaning on the sciences and our

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[257] Ibid.

[258] This practice has also been subject to criticism in works by well-known African American artists, like Carrie Mae Weems, Carla Williams and Lorna Simpson.

[259] In her interview with Robert Enright, the artist provides a few of the questions herself, such as how do we talk about "women's sexuality, imaging the woman, woman's ability to control how her images is being portrayed" and "how should she be viewed and who is really in charge." Enright, "Resonant Surgeries," 28-46.

"instinct to categorize what we're afraid of."[260] On a verbal level this is manifested by the use of terms like "collection," "series," and "families" in the titles of the collages. In the exhibition space it is manifested through the use of display cases and/or groupings of images (as well as sculptures, for example the *Moth Girls,* 2010). And in the physical object of each collage it is manifested both in form and content. The 2004/5 series *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumors* makes this connection through the similarity of technique and materials, but in particular through the use of images from the same source—an antique medical compendium of diseases that affect a woman's reproductive system. Each work is composed of a different page from the book, thus preserving the collective idea of the original unit, and in each instance the artist also "reuses" the original title of the medical illustration as the title for the new collage. Yet, the scientific titles contrast sharply with the images presented to the viewer, which in most cases resemble portraits of fantastic females, of an alien species, or other superhuman group (i.e. goddesses). By appropriating an established system and re-inscribing it through the addition of collage elements, glitter, fur, and her own drawings, Mutu effectively creates a new order—a meta-order that allows some of the original categories to persist but only in a completely altered state.[261] She liberates the objectified anatomy through her modifications and alterations, which not only obstruct the depiction of the original

[260] Mutu in "We Categorize What We're Afraid Of" An Encounter with Wangechi Mutu by Matthew Evans and Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, *Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine*, no. 11 (2010): 6.

[261] Taxonomy also permeates her work process, as she organizes all the pieces she uses: "I cut ferociously out of magazines. There are categories of things—eyes, wings, hair—so when I need to find something that's like a frog's leg or that looks like foliage, I've got it." Interview with Okwui Enwezor, "Cut and Paste," accessed online July 25th, 2013, http://www.ariselive.com/articles/cut-paste/87416

disembodied part (thus denying the expected view) but also elevate the image to the level of an individual subject. Her characters are immediately recognizable as such, because the individual subject is traditionally rendered through portraiture. Having given life to her characters, the artist also puts them to work, with each portrait asking the viewer "What have you done to me? Why do you fear me?"

The *Cancer of the Uterus*, 2005 [figure 6] features a black and white, furry, glittery, nose-less visage with collaged mouth and eyes. Sometimes identified as a goddess,[262] the portrait has invaded the illustration and spread, not unlike the "cancer" originally represented. However, through the very act of obscuring the disease, Mutu has cured the anonymous object and given it a new identity. In the *Complete Prolapsus of the Uterus*, 2004 [figure 6] the illustration has been turned into the top portion of a mask, below which the lower part of a mature face with a stiff white collar emerges. Small red lips are superimposed over a tightly shut, wrinkled mouth, and the original nostrils are ornamented with a small cutout of a pair of breasts. A smattering of glitter around the modified illustration serves to indicate hair, which—considering the re-inscription of the image—should be understood as both pubic and head hair. The *Proplapsus* appears as a priestess—severe, authoritative, yet wise (indicated both by wrinkles and the markings on the "mask" portion). Mutu has reversed an act of ultimate loss of power (as a result of the slippage of the main organ associated with fertility), by turning her into a powerful female figure that wears the sign of shame like a proud emblem on her forehead.

[262] See Saatchi Gallery, *Wangechi Mutu exhibited at Saatchi Gallery*, accessed online August 5th, 2013 http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/wangechi_mutu.htm

A third member of Mutu's new genus, the *Uterine Catarrh*, 2004 [figure 7], introduces yet another character—the visionary (also identified as "shaman and cyborg").[263] The tripartite division of the portrait into hair, upper, and lower half of the face, also creates a color block contrast: black glittery hair, yellowed original paper, and a cutout of black skin further augmented with cutouts of bright pink and red lips. Unlike the previous two examples, this image features a mechanical device—though not of Mutu's choosing. Between the two superimposed eyes—one placed on each of the inner thighs—is a speculum, an instrument that very generally functions to "render a part accessible to observation,"[264] or more simply put: to make something visible. In its new place on the forehead, it appears as a third eye, and is re-inscribed as the tool of spiritual insight, clairvoyance, and out-of-body experiences. The shape of the upper half of the face adds another level of "visionary" to the portrait: it resembles the eye-masks of a number of superhero characters.

Mutu herself is such a visionary, but she shares her visions and constantly opens up new worlds for the viewer through her art. In this position as a demiurge she establishes the families, genera, and species that populate her universe, as well as the relationships between each of them. There is continuity in content and material from one set of collages to the next, but also in each exhibition, especially when the artist is involved in selecting how works appear together. While these relationships will be discussed in more detail below, another category of works can illustrate the "grouping of images" aspect of Mutu's taxonomy.

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[263] Ibid.

[264] See Webster's Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1996: p. 1833.

The *Family Tree*, 2012 [figure 8], a suite of 13 mixed-media collages on paper, displayed in matching frames and mattes, and connected with lines painted on the walls of the gallery, is one such clear group of collages that are meant to be viewed together. However, in 2008 the artist produced a number of polyptychs that are not linked in such an obvious manner, yet the shared title and display in close proximity reveal the underlying relationship. In works such as *Zebra Crossing* and *The Gods Must Be Lazy*, both 2008 [figure 9], the artist uses five or more individual collages to piece together a new whole, though it is ultimately the viewer who has to make the connection by filling in the blank areas between the frames and establishing how the works and title are related to each other. While the respective collages already function as individual works (though in some cases the placement on the page hints at continuation beyond the confines of the paper), in the grouping they emerge as bodies or as maps. Thus, in the same way the artist establishes a taxonomy for her creations, *place* serves as a meta-category through which the viewer can understand the emerging bodies and their relationships.

Collage on Every Level

Yet, for Mutu the technique of "collage" is neither limited to the individual work nor to the relationships she establishes by creating the works as a series or by arranging them as a group in a gallery setting. The collage aspect also extends to the interaction with her audience and to the very titles of the artist's works. For her collages grouped in "*The Ark Collection,*" Mutu took the *Ark* out of "Women of the African Ark" and the "collection" as the term for the assortment of items presented in

a display case (see above). Disconnecting the "Ark" from the identifiers "African" and "Women" resembles the artist's practice of cutting out the eyes, nose, lips, ears, and other body parts of magazine or postcard images. Like the cutting apart of a photograph, taking some words and leaving others generalizes as it removes the identity of the original. By piecing the parts together in a title—either as phrases or as a word formation—the artist replicates the visual collage on a verbal level. Now the *Ark Collection* brings to mind antiquities, religious symbols, rich and/or slightly obsessed collectors, and scientific inquiry.

Another example of the collaged title is *One Hundred Lavish Months of Bushwhack,* 2004 [figure 10]. One of the first impressions of this combination is the contrast of the adjective "lavish" and the verb "bushwhack." While the former seems to imply a scene of opulence, excess, even luxury, the latter brings to mind a much simpler, rugged outdoors individual charting his or her own course through the natural world. The adjective not only provides the contrast, it also serves as a modifier for a number—one hundred months, the equivalent of 8 years and 4 months. This allows us to dissect the title and see its distinct pieces. The 100 months refer to the time period of two presidential terms, and the verb is actually a composite, consisting of the last name of the president in 2004 (George W. Bush) who had just been re-elected for a second term, and the verb "whack."[265] To the artist, who was struggling with visa and immigration issues for much of the first decade of the new millennium, the policies of the Bush-era were certainly a "blow." While the first impression of "lavish" still fits with the sumptuousness of the image—a central figure

[265] This is one of several of Mutu's works during the Bush presidency that integrates the last name into the title. Mutu, Lecture, March 21st, 2013.

with a silvery gray grass skirt and two curved, jaguar pelt covered horns—the position of the adjective as the modifier of a particular number, refocuses the emphasis on the fact that "one hundred" is a great amount or profusion of months. The results of the "whacking" are also reflected in the figure's blood spouting head wound and exploded right foot.

The grassy bottom of the image reflects the "natural bush" of the African Savannah (as do the Hippopotamus-heads-as-hands), but rather than showing a cleared (i.e. "bushwhacked") path, we can make out a second figure half hidden by the grass, which is supporting the central figure's left leg with her arms. The theme of contradiction reflected in the words of the title, continues in this figure's brown and pink mottled skin which contrasts sharply with the yellow stained body of the central figure. The contrast is extended in that the former body's nudity is pitted against the latter's "lavish" grass skirt, which is reminiscent of the infamous banana skirt donned by Josephine Baker[266] and thus alludes to our own myopic way of seeing something not as it is, but as we imagine it to be. And although the smaller figure is in a squatting pose on the ground—adding to the submissive effect and contrasting with the standing, moving central figure—it is unlike its "superior" in that it is still whole: possessing both hands, arms, and legs, and a head ornamented by a flower rather than a blood stain.

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[266] In her Penny W. Stamps Distinguish Speaker Series lecture at the University of Michigan, Mutu talks at length about Josephine Baker and the "completely insane and comical" banana skirt ("where, in *any* culture have I ever seen *anybody* wearing a banana skirt?"). While the artist admits that she cannot wholeheartedly embrace Baker, she does reference her frequently in her work as a way of challenging the invention of stereotypes in the early 20th century of which Baker was a part. November 18th, 2010.

Counter-violence

In the tradition of artists like Paul Klee, who insisted that "art does not reproduce the visible, rather it makes visible,"[267] Mutu says she "took all of these psychological issues and my own personal stories and the stories of other women, and I manifested them as body injuries or mutilations or malformations or exaggerations or prostheses, as a way of talking about the need to extend, perforate, change, or shape-shift your body in order to exist."[268] However, the artist not only applies her augmenting and mutilating strategies to re-presenting women—she also uses them as a reminder of the very real atrocities committed in wars (both past and present), and especially of those connected to colonial rule in her home country.[269] In these instances, the modified female body not only serves to unseat many of the commonly held views of African women, beauty standards, and of a victimized gender, but transcends this level to create a memory of the transgressions to which we are tied as heirs to the political, economic, and social post-colonial power structure.

The artist's choice of making the female body her subject is similar to the choices involved with her primary medium in that it is rooted in her life experience. Beyond her fascination with the body as an object,[270] and her experiences as an

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[267] Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 1920 section 1, in *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit. Eine Schriftensammlung*, ed. Kasimir Edschmid (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 28-40 – this is also more commonly known as the "Creative Credo."

[268] Mutu, ""Interview," 119.

[269] Mutu, Penny W. Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series, November 18th, 2010.

outsider after moving to the United States, Mutu credits two specific events with making her aware of what it means to have a body that is gendered female. Both took place in the early 1990s in Kenya—a time when Mutu had returned from the U.K. and was working and supporting herself as a graphic designer. In July of 1991, a coed boarding school became the site of a gruesome chauvinistic attack, when a group of male students proceeded to rape 71 of the female students, while a stampede to escape from the attack led to the death of 19 girls.[271] Mutu recalls that she was shocked by the fact that the attack was trivialized in public discourse, and that it was "then that my place as a woman hit me and I understood that there was a difference between women's rights and human rights."[272]

The second event occurred in March 1992, and shows how multiple histories become interwoven with the artist's personal experience. In her 2010 lecture at the University of Michigan, Mutu tells the story of the Uhuru Park protesters[273] that

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[270] "Drawing the body is one of my favorite things. It's always been interesting to me [...] I was always drawing and doodling gestures and it built in an innate understanding of the body." (In: Enright, "Resonant Surgeries," 28-46).

[271] Accessed July 25th, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/29/world/kenyans-do-some-soul-searching-after-the-rape-of-71-schoolgirls.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm

[272] In Enwezor, 2011; the reports in Western media, such as the New York Times, emphasize two different views taken by Kenyan media—one that rape was common and something "boys do," the other that it was a reflection of how little women counted in Kenyan society. Sadly, this differentiation continues into the present day, as the 2014 abduction of 200 Nigerian schoolgirls shows.

[273] They had gathered near the parliament buildings to protest the secret detention and incarceration without trial of their sons and they would continue their protest at All Saints Cathedral for the next 11 months. Accessed online in the *Global Nonviolent Action Database,* July 25th, 2013, http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/kenyan-mothers-win-release-political-prisoners-and-press-democratic-reform-1992-1993
This event occurred only 6 months (not years, as Kristine Stiles has claimed) after the boarding school tragedy.

resulted in the disrobing of the protesting mothers as a last resort to have their voices heard: "This one moment the riot police were sent out to clean up the area [Uhuru Park] and to get rid of these women and families and this amazing, incredible and curious thing happened that I had never seen happen which is that the mothers of these people took off their clothes and it was on of those moments where, you know, all the saggy breasts, and the big legs, and all that maternal flesh was exposed in such a way that everyone was ashamed and [...] these police actually stopped in their tracks and didn't know what else to do."[274] The act of undressing as a protest has a predecessor in 1929 in the Nigerian city of Aba, where a group of Igbo women "used their naked bodies to express their public disapproval of excessive taxation [by the British colonial administration] in the absence of democratic representation."[275] The naked body—especially the black female body that had been objectified through colonial images—was no longer weak and passive, but became emboldened through protest and turned into "a vehicle of gendered radicality and feminist power."[276] While the Uhuru event thus connects Mutu with a form of female protest that spans history and geography across the African continent, it also underscores the significance of the particular body—not just any female body, but the body of a "mother." Wangari Maathai has attributed the success of the protesters stopping the police to the fact that "in the African tradition, people must respect women who are close to their mother's age, and they must treat them as their mothers. If men beat

[274] Mutu, Penny W. Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series, November 18th, 2010.

[275] Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, 46.

[276] Ibid.

mothers, it is like sons violating their mothers, and the mothers respond by cursing them. And they curse them by showing them their nakedness."[277]

Mutu's figures exhibit a similar power of position, gender and nudity—for example her work featuring one of the "original" mothers, *Root of All Eves*, 2010 [figure 11]. *Root of All Eves* utilizes the collaged title, which alludes to "root of all evil" (long perceived to be the role of women), the root of civilization in the original "Eves" (known to have been located in Africa), and the effect of Christianity on pre-colonial African culture (through language which puts the latter in a negative light). Through the *Root* reference, Mutu reminds the viewer of the importance of being grounded and located, and we do see a strangely contorted female figure with a mess of multidirectional hair in the ground below the central body. The hair/roots reach up and wrap themselves tentacle-like around the left calf of this central figure and also begin to reach to the lower left side of the collage, to connect the right calf in a similar manner. Yet the main protagonist in the image seems aloof and disconnected—the rock star mannerisms and accessories (from the high heels to the sunglasses), the pose of sexual availability, and the bizarre full body mandorla made of imitation wood all contribute to a figure that is floating or hovering above the roots and nature that attempt to tie it down. The *Eves* of the title can be seen in the two figures: the earthy, birthing "Root-Eve" and the flashy seductress, post-colonial Eve with shoulder epaulettes made of the two halves of a military garbed torso. The artist has identified her as "a wounded queen," who is the result of the colonial

[277] *Global Nonviolent Action Database,* accessed online July 25th, 2013.

denigration of African culture.[278] While at first the profile legs with the frontal torso pose seems to convey strength, a second look highlights the figure's missing left arm. It has been recently severed, right above the elbow, as the bright red flesh of the cross section and the splatter pattern on the background indicate. The continued violations of *All Eves (*in both western and post-colonial environments), emerges as the most recent incarnation in need of the naked body protest.

As the artist processes the atrocities, discriminations, and victimizations, her practice of collage can be seen as a kind of re-enacting these violations against the female body: she cuts out the images with her x-acto™ knife (an artist's bayonet), and removes eye, lips, ears with surgical precision.[279] She separates limbs and torsos, hair and accessories. The body of the source is split up and never reunited. The violations continue in the application of ink, watercolor and other materials, as skin becomes mottled, patchy, and textured; shapes are exaggerated or diminished; and the normative body is denied unless it is presented in an augmented state. And yet, in the labor-intensive process, a transformation begins. For Mutu "work is a way of passing time, of making time valuable for yourself," and thus she begins to impart value on her creation from the first clipping to the final application of glitter and glue.[280] The work is sketched first before being transposed to the large format of the collage. Elements are placed, replaced, and augmented before glue, watercolor and ink appear. In this later step, the artist also relinquishes some control and lets the

[278] Mutu, lecture, March 21st, 2013.

[279] In an interview with David Moos Mutu actually calls her work surface "the operating table." *Art Gallery of Ontario,* accessed online July 25th, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqCH8uFdCG8

[280] Mutu, "We Categorize," 11.

"chemical and natural qualities of the material decide how it wants to lay on the paper."[281]

Beyond the specific Kenyan experiences, Mutu acknowledges that her choice of focusing on the woman's body is also based on the particular habits of our time: "There is this tiny percentage of people who live like emperors because elsewhere blood is being shed. Women's bodies are particularly vulnerable to the whims of changing movements, governments, and social norms. They're like sensitive charts—they indicate how a society feels about itself."[282] The artist takes her evidence from the representation of women's bodies in the media, particularly fashion photography and purportedly scientific publications like National Geographic, but also from more obviously discriminatory sources featuring women either as objects (such as porn) or not at all. The latter is particularly prominent among topics that view the machine as an extension of masculinity (motorcycle magazines are among the artist's favorites). The artist says she has learned to "read" the media as a shortcut to understanding American culture and her own *place*:

> As a woman of color, how I'm represented in the publications is of absolute relevance and importance to me because it tells me where I stand in that particular culture [...] You can tell what American mainstream culture is thinking by looking at the newsstand. For the most part, there's a lot of misogynistic material, and a few things that have to do with sports and cars. If you want to know what an animal's system is about, you look at its shit, like elephant dung. If you want to know where the animal has been and whether it's healthy, you sift through its stool. That's a little bit what it's like when I

[281] In Enright, "Resonant Surgeries," 28-46.

[282] In Firstenberg, "Perverse Anthropology," 142.

> look at media; it's quickly processed, it's not the most high-end knowledge, but it definitely gives you a cross-section of what is going on.[283]

Yet, Mutu also realized that we all, as individuals, have the power to deal with the expectations and stereotypes we encounter by denying them the power to shape us—as she puts it: "What we can do is go home and be like, To hell with that; that's not who I am. I can think differently and create work that accesses something deeper"[284]—it certainly is what she has chosen to do with her re-presentations.

The Gallery as a Place of Artistic Creation

The bodies of Mutu's collages have carried her *places* around the world, and—as they are displayed in museums and galleries—they have also created their own *places*. Realizing this as the potential of her work has affected the artist's approach to her creations: "I think you just have to do what's true to you. People aren't stupid. They sense when work is insincere or not coming from a core vision."[285] And many in her audience (public and critics alike) agree—while art can be about serious issues, it can be both beautiful and thought-provoking. Almost all of Mutu's collages pull from very different and even diametrically opposed sources, and in many ways the comments left by her viewers seem to reflect this practice as they feature similar contrasting statements. Words like "remarkable" and "beautiful" appear in the same

[283] In Enright, "Resonant Surgeries," 28-46.

[284] Mutu, "Interview," 119.

[285] Ibid., 158.

sentence as "brutal" and "disturbing."[286] This underscores that the contrasts and divisions are not limited to Mutu's own experience and its reflection in her art works, but extend to the experience of her audiences. Viewers are drawn into her world, allowed and encouraged to soak in the lusciousness of colors and textures, yet at the same time they are moved to the uncomfortable position of being an invader, alien, and outsider in a *place* representing a different world. Through the exhibition of her collages, the gaze of the existential insider (in Relph's understanding) can be reverted. By entering the physical location of the gallery, the viewer is forced to leave behind the comfort zone of the existential insider, and to establish a new relationship with the *place* he or she encounters. This experience of *place* as "new" certainly applies to each exhibition visited as the configuration of the gallery changes from lighting, to wall color and wall position; but it is also possible to have very different experiences from one visit to the next, for example by being the only visitor versus being one among a group of noisy/smelly/obnoxious/disinterested visitors, or even within the same visit. The latter can occur due to the onset of physical exhaustion or a change in room temperature with the loss of heat/cooling could drastically alter the experience of *place*. Depending on the person, the relationship with *place* that is formed in this encounter can range from empathetic insideness to existential outsideness. The latter outcome can be observed in guest book entries of visitors

[286] Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin *My Dirty Little Heaven* exhibition guestbook entries: "Bemerkenswert, eine sehr besondere Ausstellung. Phantasievoll, brutal und manchmal wunderschön" (Remarkable, a truly special exhibition. Full of fantasy, brutality and sometimes beauty); "Bit disturbing however quite lovely as well;" "Sehr beeindruckend Sehr bedrückend" (Very impressive Very depressing); "Erschreckend und trotzdem sehr ästhetisch" (Frightening and yet very aesthetic).

who felt that the museum had wronged them with the exhibit.[287] These viewers were either taken aback by the content (often by alluding to their own knowledge of what "real art" consists of) or by their experience of alienation in the gallery (reflective of their status as members of the elite who are comfortable in the museum space—as long as it displays art that fits the expectations, i.e. is part of the accepted canon).

In the case of the exhibit at Deutsche Guggenheim, the title "My Dirty Little Heaven" [figure 12] provides the viewer with more than a theme that ties together 40+ works (consisting of collage, video, and installation pieces): it provides both a description and invitation to the place experience. Contrasting concepts/adjectives such as "dirty" and "little" with grand ideas/nouns like "heaven," often associated with something pure, clean and vast, the title is another variation on the artist's collage technique on a verbal level. It is also prefaced with the personal pronoun "my," thereby letting the potential visitor know that the experience itself will be deeply personal (my heaven), slightly naughty and imperfect (dirty heaven), and only a snapshot of a bigger goal (little heaven). The artist makes it clear that this is a fantasy world, albeit a flawed one.

When moving from the verbal metaphorical level to the level of physical reality of the Deutsche Guggenheim as a gallery, the adjectives also become quite

[287] See guest book comments above and entries such as: "Kitsch!" (kitschy); "Frankly horrible—your shop is bigger than your exhibition area. Nonsense;" "Der Vidio-Film (sic) ist eine Zumutung u. erinnert mich an Psychopaten mit Waschzwang (sic) Methafer (sic) hin, Symbolik her—hier wird der Zuschauer 20 Minuten lang strapaziert u. ihm Zeit gestohlen. Passt nicht zur Künstlerin!!!" (The video borders on harassment and reminds me of a psychopath with ablutomania. Whether metaphor or symbolism, the viewer's patience is strained for 20 minutes and has lost that time forever. This is not fitting for an artist like her!!!) The latter comment reveals the outsider experience of a person who assumed him or herself to be an insider, but in addition to missing some of the ideas of the video "Cleaning Earth," also revealed ignorance of other video works and performances, like Mierle Laderman Ukeles "Maintenance Art" manifesto and series.

accurate descriptors of the exhibitions space: it is small ("little") compared to its sister spaces around the world, and the use of organic liquids dripping on bowls and a wooden table and of dark felt blankets on the walls create a "dirty" environment that is far from the white and sterile cube symbolizing the contemporary gallery. Though artists throughout history have transformed the rooms they were given—a significant precursor of Mutu's "dirty" gallery was the decision of Walter De Maria in 1977 to move his work down from the traditional wall display area onto the floor, and to do so by filling an entire space of several thousand square feet with earth (making it impossible for viewers to enter the gallery)—it is still a rare enough occurrence that two of the five catalogue essays for "My Dirty Little Heaven" highlight this decision of the artist.[288] In both passages the implied message is that the artist changed the gallery into a particular *place* for the visitor to experience, and that this experience is also particular and important to the viewing and experiencing of the works.

The curator Courtney J. Martin emphasizes the gallery environment as a closed system: " The placement of other collages inside this environment puts each one inside of the re-order and repeat system. Each individual collage is then connected to the others, just as it is making its own message. To be inside the installation is to have entered into one of Mutu's collages."[289] With this description,

[288] Friedhelm Hütte, "On the Exhibition," in *Wangechi Mutu. My Dirty Little Heaven* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 16-18; Courtney J. Martin, "Fracture and Actions: Wangechi Mutu's Collages 1999-2010," in ibid., 48-54. Both provide descriptions and interpretations of the transformed gallery in their essays. In addition, in a video documenting the opening (Vernissage TV), Mutu's gallerist, Susanne Vielmetter also underlines the use of the dark gray felt as a significant element in the experience of the installation (she highlights the sound absorbing qualities of the material in connection with the dripping sound of the suspended bottles).

Martin captures a key element of the place experience—the multitude of relationships that constitute it. The collages form a relationship with each other (often formalized by the fact that the artist puts them in a "series"), they form a relationship with the other art works, they represent a relationship with the artist, and now they will also have a relationship with the individual audience member. As the establishing, continuing, and expanding of relationships underscores: the experience of place—and this one in particular—is interactive or "creative." The viewer has become a part of the *place* and now contributes to the experience, which becomes a process of creation (even as an "outsider" he or she finds himself "inside" the *place*).

This emphasis on the relationship aspect is augmented by a description that focuses on the sensorial aspects of the place experience. The catalogue essay by Friedhelm Hütte, who as Global Head of Art for Deutsche Bank is one of the sponsors of the event and has a particular interest in conveying its uniqueness, contrasts the place as a gallery of the Deutsche Guggenheim—the "White Cube as a neutral, pure space in which art can be viewed detached from everyday realities"—with Mutu's "'small dirty heaven,' an improvised, organic, pieced-together

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[289] Martin, "Fracture and Actions," 54. Martin's essay is not about the exhibition space or place experience, in fact, at various points throughout the text, she goes to great lengths to deny the importance of sources and origins of Mutu's collage (48 & 52), as she tries to build a case for "collage as politic," and argues for new category that distinguishes collage from painting/sculpture ("the latter [...] transmit messages, while collage [...] is the message" ibid., 50), and yet ultimately she does have to acknowledge that the sources do matter and that for Mutu the history of collage making culminates in a place of her own. Coincidentally, Martin's point is not as original as it may appear—in their 2008 essay "Tactical Collage," authors Malik Gaines and Alexandro Segade state that "Wangechi Mutu uses collage as a tactic" (145), which already promotes the idea of making the medium the message.

architecture which occupies the space, 'contaminates' it."[290] Hütte describes how *place*—both in general and in the particular instance of *My Dirty Little Heaven*—is experienced through the senses, "by means of visual, tactile, or even olfactory stimuli, which in turn trigger associations, memories, and fantasies," and through the encounter of the altered architecture, which "suggests that one can ensconce oneself provisionally in this cool construction, can create a home, warmth, one's own 'heaven.'"[291] These are crucial components in the experience of this particular *place*. The viewer contributes the sensory equipment and feeds back into the complex ecosystem and expresses the creative process through written and oral comments and other exchanges (such as purchases in the gift shop, future visits to the artist's exhibition, and the consumption of printed and digital information on both the artist and her work).

Another example of the creative place experience is the exhibition *Wangechi Mutu. A Fantastic Journey* at the Nasher Museum (March-July, 2013).[292] The selection of works and implementation of different components for this exhibition convey the process of becoming and changing in a number of ways. From the beginning, as the viewer enters the gallery, both physical movement and sensory

[290] Hütte, "On the Exhibition," 18. As the title *On the Exhibition* indicates, this brief essay is more interested in the place of the exhibition than the other essays in the catalogue, though its primary objective is to provide an introduction to the artist and her work (and place is featured because it is crucial to both).

[291] Ibid.

[292] The exhibition went on to tour the U.S. in 2013/14, continuing at the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami, FL), and the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art (Evanston, IL).

experience are shaped by the encounter.[293] The entrance to the gallery is sealed off by a long wall, which prevents the visitor from seeing what lies beyond and redirects the course that can be taken—rather than going straight through the doorway, one must chose to go left or right and then turn again to enter the actual gallery space. Yet, the wall also has the first work – a site specific collage titled *Once upon a time she said, I'm not afraid and her enemies became afraid of her The End*, 2013 [figure 13], applied to the wall by the artist during the installation of the show, and growing out of the wall into the entryway by means of felted material turned into organic, tree-root like shapes with the help of glue and packing tape. Turning left (which corresponds to choosing a roughly clockwise course through the exhibition and then exiting on the right) means being confronted by the wall stenciled introduction text but not yet any other artwork.[294] Another 90° turn is required to see the first framed collage, Mutu's 2003 diptych *Yo Mama*. Making yet another 90° turn, the *Suspended playtime* (2008/2013) installation blocks the way ahead as a path through the exhibition and at the same time allows the viewer to survey what lies ahead [figure 14]: *Family Tree* (2012) to the right, *People in Glass Towers* (2003) straight ahead, and to the left both *Funkalicious fruit field* (2007) and *Root of All*

[293] This idea has been discussed in general terms by Isolde Brielmaier (as Mutu moved from framed works to manipulating wall surfaces to integrating the entire exhibition space): "Mutu continues to extend her focus on the body—both as the core content of her work and in relation to the viewer [...] The works overtly demand that visitors negotiate the specific sites as a way of experiencing and in turn generating meaning from Mutu's art. This encounter makes viewers intensely aware of their own bodies." In *Wangechi Mutu. A Shady Promise* (Bolognia: Damiani, 2008), 13.

[294] Going right leads to a blank wall and requires turning around completely to see the back of the entry-blocking wall, on which the work *Family Tree* (2012) is installed. It appears to be the totally wrong way to enter the exhibition, although a visitor choosing this path gets to read the wall label for *Family Tree* (which is left of the work) and proceeds to see some of the earlier works, including the sketches, first.

Eves (2010). It is not just in the turns and physical limitations that the exhibition asserts itself, but with every move the gallery changes as well. The experience of the entry area with its dado of organically shaped dark gray felt, is different from the response to the sharp contrast of chocolate colored walls with white, stenciled text, and changes yet again as it becomes a light blue, morning sky color for all the interior walls and the walls to the left that makes the large rectangular frames of the collages appear to float in place. The chocolate hue continues along the entire right side of the gallery until it meets the back wall, which is covered in the same gray felt that was used in the dado. Felt also covers the walls around the video works *Amazing Grace* (2005) and *Eat Cake* (2012), and turns a column in the back into another tree trunk.

The interaction of the felt-covered areas with the viewer is much more complex than the "wallpaper" use suggests. As a recognizable blanket, the material is associated with a cozy feel and with protection (though it is somewhat rough); as an imitation of roots and trunks, it brings the trees from the collages into the exhibition space—or rather it emplaces the viewer into the collage that is the exhibition; as an emergency blanket commonly found in refugee camps, it is a reference to the effects of global politics; as a composite material, it is itself a collage of different components (wool, plastic, recycled and reprocessed);[295] as a wall cover, it muffles sounds—those made by visitors and those made by the audio of the different video works; and as an organic shape it resembles a living thing which creates the experience of becoming. This is an important aspect of Mutu's work, as she "believes

[295] See Schoonmaker, *A Fantastic Journey,* 22.

that when you create something you bring it to life, into being, through your actions."[296]

For the visitor who is moving through the gallery, the cumulative effect of the chosen color and material add to the experience of being *in* the artist's collages rather than *in front* of them. And like the materials in the collage, which have been "altered, fragmented, and reassembled," as Trevor Schoonmaker notes, "viewers themselves are also transformed as they engage with Mutu's shape-shifting images and provocative concepts."[297] Now the brown hue corresponds to the earthy ground line found in many of the works, the blue represents the background, the felt and packing tape align with the use of contact paper and tape for texture, and the respective framed images are the cutouts that make up the collage figures. Another element that can be seen as a "cutout" are the visitors'/viewers' bodies, which are added to the exhibition collage through their presence in the gallery and in a manner that organically morphs and changes the work. Although, this morphing appears as a natural consequence, it is not a result of chance or mere curating expertise. As she did in the Deutsche Guggenheim gallery, the artist has taken part-ownership of the curating process at the Nasher Museum through her re-designing of wall and floor spaces by means of installations and modifications. While it is not unusual for artists to be involved in some of the processes (such as selecting and/or creating work specifically for the exhibition), Mutu's treatment of the gallery as her canvas sets her apart (especially since she is usually not creating a "site specific" work). Not only

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid., 26.

does she provide the art for the audience, but by altering the gallery environment she also determines the way in which the works are viewed. The interactions of her body with her work, her body of work with itself, and of her work with an embodied audience, emphasize the centrality of *place* not just in the creation but also in the perception and processing of art.

La lutte elle-même vers les sommets
suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme;
il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.
Albert Camus

There is no other place than here.
IngridMwangiRobertHutter

CHAPTER 4: INGRIDMWANGIROBERTHUTTER

Putting Place to Work

When Ingrid Mwangi became IngridMwangiRobertHutter and retroactively attributed the works listing Mwangi as the artist to reflect this new collective (MwangiHutter for short)—even re-signing them with both signatures—the artist caused a great stir. She did not do so to make anyone's life difficult or even to be different (though the artist knows all about what it means to be different), rather she perceived it as a logical next step in formalizing the collaboration between her and her husband/artistic partner Robert Hutter.[298]

Reactions to this act were charged with the kind of anxiety more commonly associated with coming out or sex-change revelations. The idea of "two bodies–one

[298] In a 2003 catalogue most of the works listed in the "List of Illustrations" already state that they were made "…in collaboration with Robert Hutter," see *Your Own Soul – Ingrid Mwangi*, ed. Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2003), 69. The collaborative idea also meant that instead of assigning two names to a work, which leaves viewers with the question of "who is the *primary* artist?," the artists ultimately decided to keep "one" artist as the creator, and be that "one" together – as their long new name testifies. In the following, the artist will generally be referred to as "MwangiHutter" or as "the artist," but when personal pronouns are required, the one that will be used is "she" as it contains the "he" in the word. In German writing practice, the dual form is emphasized through capitalization ("sHe"), which will be omitted here to improve "readability." Though the artist has created an average birthday and fictional birthplace, the text will identify past individuals as separate.

person/artistic identity" was particularly difficult to process for collectors. Before the merger, collectors felt invested in Mwangi the *particular* artist and, by extension, the particular categories to which she was assigned: a female artist, with Kenyan and German origins, who produced critically acclaimed contemporary art. While the artist MwangiHutter reminded collectors that the separate individuals Mwangi and Hutter had already impacted each others' works prior to the merger, the artist's sudden acquisition and public affirmation of white, male German attributes did not fit into the "niche" or category that had so appealed to collectors.[299]

If the collectors' experience of this sudden and profound change was a discomfort with shifting parameters that were beyond their control, it was an experience the artist MwangiHutter was very familiar with. When she was fifteen years old, the world she knew came to an end with the divorce of her parents. All of a sudden she had to part with everything that had been familiar in her native Kenya and move to Germany. She left behind her house, her friends and family, her country, and her language. This first awareness of what *place* meant to her therefore was traumatic, and she later likened it to an experience that was "very close to death."[300]

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[299] MwangiHutter recalls this conversation in "The collective idea. Reflections on the retrospective formation of a collective," accessed November 9th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/text_ingridmwangiroberthutter_collective.html In the text, the artist describes that the woman of the collecting couple was upset with Ingrid for betraying the inheritance of feminism, i.e. the possibility to "stand out with [her] strong, powerful, feministic work," by her "submission" into a shared identity, or specifically, the fact that she shared the credit for these works with a man.

[300] The artist had lost her sister to cancer in the same year as the interview took place, which had caused her to define death as "absolute loss" and elucidating: "you don't only lose your family and your house, you lose your body, you lose your memories, you're cut off from everything that defines yourself as you." As discussed above, many of these factors came together when she left Kenya for Germany as a teenager.

The culture shock was momentous—in MwangiHutter's words: "If we had moved to a similar country with maybe the same language, you know, then it would have ended there, you could say 'o.k. – you have to make that shift,' but a foreign, for myself foreign culture with a different language, [meant] I lost my language and I lost my culture."[301]

Trials and tribulations of displacement

In Kenya, the artist had been regarded as "white," due to her lighter skin tone, but had not felt like an outsider, as a result of her biological, cultural, linguistic and national ties into the communities that were home, school, and city.[302] Her skin color also did not matter much because "it was more of a multicultural society where I grew up because [in this particular part of town] were Europeans of every shade."[303] In Germany, however, she was seen as "black" and as "African." With this shift came what Edward Relph termed the experience of *existential outsideness*, which is a feeling of being separate, out of place, alienated, and being resigned to the position of longing.[304] And whereas Ingrid Mwangi had not given any thought to

[301] IngridMwangiRobertHutter, interview by the author, December 1st, 2010, Ludwigshafen, Germany.

[302] For "too white/too black" see Bernd Schulz and Lisa Puyplat, "Forword," in *Your Own Soul – Ingrid Mwangi*, ed. Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2003), 6, and Barbara Thompson, "Decolonizing Black Bodies: Personal Journeys in the Contemporary Voice," in *Black Womanhood. Images, Icons and Ideologies,* ed. Barbara Thompson (Dartmouth: Hood Museum of Art 2008), 303.

[303] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[304] See discussion in the chapter on Place and also David Seamon, "A Singular Impact: Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness,*" *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter* 7, no. 3 (1996): 5-8.

"being African or not being African" before her arrival in Germany, she now regularly encountered Germans who "have not had any exchange with Africa" and who considered her and her brother to be representatives not just for a country but for an entire continent.[305] The teenager MwangiHutter stuck out in the small community in the southwest of the country, and was generally believed to have been adopted.[306] She was reminded that she did not fit in both from the outside, through the stereotypes she encountered, and from the inside, through the fact that the once aspiring writer was required to learn a new and different language and thus was no longer in command of her words.

To make their new existence more bearable, Ingrid and her siblings resorted to a common Diaspora strategy: "nostalgia for the homeland."[307] In recollections of their former life they painted a "way overboard, positive view about where [they had]

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[305] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010. While most Germans do not want to be identified with the country's Nazi history by the world-at-large, the same people do apply the *pars pro toto* approach to those they perceive as *other*.

[306] There is a long history (even into the present day) of the inability of Germans to acknowledge that someone who lacks a white skin tone (and blonde hair) is truly German, see discussion below and Alanna Lockward, "Black German Diaspora and De-Mentioning: A Decolonial Option." In *Rassismus auf gut Deutsch. Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk zu rassistischen Sprachhandlungen,* ed. Adibelie Nduka-Aguwu and Antje L. Hornscheidt (Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes and Apsel, 2010). Thus it was easier for locals to assume she had come to have a German passport via adoption – which maintains the patronizing aspect of doing something good for those "poor Africans" – than acknowledging the "mixed culture," even though, as the artist says "I do very much look like my mother, if you look properly, but till today it's very hard for people to see that because she is small, blond, blue-eyed type." MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[307] In the definition of diaspora according to William Safran (in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991)) and reiterated by James Clifford (in "Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 304) diaspora communities "maintain a 'memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland'" – in the case of Ingrid and her siblings, the diaspora community is just one family, but the community lasted until the common cause dissipated (more on that below).

come from" and indulged in the "heartache of 'when are we going back?'"[308] For the past 300 years, the heartache associated with nostalgia has been identified as a disease and studied as such,[309] though over the course of time the condition has moved from being considered a fatal "geographical disease [with specific local ties] into a sociological complaint [of a generalized sense of loss, which] for mobile modern man [has turned into] an increasingly pervasive ailment."[310] It was only after the family's nostalgia abided that the artist came to see it as something dangerous to indulge in for the long run: "it's an unrealistic point of view that develops, because if you don't feel comfortable in this place then there must be another place … and it becomes kind of a dreamland."[311] By resorting to such an imaginary place created by "nostalgia," a person is then prevented from engaging, interacting, and relating to the current environment that would allow establishing a new and more comfortable *place*.

After finishing high school in Germany, MwangiHutter first studied Design at the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Saar (HBKS, *University of Fine Arts Saar*) in Saarbrücken and then switched to major in New Artistic Media. Ingrid and Robert were both students of New Media professor and pioneering German video artist

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[308] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[309] According to David Lowenthal, in 1688 the term *Heimweh* was first used to describe how those who, removed from their native land, languished and wasted away, and in the late 18th century, the French army knew of no other cure than to send those suffering of "homesickness" on convalescent leaves. See Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (1975): 1.

[310] Ibid, 2.

[311] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010. The artist designates her first visit to Kenya after the move as the turning point, because it helped her see that a return was no longer a realistic option.

Ulrike Rosenbach. But they had more in common than just studying under the same professor: "we found the issue of violence – for me from the racist/racism point of view, for him more from the point of view of the media and communication – [to be a common concern in our art]."[312] Rosenbach had studied with Joseph Beuys and subsequently passed on to her students the idea of social responsibility in art.

As a student, Ingrid Mwangi was not thrilled when her professor suggested she deal with the issues of being African in Germany, of her encounters with racism and ignorance, and with historical and social injustice. When she had this conversation with her professor, Mwangi was never told "you have to do that," rather "[Rosenbach] said 'you know…' and she pointed and said 'that's an issue…' and I thought 'Oh no!' and I remember feeling 'not that!! I deal with it every day! I don't want to have to put this in [my] work.'"[313] The idea of confronting the discomforting or painful experiences of her everyday life did not make her erupt in joy and excitement, yet, the artist eventually realized that it was what she had to do. Combining her first hand experiences with her skills and abilities to communicate both verbally and visually, MwangiHutter could bring issues to the attention of an audience who generally ignores or steers clear of such confrontations.

Creating work that was socially relevant turned into "a huge chance" – especially when she compared herself to colleagues whose lack of purpose meant they were "kind of swimming around [even] till today" and here she was with this definite "raison d'être," with the answer to the question "what's the reason that

[312] Ibid.

[313] Ibid.

you're here [as an artist]."[314] MwangiHutter acknowledges that she could put her African history "in the past and look at it as 'it's not my reality at this point.' But [your history] points you in a certain direction and you have a certain responsibility to represent or to engage, but it doesn't end there, you know, it could be an invitation to open your mind for the position of other people and to find the point where it relates to you."[315]

Even before her own nostalgia abated, the artist refrained from (re)producing a kind of ideal world in her work. She has always seen herself as a communicator—a role that could not coexist with retreating into such a fake idyll—and as solidly grounded in the "real world." Her work thus becomes the basis for translation, sharing, and a dialogue of her experiences (though *not just* her own, as will become clear below). She readily admits that the *places* MwangiHutter creates are not intended for "permanent" residence or "perfect." They have "a lot of friction, because I do believe that through discomfort that's the way you find things out. [...] A lot of things I have learned in life have been through discomfort and I thought that it is justified, you know, to create that same kind of space [for the audience]."[316]

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[314] Several articles for the catalogue *A Fiction of Authenticity,* raise the issue that these artists were not "entrusted with the mission of representing Africa"–see for example curator Shannon Fitzgerald citing Ery Camara—rather they are looking in and at Africa for their content because they want to dismantle "the imperialist, colonialist mindset that created the *original* fictions of authentic culture." Shannon Fitzgerald, "A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad," in *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*, ed. Shannon Fitzgerald and Tumelo Mosaka (St. Louis, Missouri: Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2003), 3; Ery Camara, "Demystifying Authenticity," in ibid., 83.

[315] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[316] Ibid.

The changed circumstances of her life had meant that as a 16 year old, MwangiHutter could not simply indulge in teenager pleasures of being carefree, going out, enjoying some "disco time," and becoming more comfortable in her own body, but rather she would spend the next 8 years in "an assimilation phase [in which she was] confronting the view of self and of the environment" that she was in, "in a whole different way."[317] When the artist finally went back to Africa in 1998—almost a decade later and adding now also the eyes and experiences of Robert—she went back "as a different person, who went there professionally, to give video workshops and to engage there in the art scene" and who also with the realization that she could let go of the heartache "and now feel quite well-balanced between the two places"—as they are both important for her life (today, as one artist with two bodies, she also appreciates being able to be in both places at the same time).[318]

Immediately after graduating from the HBKS Saarbrücken, MwangiHutter decided to face the "issue" suggested by her professor head-on. To show that she was not going to mince words or gloss anything over, and that she was not going to spare her audience the pain of her own experience, she provocatively titled a series of works *Neger* [figure 15] (the term is a discriminatory German expression, with the same Spanish/Latin roots as the English word "Negro"). In 1999, a video and installation work titled *Neger* was complemented and supplemented by a performance titled *Regen* [figure 16] (the palindrome for "Neger"), and a photo series titled *Negro*. In case this was not clear enough for the audience, in 2000 the

[317] Ibid.

[318] Ibid.

artist added a video/performance work titled *Neger – Don't Call Me* [figure 17]. All of these works, and the subsequent video works *Masked,* 2000, and *Cutting the Mask,* 2003 [figure 18], are based on the notion of African Masks as markers (or placeholders) of a racialized identity. The masks used by the artist, however, are neither imported nor carved out of wood (which would align with the common image of the African masks in the West), but rather fabricated, woven, and braided out of the artist's own hair (still attached to her scalp).[319] This special kind of "natural fiber" (and perhaps a rather strange extension of and allusion to the "other kind" of African masks, which are based on fabric), is bent and tied into shapes close enough to some traditional forms that they are identifiable as masks, but also creative enough to go beyond mere "re-presentations" and to become generalized examples for the mask-as-such (and thus for the Western view of "the African as such"). Taking on stereotypes at this largest of levels, MwangiHutter does not make any single individual responsible for the prejudices encountered by people with African roots, and in fact acknowledges their basis in the long history of public misinformation and propaganda. At the same time, she holds each of us accountable: There are no excuses for racism.

With the works she created between 1999 and 2003, and after having lived for over a decade in Germany, the artist underscored that she had let go of her nostalgia, and through making art had found a new way to relate to *place*. She still encountered prejudice and stereotyping, yet also realized that unlike other "Afro-Deutsche"—who were so called because of their skin color and regardless of whether

[319] This is a choice made by the artist and not an omission, as the use of a "traditional" wooden mask in the artist's 1997 work *Black Half/Half Black* shows.

or not they had in fact been born in Africa—she was fortunate enough to "know where she had come from" (i.e. that she had actually had ties to Africa herself, and not through some previous and far removed generations, which would have left her with the stigma of being African but without memories of her own). This foundation led her to embrace her "hyphenated" or "chameleon" existence.[320] The artist eschewed the term "hybrid," which enjoyed popularity for a while (used especially by those who didn't consider themselves "hybrid") and then fell out of favor (as it came to mean something inferior—neither one nor the other and therefore not "whole"), and she also tries to move away from the hyphenated identity superimposed on her by German society.[321] However, the chameleon image fits at least in part for a person who says of herself: "I can be one and I can be the other, and yet I do notice, when I'm in Kenya, I become different in my whole way of speaking, and I adapt my whole way of being."[322] Ultimately—due to her own experience of coming to terms with wholly belonging to two different countries and histories[323]—the artist questions even the validity of the chameleon symbol, because "you are also neither [...] because this whole thing of belonging to a group is definitely a construction. You can see

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[320] The former term was used by Bernd Schulz and Lisa Puyplat in their foreword to *Your Own Soul*, 6; the latter was used by IngridMwangiRobertHutter in the artist's interview by the author.

[321] As mentioned above, the use of the "hyphen" is reserved for those who are visually or culturally different, i.e. "Turkish-German," "Russian-German," or "Afro-German," though the latent racism in these "descriptors" is commonly overlooked.

[322] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[323] In MwangiHutter's words: "I think it's been quite a whole healthy exercise for me in my life to actually be painfully confronted with the whole idea of not belonging and to actually come out and say that you belong to a much larger group [motions the shape of the entire globe], the group of every being you could relate to, which is your choice." Ibid.

nationalism and the whole idea of nationalism as always shifting, even when we had an African movement it always depends on your consciousness which group you belong to."[324] Furthermore, the choices we make when we subscribe to such delimiting views can have unintended or negative consequences, for example when "these constructed realities, that are somehow supposed to serve us, go against us – when we start feeling so identified with our group that we would actually go against another group."[325]

Taking responsibility and putting experience to work

For MwangiHutter, the experience of finding her place in Germany and in the art world has also meant having the responsibility to use her talent and training to do "this work for other people, who don't have the time, who don't have the access, and who haven't had the training."[326] The light-bulb moment came when the artist was explaining one of her works to a little boy in the audience and halfway through, it hit her: "Wow, this is actually my job! This is my work!"[327] Thus the artist moved from the point where art was "something you slipped into," and went on beyond the stages of self-doubt and questioning one's role as an artist, to acknowledging now that it is a "function which [she has] taken within this society to produce art, which says things to people, to contemplate, to reflect, and to be in the studio trying out how [she] can

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

fit this together."[328] Much like a talented craftsman or someone with technical knowledge, the artist sees her contribution to society as a special skill set that has its own place—and justification—in the grand scheme of things.

And yet, the artist not only uses her skills to a general benefit. The very process of making art has given the artist collaborative "this sense of responsibility and capability of actually shaping my surroundings" which she contrasts with the "helplessness" many people feel, who are unable to experience the "transformation from something very immaterial like your thoughts and ideas to something manifest [i.e. a work of art]."[329] Because of this capability, the artist no longer perceives herself as having a lack of agency or control. While others may feel like "a victim of the times… of politics… of the whole direction [the world] is taking, and tell themselves 'it has nothing to do with me – it's them out there, who are not making the right decisions," for MwangiHutter this kind of recourse to victimization, helplessness, or resignation is not an option.[330] Lastly, the artist's ability to shape her surroundings has also meant that tackling racism, stereotypes, and historical injustice is no longer merely something the artist "has" to do because she is black, but rather, along the lines of Albert Camus's *Sisyphus*, something she *chooses* to do.

That this choice goes far beyond her own personal experiences becomes clear in works such as *Shades of Skin*, 2001 [figure 19]. The work consists of four separate photographic images, executed in slightly larger than life C-Prints, of the artist's head

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[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Ibid.

and arms, back, upper legs, and "dangling" feet (the image makes them appear to be hanging over—but not touching—dark soil). It takes its title from the fact that each image has a different shade — from light (head and arms) to dark (dangling feet). With the work, the artist brings attention to racism based on skin tone, and she chooses to do so not just in the present tense and not just in her own experience, but also by bringing in the past and the experiences of "colored" peoples throughout history: "I have made this one work where you see welds on my back as if I've been whipped—I haven't been whipped, but I have to try and kind of appropriate that whole idea, how can it be to be exploited or to be enslaved just because of skin color."[331] In the work, MwangiHutter also obscures her face by placing her hands in front of it. It is a gesture frozen in time, as if the hands were praying or holding an imaginary, precious object, which the artist is trying penetrate mentally. Regardless of the particular meaning of the hand gesture, the effect is that her facial features become less visible, more anonymous, and thus open to stand for a general person rather than a specific individual. The artist tells us: you can be in this *place*, too—or rather: put yourself in my *place* for a few minutes.

Another work in the same year, titled *Coloured* [figure 20], and actually the title of both a video installation and a performance linked to the photographic work *Shades of Skin,* was the artist's more obvious attempt to put the question to audiences "where is the color? Where does color happen?" By producing both a permanent work (the installation, on a wall) and a temporal or ephemeral work (the performance, in the center of the room), she tries to make the subject accessible to

[331] Ibid.

the viewer: "It is about experience and translating that experience, about creating a similar space in which it can become an experience for an audience."[332] To allow those who could not be present for the actual performance to approximate some of this experience, the performance was videotaped and became part of the installation, projected on an adjacent wall as a 15-minute loop. The platform on which the performance took place, as well as the red earth on it, were also left in situ.

In the performance of *Coloured,* 2001, MwangiHutter addresses the trauma of her experience and re-enacts it to therapeutic effect, ultimately helping to dissolve the original trauma: "Actually I have found that issues have been worked off. At a certain point, I'm kind of on the stage and I'm also shouting and screaming and going through motions of being puppeteered [by saying]: 'Get up!' 'Stand up!' 'Turn around!' You know, just expressing, and after that I said, 'now it's enough screaming, it's o.k.'"[333] This kind of overcoming through communication is a crucial element of the artist's work and mission. If communication with the audience is one part of the artist's credo, the other is bringing the different elements that make up her work into communication with each other. For the performance of *Coloured* MwangiHutter is on a stage dressed in a long, luscious red gown. The interaction of her performance and the video installation around the artist are captured in this text:

> I stand and concentrate.
> I begin rocking on my heels, more and more…
> hissing noises as the projection blows into colour.
> Head Back Thighs Feet
> I lose my balance and fall, lie on my back.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Ibid.

Face is light-skinned and watching, waiting for something. Frozen.
Back is breathing calm.
Hands rest on my thighs. They move up and down in a slow caress.
Feet are grounded, and dark.

I lie and listen.
Slowly groaning, grating noises.
Muttering, gasping, moaning, sighing, sniffling,
Shaking, cursing, screaming,
hit the stage
play it
I am the stage.
In between quiet, listening.

Head turns to look at you. Face is watching waiting for something, frozen.
Back is twisting from side to side, sometimes a glimpse of breast, then gone, so quick you wonder if you saw those hands squeeze out milk. Scars like whipped.
Hands are on thighs. They draw back and strike several times. Harsh clap of flesh on flesh. They caress the bruise that forms.
Feet hovering like hanged. My hands around my ankles, pushed to the earth bury them with soil. Ground them.

Then, videos move, quietly fall, dropping into bright light, fading into dark.
I slowly rise.
And stop.[334]

The stage itself also played a special role. Constructed of wood, with a hollow space in between and open on two ends, it magnified the sound of stomping during the performance.[335] Thus, along with sounds from the video installation, and the amplified sounds from the artist's mouth, a whole audio panorama emerged, having

[334] Text from artist's description of "*Coloured* performed," in *Your Own Soul – Ingrid Mwangi*, ed. Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2003), 12-13. Italics added to show her description of what is happening on the video screens.

[335] See description of the components of "*Coloured* performed," 15.

originated in different physical and temporal moments only to become one in the *place* of the gallery. In the installation of the same name, MwangiHutter "cut up" her body to be presented on different video screens, and made each part a different color (from bottom to top, i.e. from very dark feet to a very light colored face). Each of the screens shows her engaged in different actions, which are a continuation of the ones seen in *Shades of Skin*, and are being described by the artist in her script of and commentary on the performance. By leaving the "original color" open to question, MwangiHutter wanted to make it possible for the viewer to investigate and become suspicious of preconceived notions. Alas, she found the particular audience's reaction overall to be rather simplistic. In her recollection of the feedback she received, most people lacked the "capacity to infiltrate the content of the work and relate it to themselves" because it was perceived to be something that is "happening over there, it's on the other side."[336] This experience is still very common when Germans are confronted with their own history and with present-day expressions of racism. One often finds a kind of "but not me!" attitude, which presumes that being oblivious to such issues absolves one of responsibility.[337]

The common perception that Blacks are not German is tied to the legal history of German citizenship, which is based on *ius sanguinis*, i.e. someone who has German "ancestry" rather than someone (regardless of skin color) who was born in

[336] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[337] In many ways this attitude is also a reflection of a high level of egotism in millennial Germany that has replaced many of the social responsibility values of previous generations and reflects a Zeitgeist of individual responsibility to the extreme: "I'm not doing it, so why should I do something about it." Or even more radical "I'm not in that person's skin, so I don't have to change anything."

Germany (this holds true even generations later if the original ancestor was not "German").[338] This law has cemented a certain "racial heritage" as a requirement for "true Germanness" not so much in the actual legal system, but in the eyes of the German public (and this has not changed significantly despite de-nazification after World War II and the country's entry into the European Union). As a result of this, Black Germans, though born to and raised by German parents and belonging to no culture or nation other than Germany, are commonly perceived to be "African."[339] This particular myopia also means that there is "technically speaking [no] such thing as an anti—Afro-German discourse, only an anti-African discourse," which makes it effectively impossible for "an Other-from-within [to] respond to a discourse that posits one as an Other-from-without."[340] The "inability on the part of white Germans to understand so simple a concept as being both Black *and* German" can in part explain the disappointing reactions to MwangiHutter's color questioning work,

[338] A change in German law in 1999, which came into effect in 2000, actually makes the "naturalization" of long-time residents easier, but the perception of "other" remains—as is evident in expressions such as "A Turk with a German passport" or the hyphenizing of nationalities, even when the person is only a citizen of Germany.

[339] See, among others, Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 185, and a collection of essays in the spring 2003 issue of the journal Callaloo. This view has also been documented by Alanna Lockward in her analysis of the language used by German print media reporting the brutal attack on a Black German man by two White Germans. The victim was identified as *Other* 63 times in 27 articles, and as a black German in only four instances, whereas the perpetrators are never identified as white; the only reference made to their identity is the term neo-Nazi. See Lockward, "Black German Diaspora," accessed January 10th, 2010, alannalockward.wordpress.com/black-german-diaspora/

[340] Wright, *Becoming Black,* 191.

though it is still shocking that this "is most likely unique to the Afro-German experience."[341]

Yet, Germans and other national audiences do have the intellectual capacity to process the artists' ideas and then put them in a larger context—if not on their own, then with the help of scholars like Gislind Nabakowski. In the exhibition catalogue *Your Own Soul* Nabakowski's essay examines the complexities of the installation and performance *Coloured* in connection with global issues of racism, chauvinism, exoticism, ignorance, post-colonialism, fetishism, prejudice, and the dissolution of all of the above into finally grasping female corporeality as a phenomenon that is equally "a staged and [a] social being-in-the world."[342]

A place in the international art scene

MwangiHutter's contribution to the seminal exhibition *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, at the Museum for African Art in New York in 2003, did not include her video installations and performances. They are only represented in the essay on Ingrid Mwangi in the exhibition's catalogue, though the Museum's *Focus Gallery* had in fact featured the *Neger – Don't Call Me* installation earlier in 2003 as a contemporary contrast to the large-scale exhibition of historical masks titled *Facing the Mask*.[343] In *Looking Both Ways*, the artist was

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[341] Ibid. In a footnote the author further elaborates that there is no such dilemma in other Northern European countries where an even smaller presence of black citizens is automatically assumed to be Danish, Swedish, etc. by their countrymen.

[342] Gislind Nabakowski, "The Other State in the Sense of Reinterpretation or 'The River of Thought Takes the Form of Skin?,'" in *Your Own Soul – Ingrid Mwangi*, ed. Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2003), 65.

represented through works that lent themselves to the format of a traveling exhibition (which was slated to be shown at about half a dozen art institutions around the world): large photographic prints. The two colossal images of *Static Drift,* 2001 [figure 21], are the first specific attempts of the artist to examine the *places* of her origin in her work.

As the point of departure for *Static Drift*, the artist chose a *place* that is at the core of all *place* experiences, namely her own body. Focusing on her midsection (or maybe anonymizing the "canvas" of the body, by cutting the image off so that there are no markers of gender or personal identity), we see the outlines of two geographically, politically determined entities: the EU-country Germany and the continent of Africa.[344] The photopositive (Germany) and photonegative (Africa) were created by means of a stencil which the artist placed on her abdomen, and then letting the power of the UV-rays of sunlight produce the "photo" exposure on her skin. These places are literally burned into MwangiHutter's skin—they always had been, as the artist famously opened one of her performances by saying "Ladies and Gentlemen. I'm coloured – es brennt mir auf der Haut"[345]—but now the rest of the

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[343] See artist's biography as well as Laurie Ann Farrell's review published on MwangiHutter's website, accessed February 10th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/text_laurie_ann_farrell.html

[344] As it was the artist's choice to portray "a headless body," and to eliminate any clear markers of gender, I do not agree with Alanna Lockward's interpretation that the image reinforces "the absence of subjectivity by which *white* hegemonic gaze constructs its fantasy of the colonized subject, especially of women." In Lockward, "Decolonizing Germany: Wild at Hair. IngridMwangiRobertHutter: Masks and Skin Politics as a German DeColonial Knowledge Production," *Reartikulacija* 10, 11, 12, 13 (2010): 23-24. The person in *Static Drift* is not an exotic, fetishized female, and at least in theory could be any body.

world can see it, too. But it would not have been enough for the artist to simply leave us with her own experience of uniting two places in one body (and still she is always excluded from both, as the discussion above of being too "white" as a Kenyan and too "black" as a German shows); she aims for the bigger questions. Here, the stencils include English text – referencing stereotypes found in literature and recent history. On the Africa outline we can read a photopositive: "Bright Dark Continent," in which the artist directly plays on the lighter colored outline of the continent we see on her body, and gives a positive prognosis for the continent's development. However, the text also alludes to the title of Joseph Conrad's book *In the Heart of Darkness*, and thereby brings to the fore the entire history of colonialism and racism experienced by a continent.

The outline of Germany, on the other hand, has the photonegative writing "Burn Out Country," matching the darker colored shape of the country. The phrase does not provide quite as much charge, but does reference two historical points of interest: the recent discussion of both individual and societal "dead-ends" of development, and the past event of a "burned" out country after the Second World War. The two *places*, which are both part of the artist and of which she is a part due to her life experiences and her genes, are now contrasted on the same location of her body. By taking these two images to yet a third location where they are shown as

345 The last part translates to "it is burning on my skin," (though it is also related to a figure of speech implying urgency) see performance transcript in *Your Own Soul*, 12.

part of an exhibition, the audience is left to fill in what *place* really means, and which of the "meanings" provided by the artist has more "truth."[346]

The photo work *If*, 2003 [figure 22], MwangiHutter's second contribution to the show, was especially commissioned for *Looking Both Ways* by the Museum for African Art. The grand scale of the work resembles a painting of a royal audience, yet is actually based on a magazine photo. Even without having seen the original, the viewer can immediately identify the original subject: the work depicts Hitler (in *If* he is actually Robert Hutter, sporting Hitler-style mustache and combed hair) and a throng of female admirers (in *If* they are multiple versions of Ingrid Mwangi, featuring different facial expressions and hairstyles). Despite the touchy subject, the work was reviewed very favorably by a number of established critics. This can partly be attributed to the fact that MwangiHutter dares to tackle issues of racism firmly entrenched in German culture, and partly to stereotypical expectations of the kind of art "German artists" should produce.[347] In the hands of MwangiHutter, an expert at turning stereotypes on their head and inside out, *If* becomes a work about *place*. On the one hand, there is the abstract "place" of "where minority groups fit in" in Germany—the women have to be seen as representing any discrimination based on

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[346] As MwangiHutter pointed out, for those knowledgeable of the New York art scene, the "two placedness" of the artist was reiterated in the concurrent exhibition at the city's Goethe Institute—where the artist was representing "Germany."

[347] See Holland Cotter, "An Africa Diaspora Show Asks: What is Africanness? What is Diaspora?" *New York Times*, November 21, 2003; Laurie Ann Farrell, "Looking Both Ways. Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora," *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, (Spring/Summer 2008); Nick Stillman, "Looking Both Ways," *The Brooklyn Rail,* accessed March 1st, 2011, http://www.brooklynrail.org/2004/01/artseen/looking-both-ways

gender, and the skin color representing anyone who is not white—which is conveyed through the different expressions of the "admirers," who seem to ask the white man in the middle "What are you going to do for me?" On the other hand, there is the actual "place of the other," which the artist inhabits to feel and to understand this "other" while enabling the audience to do the same.

As MwangiHutter writes in the accompanying artist statement: "My artistic strategy became increasingly one of identification: to take the place of the other, in order to feel, to understand. In *If* I take a similar approach of putting myself in place of the other, but resulting in a different outcome, for the viewer will not as willingly accept my identification with the white, as he does with the black. In this case 'the Other[s]' are those who should have known, who knew and who benefitted."[348] The artist confronts history, both the fact that she would not have been in the original picture, and the fact that this is the one bit of information about her as a person (her mixed German-African heritage) that is still foremost on the audiences mind.[349] She also takes on the impossible and improbable, through the simple reality that she is straddling two cultures, two histories, and two opposites in her own, one body: "The

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[348] See "About eventualities," accessed November 25th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/text_ingridmwangiroberthutter_about_eventualities.html

[349] Ibid. As critic Horst Gerhard Haberl stated in the opening lines of his essay "Art is the message" it was Mwangi's luck of a "late birth" that made her life and career possible: "If Ingrid Njeri Mwangi – the daughter of a Kenyan man and a German woman – had been born during the Third Reich, she would have been considered 'of an inferior genotype' and classified as 'degenerate progeny.' She might never have been born in the first place, as racial anthropologist were demanding the forced sterilization of mothers of Afro-Germans even before the rise of Nazism." In *Your Own Soul – Ingrid Mwangi*, ed. Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2003) 32. Haberl continues to say that there continues to be a "perceptible social, political and cultural stigmatization of a colored person, an Afro-German, in Germany" which calls the "luck of the later birth" into question. Ibid.

fact is: German history is part of my heritage. And if in art I have begun to use my identity to ask questions about individual responsibility, then I cannot stop at my African identity. I must go all the way."[350]

In 2003, the same year as *Looking Both Ways*, and in fact opening two months before the New York exhibition, MwangiHutter participated in the show *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*, at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Curated by Shannon Fitzgerald and Tumelo Mosaka, the show featured eleven artists, four of whom were also showing in the New York exhibition (in addition to MwangiHutter, the double billing included Kendell Geers, Moshekwa Langa, and Zineb Sedira). Yet, with the focus of the exhibition on a "concept," the contribution of MwangiHutter was markedly different from the works seen in New York.

A Fiction of Authenticity had provided funding to create new works (or "responses" to the title of the show), which led to MwangiHutter's video installation *Dressed Like Queens*, 2003 [figure 23].[351] To bring in the artist's bodily presence, the installed work was accompanied by a performance piece (which was "repeated" in each of the three locations to which the exhibition traveled!). In *Dressed Like Queens*, MwangiHutter sought to provide a counterweight to the imbalance of how Africa is portrayed by the media.[352] By concentrating on "depicting the strength,

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[350] In "About eventualities."

[351] Interestingly, the same work was shown again in the U.S. five years later, as part of the *Black Womanhood* exhibition at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, NH. The exhibition also included the two other artists featured in this dissertation: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Wangechi Mutu.

creativity and potential power of African people and especially of the African woman symbolizing motherhood and creation," the artist juxtaposed positive visual images with the negative views that persist on TV screens and in our minds. The installation was set up as a triptych, with distinctly colored, hand-dyed panels of fabric that slightly overlap and smoothly fall onto the floor, where they are gathered in the center in a mound of folds. The panels serve as projection surfaces for video images of different women. The center panel shows a woman of color. Her naked, pregnant body is recorded in various stages of moving—sitting, standing, walking—and gesturing. The movements are carefully chosen and intended to "articulate personal histories and experiences" and to reveal "strong presence and expression of pride."[353] On the two flanking panels of red and green material we can see the artist herself, "gesturing expressively while speaking a poetical text" of her own, which tells of women—the artist's "metaphorical queens"—whose clothes were taken away from them, and "how, after difficulties and troubled times, they finally reclaim their rightful property."[354]

Reclaimed, 2003 [figure 24]—the title of the accompanying performance—uses the "idea of dressing as an act of communication and an expression of identity."[355] First, the artist sits fully dressed in front of the panels, mixing a paste of

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[352] IngridMwangiRobertHutter, "Redressing. Statement to the Video Installation Dressed Like Queens," accessed November 15th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/text_ingridmwangiroberthutter_redressing.html

[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid. Full text accessed online November 25th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi.de/_/text_ingridmwangiroberthutter_they_should_be_dressed_like_queens.html

[355] Ibid.

red Kenyan earth. This is followed by her resituating herself in the center between the panels on top of the folds, and (now topless) acting out a "dialogue" with the installation by means of its video and audio tracks and her own sounds, song, and the gesture of painting her own body with the paste made earlier. In each of these acts, MwangiHutter aims to "reflect the power and beauty I feel when 'thinking African,'" and thus counter fiction with the "authentic" experience.[356]

In 2006, the artist set out to prove the "fiction" of African authenticity by taking a personal stand. The collaboration with Hutter on the work *Dressed Like Queens* had reached such an extent that he was listed with his own entry in the biographies section of the catalogue. He could, however, not be listed with the "official" lineup due to the fact that unlike the other artists in the exhibition he was not born in Africa or could otherwise claim to be "African." In response to this and other instances like it, the artists questioned the "authenticity" of having separate artistic and individual identities, and in a move that continues to challenge the idea of "fixed categories of cultural, racial, sexual, and political identity that exist within prevailing oppositional structures" they retrospectively made one (artist) out of two.[357]

Today, almost a decade after officially becoming at collective, the artist acknowledges that their decision has still not been fully implemented. It is "a jump which many people have not yet been able to take, [...] sometimes Robert's name is

[356] Ibid. The techniques of adornment chosen by MwangiHutter are actually part of East African ritual customs. See Fitzgerald, "A Fiction of Authenticity," 29.

[357] See Fitzgerald, "A Fiction of Authenticity," 3.

dropped in spite of years of having this [new identity]."[358] To a certain extent this reluctance to adopt the combined name is also connected to the established institutions in the art world, which are difficult to change, as are the categories that make it easier for collectors, curators, scholars, and the commercial success of the work. All of them rely on the "name as part of this packaging thing, and it is difficult in mid-race to change the label."[359]

The change of identity that became reflected in their joint name was an inconvenience for collectors, curators, and researchers, yet it serves to underline the fact that MwangiHutter is not a "convenient" artist. Already complex and complicated, this move has provided the artist with new levels of experience/vantage points/possibilities, including that of making visible how the artist is present at opposite ends of the spectrum (or the two poles in a dualism) as well as having two bodies in one "mind." As Richard Elliott pointed out in his article in 2009, "IngridMwangiRobertHutter become simultaneously both colonizer and colonized, civilized and uncivilized [...], oppressor and oppressed" in addition to representing traditional binary opposites, such as "yin and yang, black and white, and most crucially European, and more specifically German, and African, and more specifically Kenyan."[360] Curiously, all of these aspects were already found in the Ingrid Mwangi part of this new fused identity (though the white colonizer element was represented by her mother, which turns the traditional power structure on its head and all but

[358] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[359] Ibid.

[360] In *NY Arts Magazine,* May/June 2009, accessed online, November 25th, 2010, http://www.ingridmwangi .de/_/text__Richard_Elliot_NY_Arts_Magazine_may_june _issue_2009.html

dissolves it). While the author highlights the power dualisms, the significantly new aspect—the different gender viewpoints of male and female (and the one most critiqued by her collectors)—is subsumed under the reference "yin and yang."[361] This may be chalked up to the continued ignorance of feminist perspectives by some male authors, yet these very perspectives play an important role in the changed perception and especially the artist's new perception of *place* (this fact is further underscored by the separate disciplines of feminist geography and eco-feminism, which were discussed in part one). Along with the change in the artist, the experience of place also evolved and recently has even been (r)evolutionized—not many people can boast to have been in "two places at the same time."[362] One result of MwangiHutter's complex history from displaced teenager to collective being, is that such a thing as "finding one's *place*" is not as simple as figuring out where you are on a map. Rather it is something that remains in flux, like life itself, and something that has to be constantly renegotiated.

While *place* is generally connected to having a dwelling or a home that provides security, it only does so through the belonging that is established by acts of relating. For the artist it is "through relating to people—[that] you relate to place," which means one has to become a part of the environment and the community in

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[361] The neglect of this type of difference is precisely the reason why a specialized discipline such as feminist geography could contribute so much to "place" discourse.

[362] Or at least not while conscious and in one piece. The case in point here: while I interviewed the artist formerly know as "Ingrid Mwangi" in Southern Germany, the "Robert" part was in Kenya, which the artist thought was "very interesting, that you can be in two places at the same time, I mean, that is something that is also specific to our time here that that is possible" – maybe more so to her specific situation of a dual bodied person, unless we include the virtual presence of somebody who is in your living room via a skype conversation/computer screen, while in actuality being on a different continent.

order to find one's *place*.[363] For MwangiHutter this applies even to such temporary places as biennials and traveling exhibitions (though really almost all exhibitions have a timeframe that limits the artists' exposure). She remains appreciative "that I'm there, that I've been given this space, that I actually have the chance to meet the people who see my work and engage with me in the level over my work."[364] This underscores that relating, to MwangiHutter, is not just a one-way street. Rather there is both give and take, and the resulting interrelatedness of people and events becomes the foundation of *place* for the artist: "I show my work from Japan in Asia to the States to Africa – it is quite amazing how people relate to the same thing quite similarly, because it's a human experience. And that is the basis of my work, it is about a human experience that I'm trying to communicate."[365]

The experience of starting as an *existential outsider* and becoming an *existential insider* (in Relph's terms) is chronicled in MwangiHutter's personal and professional lives. Though the process is never quite complete, the progression from the former to the latter is crucial in the general experience of *place*: it has life-changing power, giving back control over those factors once considered "outside" of one's reach.[366] Both in conversations and articles documenting the artist's actions, MwangiHutter has made clear that the achievement of "insider status" is to a large degree a matter of the choices one makes. On the one hand, through relating, she

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[363] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[364] Ibid.

[365] Ibid.

[366] Though according to Relph, we no longer need the feeling of control because once we are *insiders*, we experience place "without deliberate and self-conscious reflection." In Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 6.

accomplished an immersion into place that is impossible to ignore—the audience is not merely passive vessel, but active participant in the give and take. On the other hand, through processing the outsider experiences and making them accessible to the previously "exclusive" insiders, the artist has both highlighted existing boundaries that need to be eliminated (providing the insiders with a different kind of "exclusive" vantage point) and benefitted from the therapeutic effects such a practice can entail.[367]

Place in a new light or "seeing isn't knowing"

In an unpublished text titled "Intrusion," the artist recounts a part of what happened on the journey from being a teenager in the diaspora to becoming an artist with a collective identity—and at the same time spells out the possibilities and the responsibilities the latter brings with it:

> I had shut myself in myself. I don't know why. It was a habit. [...] Bravely, I stepped forth again and again, facing the battering waves. There was something to be found out. I became an intruder, defying the comfort zone of the known. Intrusiveness became the habit. Now I have no problem with it. I step onto the streets with eyes closed and arms far reaching. If there is a huge, stagnant pool of filthy water that is fed from broken sewage pipes, I will step into it. Even though the inhabitants themselves might avoid wetting their feet for fear of sickness and death, I cannot afford fear on this journey. If something can be found out and a true moment shared, then dangerously dancing along a thin line, I will do it.[368]

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[367] In other words, Relph's "notion of insideness – the idea that the more strongly an environment generates a sense of belonging, the more strongly does that environment become a place" means that because MwangiHutter has established a sense of belonging through relating, the artist has transformed essential outsideness into essential insideness or *place* (see Seamon, "A Singular Impact," 5).

[368] IngridMwangiRobertHutter, "Intrusion" (unpublished essay, December 01, 2011), Pdf file.

The artist has realized that in order to break down boundaries, she has to go across them. Through overcoming dualities such as male/female, black/white, German/Kenyan, by means of the collective identity, MwangiHutter is now able to see the "construction" of such divisions in the world she encounters. But being able to "see" does not necessarily mean using one's eyesight. For the artist, eyes have actually become a burden, bringing with them the stereotypes and prejudices of the past.

The fallacy of "seeing is knowing" is actually challenged by many visual artists, and in particular by African-American women artists, who have found unique ways of addressing it. In her book *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past*, Lisa Gail Collins points to a number of artists—Renée Green, Carla Williams, Lyle Ashton Harris, Renée Cox, and Deborah Willis, among others—who address the problematic baggage of our "visual empiricism."[369] In works that aim to challenge the entire history of visual documentation in science—much of which was carried out "to prove the inferiority of the less powerful and thus justify their subordination"—the artists revisit the [in]famous objects of such studies: Saartjie Baartman and Josephine Baker.[370]

In the example of Green's installation *Seen*, 1990, part of *Anatomies of Escape* [figure 25], the viewer of the work enters unknowingly into the position of

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[369] Collins, *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers Press, 2002), 23.

[370] Ibid., 22-25. Collins calls the two women "the most fetishized black bodies in European history" and emphasizes the eroticization of the two women through their nicknames "Hottentot Venus" (Baartman) and "Black Venus" (Baker), ibid.

the elevated and displayed object of "scientific" study, an experience that is both unsettling in the present and illuminating of the past. The significance of the "gaze" as a privilege of colonial power has been amply documented and studied.[371] In the art world, however, it takes on a new meaning. On the one hand, it is a requirement for the visual arts; on the other hand, it has a very charged history, especially when it comes to works representing or otherwise dealing with minorities (i.e., for most of history only white males and saints—male or female—were exempt from outright discriminatory or prejudiced treatment). As Green put it: "Power is related to seeing and vision. Being able to see and name something implies a certain amount of power. I keep trying to make viewers aware of the process involved in seeing, so that it doesn't just seem self-evident."[372]

This process can also be addressed by turning an expectation upside down—a technique that has been applied very successfully in the work of Renée Stout. In *Fetish #2*, 1988 [figure 26], she takes the form and concept of a traditional Kongo *nkisi nkondi* figure, but then applies it to a life size, multi-media sculpture, which actually represents the artist.[373] Through the use of her own, "U.S.-based body" she eliminated the questionable power structure "Western artist—African model," and by

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[371] The "Colonial Gaze" was often applied to women, c.f. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), but also to the colonial subject in general: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), Homi Bhaba, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routlege, 1994), Jacques Lacan, "Of the Gaze as Object Petit a," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 67-119.

[372] Collins, *The Art of History,* 25.

[373] Ibid., 60-63. See also, Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating their own image: the history of African-American women artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 260ff.

"presenting herself as a power figure, Stout [also] resituates the female body," casting it in a new light that steers clear of stereotypes of the exotic and erotic black body.[374] Like the original that inspired her, Stout's figure has charms around its neck and an enclosure in its abdomen. However, in the case of *Fetish #2* this special compartment is covered with glass and reveals to the viewer personal object choices: an old photograph of a baby, a stamp and dried flowers. Through the acts of turning the *nkisi nkondi* into a representation of herself, taking the traditional concept and making it relevant to the present time, and removing it from being the object of ethnographic study or of a curio collector and instead placing it into the space of contemporary art, Stout has subverted the visual knowledge we associate with the Kongo figure and with the representation of the black female nude. She thus ultimately turns our gaze back on ourselves.

These prior forms of "knowledge"—encountered variously as visual empiricism, stereotypes, and prejudice—are exactly what MwangiHutter wanted to leave behind with the transformation to a collective being. In a kind of drastic measure, a number of performance works created after the announcement in 2006 actually feature the artist with closed eyes (i.e. with the eyelids closed or taped shut). As the artist puts it: "I cannot believe in what meets the eye, and so I remove my eyes to see better, and beyond."[375] This point is taken to the extreme in one video work—*Beauty, in the eye of the beholder* (2008)—in which the eyeballs are physically

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[374] Collins, *The Art of History,* 62-63. Michael D. Harris affirms that this depicts "ritual nudity, not the available female nude of Western art," in Michael D. Harris and Wyatt MacGaffey, *Astonishment and Power* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1993), 131.

[375] MwangiHutter, "Intrusion."

removed from their sockets by the subject of the video (who is not the artist), placed in front of the very person, who then proceeds to slowly cut them up with a razor blade. When another frame reveals (digitally created) black holes in the eye sockets, we are briefly confronted with the result of the just observed actions, only to be presented in the next frame with the eyeballs (back) in their proper place in a smiling face of the same person we just saw "eye-less." Playing with the viewer's expectations upon seeing such "visual evidence," the artist tries to alert us to the complicity of our own eyes in committing crimes of (pre)judgment—while relying on those very eyes to communicate with the viewer. The digitally blackened eyes, or a kind of temporary blindness, feature also in a black and white photo work titled *May you not know*, 2008 [figure 27],[376] in which the artist has removed the eyes of the children shown to draw attention to a range of issues from global violence, to overprotective parents, and minors who have suffered severe abuse and trauma.

When choosing a medium for their work, many artists with a minority background are aware of the troubled history of photography, which was equally capable of violating as it was of liberating its subjects.[377] A first remedial step was to shift from documentary or "unmanipulated" photography to modified approaches that incorporated text, a larger number of images, or an integration of the images

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[376] The expression is not complete, but has been featured in many Jewish obituaries– "May you not know any more sorrow"—as well as in Yiddish commentary—"May you not know of such troubles" (Zolst nit visn fun azelkhe tsores)—on everyday problems (losing your wallet, for example). In 2008, the artist's sister lost her battle to cancer, and, if we want to speculate, the wish can be seen as a hope for her own children that they may be spared a similar fate to that of their cousins.

[377] See Collins, *The Art of History*, 22.

into installations.[378] A second step came with the development of digital photography, which is so rich in possibilities for modification *after* the image has been taken that the "truth" of the final image is always in question. In MwangiHutter's work there are numerous instances of such alterations, though one pair of works shall suffice here to illustrate the point.

In *Echoing the mood,* 2006 [figure 28], the artist has photographed close-ups of a section of her head—in one image the left side of the face, in the other the face's lower half and neck. These images are very plain and straightforward portrait shots, except in the first the artist's ear canal has disappeared and in the second there is only skin where the mouth should be. In both cases the skin matches up so perfectly with its surroundings that the edges of the modification are invisible (something that is relatively easy to achieve with digital manipulation, and much harder with special effects make-up). As a result, it is impossible to tell from the image whether it depicts "reality" or "fiction." The only truth that emerges is a simple one, the message of the two photographs: we cannot speak without a mouth, nor hear without the ear canal.

In 2007, the developments of thinking about visual perception, truth, and artistic identity cumulated in a new approach to *place,* which the artist applies to the work *Being Bamako* [figure 29]. MwangiHutter had been invited by the Jean Paul Blachére Foundation to participate in a video workshop in Mali, engage with the city of Bamako and its inhabitants, and produce a video art work over a period of 10 days. As the artist's statement titled "becoming bamako" highlights, *place* can no longer be

[378] Ibid.

taken for granted.[379] In the quest for "truth" the artist has to acknowledge that there is nothing about this or any other *place* that can be generalized, because every attempt at definition seems to lead deeper into a pattern of misrepresentation disguised as "knowledge." The artist's line of thought and approach to the challenge are crucial to understanding the final work:

> When asked to come and be confronted, observe and reveal something about this place, I ask myself how one arrives in a new place, where one has never been before. Usually, we don't allow ourselves to admit that we know nothing. Instead, we bring along pre-conceived ideas and draw them like a coat over whatever we find [...] We think that we are looking and observing, but often we do so not in order to learn something new, but in order to compare, judge and reassure ourselves of our knowledge [...]
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> But it is not only other people's opinions becoming my own, which worries me, I wonder about my very own opinions, my own way of seeing and judging the world. I too am a producer, a creator of my own packages of images/sounds/information that I present to others. What exactly am I proposing to see and be able to communicate?
>
> I think that artists often search for artistic commentary that is somehow truthful [...] Perhaps our intention is good when we go to a place, but if we remain blind to what is actually there, or see only the half of it, then good intentions can easily become imposition, misrepresentation and even exploitation. We go away with interesting images and much to say about it, but it remains our words, thoughts and presentation [...]
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> Finally, after ten days of experience a place like Bamako – or even months, years or a life-time spent in any place, all that might be left to say is "I was there: at that place, at that time." Although this seems neither spectacular nor scandalous, if it is truthful statements we are looking for, this might be closer to the point.[380]

The work itself gives the viewer a glimpse (or 16:50 minutes, to be exact) of this experience: "I was there: at that place, in that moment." In the video we see the

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[379] IngridMwangiRobertHutter, "becoming bamako," (2007), accessed February 12th, 20011, http://www.mwangi-hutter.de/_/text_ingridmwangiroberthutter_being_bamako.html

[380] Ibid.

artist, eyes closed, arms outstretched, standing in the middle of a street, presumably somewhere in Bamako.[381] The environmental noises (mostly talking and street sounds) are all we hear – just like the artist who perceives the place through ears only (smells were probably also part of it, but they are not for the audience). As a breeze catches her dress, she begins to move and turn. Touch has entered as another one of the sensual experiences of place. Noises are amplified and selected, replicating one's awareness of surroundings unseen, which finds us focusing on one thing at a time, trying to identify what it is. Next we see the artist move down the same stretch of road several times, absorbing the feeling of the surroundings with every step she takes, all the while the video highlights the change that always accompanies that which remains the same, by featuring different persons in the background and foreground (a man with a cart, a woman with a laundry basket, children playing and doing cartwheels).

In another frame of the video, Bamako has turned into a person, a man whose face the artist explores with her hands; still for the artist *place* is perceived through touching but not looking, while for the audience it is through looking but not touching. As the artist statement underscores, MwangiHutter is critical of her own observations and judgments, in particular of the knowledge our eyes make us believe we possess, and so she takes "sight" out of the encounter with Bamako. Through this choice, we are being made aware of the fact that we as an audience also only get part of the experience of Bamako as a place, and that our encounters with *place* can always only be a work in progress, even when it is "a life-time" that we spend in it.

[381] This gesture is also included by the artist in the essay "Intrusion." The absence of sight is justified both in the essay as well as in the accompanying artist statement.

Yet, this is not a negative observation; rather, it opens up complexities of *place* which may yet be overlooked (because we are so accustomed to *this place*). It inspires us, again to find truth in the simple details.

Challenges of places real and virtual

From the beginnings of MwangiHutter's career, the artist has felt a certain amount of "privilege" in her experience of being an artist. She recalls that she never had to "fight" for her place in the art world, that there had always been a lot of interest in her work, as well as in herself as a person, and that she had been welcomed by art institutions and in art locations around the world. This subjective view finds a more objective reflection in the artist's exhibition history, which mirrors this perceived interest as a long line of solo and group show listings, catalogue chapters and articles on the artist. It is also represented in the graph of the art market barometer website *artfacts.net*, where she has consistently ranked in the top 2000 artist group (out of a total of 100,000 rankings) for the past 8 years.[382]

This experienced privilege is also tied to her German passport and to sacrificing her Kenyan citizenship. Prior to January 1st 2000, dual citizenship was not a possibility for a child born to a German and a non-German parent, instead one had to chose between those two nationalities. Giving up one's passport as a result of an involuntary relocation is an act usually not only hampered by nostalgia, but accompanied by real identity crises. The alternative, clinging to the passport as the last piece of physical evidence of non-European origins, means confronting a host of

[382] Profile accessed multiple times between fall 2010 and spring 2014 online at http://www.artfacts.net/en/artist/ingridmwangiroberthutter-67979/profile.html

obstacles. MwangiHutter has witnessed how "a lot of African artists who will not give up their passports, though they have been living in Europe [...] have issues when traveling, such as always having to go to the embassy and getting a visa [...] and sometimes they can't even travel."[383] The artist's practical and pragmatic side as well as the fact that she also feels German, made her choice and the resulting travel much easier. At the same time, it has also raised her awareness and criticism of the general "bordering out" of fellow artists and human beings that takes place based on their country of origin.[384]

Part of the global, contemporary artist's lifestyle is an abundance of encounters with new *places*, which MwangiHutter also links to "privilege": "Going back [to Kenya] and going to other places is within a frame which is quite comfortable, actually – you get picked up, you have your ticket, you have your opening. So I experience traveling and being in different places now as extremely privileged. There is always a setting for you to come into, your opinion is asked as an artist, and that's just a whole different scenario than how most people have to search for place."[385] The artist contrasts the privilege of this type of *place encounter* with the difficulties faced by immigrants in dealing with assimilation (or lack thereof). She views "the right to find place—to move, to better your life—one of the hugest

[383] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[384] MwangiHutter used this literal translation of the German *ausgrenzen* to criticize "that borders are created, and hindrances that ultimately prevent exchange from taking place." Ibid.

[385] Ibid. The artist's experience of being wanted and welcomed is unlike the experience of most immigrants or refugees around the globe, or even other travelers.

challenges of our time."[386] This challenge is taken up in the 2010 performance work *Intruders* [figure 30], in which the audience is given the role of those who are unwelcome and have to negotiate and find their *place* (see below).

As a result of MwangiHutter's boundary shattering "one identity–two bodies" persona, the artist has developed a different approach to the perception of *place*, both subjectively (i.e. opinions and communications) and objectively (i.e. observations and documentations). In most of the works that post-date the forming of the artistic and personal collective, MwangiHutter attempts to find a more neutral base that includes both establishing a common ground with the audience and avoiding big picture generalizations in favor of documenting moments in snapshots. The solo exhibition *Intruders*, at the Goethe-Institut in Nairobi, was announced to reflect "MwangiHutter's foremost current methodology: upon the particular stages found on arrival at 'unknown places,' the objective is to intertwine with people's live reality for some moments in time."[387]

This methodology was already promoted by the artist in the work *Being Bamako* through a healthy dose of self-skepticism in the artist statement. For MwangiHutter it is clear that the opinions we absorb from others can actually be dangerous to us (because they can close off our eyes and minds). At the same time, she acknowledges that we ourselves are producers and disseminators of such opinions that can delimit rather than open up our thinking. In *Intruders* (both the work and the exhibition), the audience for an exhibition opening of MwangiHutter's

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[386] Ibid.

[387] Newsrelease, "Intruders," accessed March 10th, 2011, http://www.ingridmwangiroberthutter.com/_/news.html

work is stopped at the entrance of the site, a gallery of the Goethe-Institut in Nairobi. Three men, including the artist himself and fellow German artist Sy Vincent Schmitz, are dressed as security guards. Equipped with a body-scanning device they begin to check each visitor. They also request to see mobile phones and personal information on them, such as address books, and ask the visitors questions about their name, age, job, and "intention." Random persons are then motioned to step aside and wait behind a white line, while the guard checks the next person. When the visitor is finally permitted inside—into the semidarkness behind the door—the check continues with another guard and a wristband that reads *intruder*. Each "intruder" is also given an individual number. Reactions of those who will soon be "intruders" vary from patience and curiosity to indignation and disrespect towards the guards. The usually public *place* of the exhibition has been turned into an exclusive, private place. The "welcome" of an art opening is reversed as each visitor is made to feel unwelcome from the first checkpoint to eventually receiving the new designation.

Here, MwangiHutter operates with *place* on a number of levels: the intruders have access to her mind through the personal views which she portrays in the works; they enter the sphere of her body when looking at her performances, and interacting with her in person at the site; confronting her position as an artist, the "intruders" ignore or call into question the meaning of the performance; and lastly, they "intrude" a place uniquely IngridMwangiRobertHutter—a gallery of the artist's works. As the intruder moves beyond these personal confines, either mentally or physically, the *place* is then re-situated in the larger contexts of: the Goethe-Institut, the city of Nairobi, the country Kenya, the continent Africa, and the reality of Globalism in the

21st century. With each step the *place* and the intruder's position in it take on new meanings, for example: intruders into "German culture," German culture intruding into a Kenyan city, adoption of foreign values making you an intruder in your own culture/country, reliving the history of "naming/labeling" and the resulting racism that is associated with colonialism in Africa, and perpetuating the persisting prejudice against the "other" in spite of new global exchanges.

Performing *Place*

Though the artist has described her experience of *place* in the various exhibitions around the globe as a privilege, this privilege still comes at a price. Both the logistics of such exhibitions and the role of being a participant in group-shows present the artist with unique challenges, which have to be overcome time and time again. In recent years, MwangiHutter has increasingly taken advantage of the particular features of her favored media. Not having to deal with originals or unique pieces means that prints can be made on site and with local experts. This reduces transportation costs and also helps eliminate rude awakenings, like the one the artist had when her shipped 2D works arrived at a biennale exhibition with wavy paper and broken frames. For MwangiHutter reducing shipping and insurance costs by producing locally also made it possible to show more often worldwide, especially in a number of venues in Africa (e.g. a solo show in Cairo, a biennale in Senegal, and exhibitions in Nairobi, South Africa, and Uganda), which would not all have been able to pay for these types of expenses.

This has also meant that the artist has moved away from large spatial installations (some of which were only shown once and then had to be stored in boxes). According to MwangiHutter, the role that such logistical concerns play in the artistic decision-making process is often overlooked: "It is not as if there is an artist totally free to think up [any project] and the practical details someone else will deal with. There is a practical framework, which has an effect on the work that you're showing."[388] This is one of the reasons the artist focuses more and more on video works that permit her whole vision to be contained in one work. Video works also have the added benefit of being easy to reproduce—while at the same time maintaining an aura of the ephemeral.

The particular combination of simplified logistics and new ways of communicating with the audience has also increased the attractiveness of performance art for MwangiHutter, though it had already shown itself earlier to be a good fit and a favored new medium. In fact, the majority of the artist's most recent works are performance-based, as even her video works use a performance as the starting point. However, works categorized by the artist as "performances" are explicitly conceived for a certain location, and thus often become tied to a specific place. Though the general idea is that a work can be repeated, MwangiHutter is not interested in carbon copies and wants to "take away the conceptual framework and really try to be present and let whatever is going to happen, happen."[389] The openness of the medium adds appeal to the artist, who is less concerned with control

[388] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010. This framework is also reflected in the adjustments Campos-Pons makes for her installations to fit particular venues.

[389] Ibid.

(of form and meaning), and more with the spontaneous evolution of a work. Still, the key components of the performance remain the same: the artist, the props, and the concept behind it.

In the above discussion I have highlighted notions of relating that underlie most of the artist's work. The shared experience of a performance is no exception. MwangiHutter is drawn to the interactive feature of performance, where the artist is sensitive to all the surroundings—noises, people, and directions, among others—and adjusts impulses or actions in response to what is being fed to her. Giving the audience this kind of control over the way the performance is carried out also extends to content: "If meaning is supposed to arise then it should do so on the basis of what is actually there, as opposed to some idea of what should be there."[390] Carrying out a performance temporarily creates a *place*, which—ephemeral as it may be—is based on and strengthens the relations and interactions MwangiHutter seeks. For her it also provides something else: the solace that can only be found in a shared experience. Considering the weighty topics the artist usually tackles, "the simplicity of the shared moment is like balm for all hearts. It cools our heated minds and carries us away to a different place, where things are better and we rest in a sense of sameness."[391]

[390] Ibid.

[391] MwangiHutter, "Intrusion."

In the performance *Triumph of her death*, 2008 [figure 31], MwangiHutter takes as her subject her sister Helen Mwangi Taylor's struggle with and death from breast cancer—an experience she found of "high relevance and value" and deserving of a platform. Regardless of where the performance takes place, the *place* it creates brings the audience into a dialogue that merely begins with the performance of MwangiHutter and her sister Helen. The artist is in front of a video screen that shows Helen Taylor singing, undergoing chemotherapy, touching her bald head, showing off her ruined fingernails, and her scar. MwangiHutter enters into a quasi-dialogue with her sister on the screen, and even tones herself down so the performance seen in the Video receives more room and "presence."[392] By sharing these very private memories with a group of strangers, MwangiHutter invites the audience to enter not only into a personal discussion, but a broader discourse about issues such as (breast) cancer, family, and loss. The *place* she creates is not a particularly comfortable one, but this fits the artist's professed belief in the edifying powers of experiencing discomfort: "I'm basically trying to share – really honestly sharing and putting it of course in the form which opens it rather than make it just a very specific experience which nobody would find interesting. [...] And then of course it can happen that people are shaken up."[393] Even in discomfort, however, MwangiHutter always tries to strike a balance, because she wants to avoid "[shaking] you up to the point of closing, like the effect that media reporting has sometimes,

[392] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010. In the interview the artist also stated that feedback from the audience showed her that Helen is perceived to be "as present" as the artist, and maybe even more so (Ibid.).

[393] Ibid.

when you have so much information you close off your feelings. If there is something to be communicated it has to take place on the basis of taking and giving, and there has to be an openness [to the whole process]."[394]

Thus, the feedback the artist has gotten after a number of different performances of *Triumph of her death* and also in response to the related single-channel video *Constant Triumph,* 2008 [figure 32], is overwhelmingly positive and has encouraged her to keep on using this personal view to address general topics – or in her own words "to make art in a way that people can actually experience and relate to."[395] At different sites, different people told the artist that through the performance they felt "as if I knew her," which has enabled MwangiHutter to not only share and keep the memory of her sister alive, but to create entirely new memories of Helen's suffering and death with a new group of people.

Unlike most *places* we encounter in real life, in the world of art we can visit a *place* for a short time (be it a performance or an exhibition space) and then leave it, either entirely or just physically. Due to its ephemeral nature, a performance work of art continues to exist after its completion only as a memory or a *place experienced* — though recent advances in documentation can allow us to revisit it at least visually (see discussion below of the artist's internet presence). This *temporary place* experience even holds true for wall-mounted and installed exhibitions, which also have to come to an end sooner or later. However, in the case of performances, the artist has noticed an interesting trend that is expanding the *place* experience beyond

[394] Ibid.

[395] Ibid.

the confines of time and location into the virtual world. The shared experience of the public performance is now often documented not just by the artist or gallery, but by members of the audience, who use their cell phone cameras to take video or photo snapshots to share with family, friends, and the larger community of anyone who is interested in it on the world wide web. Rather than seeing the use of cameras as an intrusion or a copyright infringement, MwangiHutter asserts that it is "a quite positive aspect that people are creating in that moment their own 'printout' of the art work, their own edition, or edition number" and she "finds that perfectly in accordance with the intention of the work."[396]

One instance of this new kind of sharing that stands out in the artist's memory is the performance of *the cage*, 2009 [figure 33], which took place in South Africa. In a fenced off area of an abandoned lot somewhere in town, MwangiHutter can be seen wearing jeans and a brown undershirt, and with eyes taped shut he moves gingerly along the fence, holding on to it with his hands. As people passing by take in this strange sight, he begins to pause and eventually sits down on a bucket. With clippers he starts shaving the hair off his head and gently putting his locks into a pile on the ground. After the artist has completed this task, he uses a pair of scissors to cut out little pieces of his shirt, which he also places on the ground—all the while he is still "blind." Then, with a small crowd gathered at the fence in front of him, he begins to fill a small plastic bag with little bits of hair and a piece of his shirt. One by one he fills the bags and puts them into a box and finally gets up and starts attaching them with little hooks to the fence between him and the audience. He

[396] Ibid.

invites the audience to help themselves to a "souvenir" and then to write with a marker on his skin, as he leans up against the fence. Later, the artist writes of this experience of being an anonymous stranger with an invisible audience:

> I find myself with my back to a fence, fenced out. I am rooted to the ground and stuck on the fence like a tree grown there, having merged with the meshed wire. Around me are sounds, voices, a cacophony of urban jargon. I am in the big city. They are writing on my back, are you crazy, what's the problem with this guy, love him for what he does. They almost refuse my gift of a small packet of my hair and snip of my shirt. Suspiciously they eye it, what is this going to do to me? Having delivered myself to them, I have no choice but to take the brunt of their remarks, their skepticism, their interest. I am now a marked man, time has done this to me. History has left ugly welts on our skin and on the skin of our minds.[397]

As members of the audience are beginning to interact with the artist, the strangeness of the experience brings everybody together. Some walk up to the fence, take a little bag and write a word or symbol on the bare back. Others take pictures or video to document what they have witnessed. What will happen to the "souvenirs" of this accidental art experience is left to speculation, though MwangiHutter feels that a first important goal has been reached already: "when people take it home I wonder what they'll say… but it is taken out and it continues to reveal itself outside of the art context and that I find very good [NB: *it* refers to the artwork as a souvenir]."[398]

By choosing to do performance pieces such as *Intruders* and *the cage*, through creating video and photographic works during visits to Kenya and other countries, and by producing prints at the sites of the exhibitions they are going to go into, MwangiHutter has also given a new dimension (and location) to another

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[397] MwangiHutter, "Intrusion."

[398] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

traditional artist *place*: the studio. For the artist, the studio in her home in Ludwigshafen is no longer the primary place of artistic production, but rather the studio is tied to MwangiHutter and "travels" with her. At least once or twice a year the artist travels to Kenya to research or create work, thus regularly reaffirming the transnational aspect of the artist's identity.

The challenges of logistics of the international exhibition circuit have thus met their match in new choices the artist made regarding which media to work in and by finding creative local solutions to the transportation woes. However, the challenge of being "categorized," even if it is as a part of a trendy niche group, is not as easily addressed.[399] For MwangiHutter, the privilege of being shown in international exhibitions has meant accepting being "labeled" and "placed" with others into a fashionable group. The members of this group often only have one thing in common: ties to the continent of Africa, and that they are known as makers of "contemporary African art." Initially MwangiHutter saw this affiliation as quite beneficient, especially for a young artist at the beginning of her career. Being shown in a group show was an important part of "making it" in the art world, and in MwangiHutter's case it was all the more significant because the shows traveled around the world. The basic idea of a group show, according to the artist, is to introduce a number of different artists to a wider audience, and it works a bit like a buffet where you, the viewer, are sure to find "something you like." Traditionally,

[399] As Lauri Firstenberg pointed out in her essay "Negotiating the Taxonomy of Contemporary African Art – Production, Exhibition, Commodification," in *Looking Both Ways*, ed. Laurie Ann Farrell (New York: Museum of African Art, 2003), 37-41, the matter of categories, especially in the context of non-Western art/artists, is highly fraught and faulty, based on national agendas and primarily "a question of Western reception rather than of artist intention." Ibid., 37. See also discussion in introduction chapter.

when enough interest in an artist has been generated through a number of such group exhibitions, the next step would be a solo show. However, MwangiHutter contends that with the emergence and increasing prominence of biennales, art fairs, traveling exhibitions and mega-shows, the once "trendy" group of "contemporary African art" could also become somewhat of a trap: "what has happened is you're going to get stuck in this group show modus, there are so many group shows that it perhaps never happens then that your work stands individually, as an oeuvre."[400] And thus the initial blessing of being part of a "category" can become a curse, especially for an artist trying to take his or her career to the next level. MwangiHutter agrees that two steps seem to provide the best remedy for this catch-22: the representation by a gallery and the platform of the artist on her own website.

The general technological advances over the past two decades have meant that there is yet another and easily accessible *place* in which to find MwangiHutter: the virtual world of the internet. MwangiHutter's web presence is unparalleled by any of the other artists discussed in this dissertation and only by a small number of other artists in the art world at-large. It can probably best be described as a dedicated IngridMwangiRobertHutter gallery (or museum) available online—truly a "*place of her own*."[401] Not only does it have biographical and bibliographic information, examples of reviews, and texts by the artist, but at the core of the web presence is an extensive archive. This includes documentation of almost all of the

[400] Ibid.

[401] Curiously, this—a place of her own—is also the title given to a "multi-phase, multi-venue arts project" of the Asian American Women Artists Association that began in 2009 featuring different artists responding to the question "If you had a place of your own, what would it be?" http://www.aplaceofherown.org/about.html

artist's works: photo works, installation, video, and both photo and video documentation of performances, as well as photos of installations, and video walking tours of recent exhibitions. The only thing it does not feature is a "shopping basket" or even "price tags," and in that it clearly differs from an actual gallery, which would be interested in selling the works. Because the website is not a commercial business operation (at least not in the direct sense), the artist is also able to be more inclusive: Some of the works documented are already in collections, others are not for sale, but together they make up the entire oeuvre and thus belong in this one *place*.

Interestingly, the creation of a *virtual place* was not the original goal the artist set out to accomplish. Before beginning to think about the logistics involved with traveling to exhibitions, there was first the matter of getting the word out, or rather the images, to any interested party. Sending out materials used to involve much paperwork, many trips to the post office, and other hassles—such as putting a preview stamp on a video (and yet never being assured that a video hadn't been copied when it was returned after an exhibition). The artist had to go through all of this "just to get the slightest bit [of interest]."[402] So the website became a platform that fulfilled many functions, though two are primary for the artist: first, it serves as an archive of the work and its documentation; second, it makes all of it accessible.[403] Now anyone who is interested in art by MwangiHutter can get a glimpse of the work first (naturally, the artist cannot and should not provide the full length of videos and

[402] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

[403] Ibid. At the beginning of the internet age, many new-media artists contemplated and toyed with the idea that the internet could become an artistic medium, i.e. that there would be art specifically created for the internet, but MwangiHutter did not feel that that was a good match, and so the website does not feature "internet art," ibid.

full size of the original photos in this context) and then will be able to contact the artist or the gallery for more information. Like a postcard of a work or an exhibition catalogue, the website cannot only stimulate interest and curiosity, but can also be a mnemonic aid that helps relive the original experience. These are functions that also align with the artist's belief in relating to and sharing with the audience, which has been documented above in the example of the endorsement of cell phone camera use.[404]

In spite of its multifunctionality and ease of access, the artist does not believe such a web presence poses a threat to the representation through a gallery, which is the traditional *place* in which an artist's work was documented and archived, and in which interest in the artist was triggered. Rather, she sees it as a means of increasing visibility in areas that go beyond the establishment of the art world. While curators and collectors will always do business with galleries, the internet gives access to those who cannot or will not enter a gallery (because of real or perceived boundaries). Especially in light of the broadened art market, which has become almost global through its inclusion of more collectors and more artists from more countries than ever before, the matter of "choices" is important. MwangiHutter points out that the question of "if you are not able to work with a gallery, do you have alternatives to chose from?" is important to make the art market accessible to talent regardless of geography. For the artist, the ultimate goal of giving as much exposure as possible to the artwork justifies finding new and creative means to do so.

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[404] To be fair, this view did not establish itself overnight, but rather has gone through different stages: from initial resignation—"there's nothing that can be done about it," to final acceptance—"I'm quite happy to know that my work is being shown, even if I'm not getting anything out of it." Ibid.

To live is to live locally, and to know
is first of all to know the places one is in.
Edward Casey[405]

I Am a Person of Many Places.
Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons

CHAPTER 5: MARIA MAGDALENA CAMPOS-PONS

The Many *Places* of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons

On a cold and snowy day in January, I find myself sitting in a Brookline lunch spot equal parts diner, 70's café and local institution. It is a low frills kind of place that uses local high school teams' photos as wall décor. These family-run places were once ubiquitous. Those that still exist now proudly defy the disneyfied newcomer restaurants catering to yuppie crowds, this one, in particular, appeared to be holding its ground against the encroaching chain cafés. All of this fits neatly into my image of this part of Boston—a fiercely independent neighborhood, proud of its history—but I can't really picture the multicultural, multinational, world-traveling artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, who I am slated to meet, as a regular here. Yet, this is one crucial element of *places*—they cannot be squeezed into a "one-size-fits-all" format. For the artist (and us) transforming *a* place into *your* place requires local knowledge as well as the acceptance that each *place* is unique not merely in the grand scheme but to your experience.

Still, what is it about *this* place that draws the artist here? Of course, there is the convenience factor: it is one of only a handful of eating options near her studio.

[405] Casey, "Space to Place," 18.

But there is also the important aspect of being part of a community: the diner owners actually work here and everybody from the neighborhood stops by. Campos-Pons obviously decided "pro-neighborhood" when she chose the location of her studio, and she has since affirmed this choice through her actions, such as frequenting the restaurant.[406] Yet, there are other reasons for this attachment. *Place* has a power all of its own, it is something we experience and then will always remember. In the movie *Elf* (2003), the character played by Will Farrell takes his date to a grimy place in the souterrain of a New York skyscraper because it advertises having the "world's best coffee." While it might indeed be the worst coffee the girl has ever tasted, she will always remember the otherwise unremarkable and underwhelming café as the site of her first date – and thus as a special *place*. The artist has a similarly personal connection to the restaurant we are meeting at, which over the years has become part of her *place* in Boston.

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons has a memory bank filled with places – as she puts it "I am a person of many places."[407] There are places she uses to ground herself and those to inspire her; those created through her work and others that are re-created to share with an audience who has not yet experienced them. Some are more prominent or dominant, usually due to the amount of time the artist spent in and with them. Many others find their way into her work, even if they were only briefly encountered. Established places are tended to and cared for like friends, the

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[406] This observation has been confirmed by the artist in her interview with F. Lennox "Lenny" Campello, "Studio visit: Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," published June 9, 2008, see http://blog.art-tistics.com/?s=Campos-Pons

[407] Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, interview by the author, October 29th, 2010, Brookline, MA.

artist pays them regular visits and they make appearances in her work. New places can capture her attention and a process not unlike one of courtship ensues. A few places are so private they are not shared or cannot be shared (and yet still find their way into the work). This chapter looks at the ways in which specific places have formed and informed the artist Campos-Pons, as well as the places that her artworks (re)present—from the body to connected as well as recreated places.[408]

The places of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons was born in the small town of La Vega in the region of Matanzas, Cuba, in 1959 – at a time when the Caribbean island country experienced its most turbulent period in the 20th century. Growing up in the shadow of the revolution left a mark on her. In response to the question of "what does place mean to you?," the artist counters with the question of "where do you belong?" And her answer makes it clear how her views on belonging and *place* were destined to impact her work: "Well, you're born in one place and that marks by some sort of definition 'you belong there!' … But that is just pure chance! You don't choose where you are born, you don't ask where you'll be born. And I was always thinking in my soul that I'm sure that I belong in more than one place."[409]

Campos-Pons's experience as a teenager is filled with finding intellectual soul mates far outside her island home and far beyond her own era, in a different time

[408] For a very thorough overview and contextualization of the artist's life and career up to 2007, Lisa D. Freiman's essay "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water" is the authoritative source. In *Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 13-62.

[409] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

and place. These "encounters" precede the artist's first travel abroad by a decade and underscore her feeling that place is more than just "birthplace." She recalls the experience of feeling "in total communion with Rainer Maria Rilke," followed by similar encounters with creative individuals from a broad range of disciplines and geographical origins, from Thomas Mann and Richard Wagner, to Chinua Achebe, Ousman Sembène and Clarice Lispector.[410] Campos-Pons discovered that while gender and race–or rather "racist ideas"–would preclude her from finding any similarities between her and many of her inspirations, once these idols were "stripped of the everyday stuff, left naked with [their] poetic soul" she could relate to them on the highest and deepest levels.[411] And though her actual home was a rather small farm on a tropical island (young Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons had to do her share by feeding the chickens and pigs, and dusting the ground with a palm frond broom), in her mind she already began to seek this *ideal place*—the *place* where such a communion of disparate yet similar beings could be experienced.

It took a second crucial place encounter in her youth to set Campos-Pons on the path to her ultimate discovery: that art is *that* place she was seeking. Teenage Magda was the beneficiary of Cuba's redefined educational goals, attending newly founded, state-subsidized fine arts boarding schools—first the Escuela Provincial de Arte in Matanzas and then the Escuela Nacional de Arte in Havana.[412] While a student at the latter, she visited the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana with

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid.

[412] Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 16.

several girl friends, and when she left she was less impressed by what she had seen than by what she hadn't seen: "No women. No blacks."[413] The institution that held the gold standard for art in Cuba made it clear to the thirteen year-old Campos-Pons that it had no place for people like her and she left "feeling so strong about that: That I want to be there as a woman, and as a black woman. [This is what started] this idea of inserting the mind and the voice of a woman and inserting the voice of a black woman into the national discourse of Cuban Culture."[414]

While her mission and destination had thus become clear, it still took some experimenting to find the means. Maria Magdalena the teenager had started to study Oboe, and the artist remains enamored with music to this day. Equally moved by Arvo Pärt, Richard Wagner, and Chucho Valdez, the artist professes to "feel" music in the same depth that she feels visual art; however, once she made the switch to the latter, a return became impossible. She acknowledges that if she hadn't become an artist, she would no longer have tried to become a musician instead, but would have opted to become an art historian or a curator. The *place* she was seeking, as had become increasingly clear to her, was art—or as she says "I am in communion with this territory."[415]

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[413] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010. This discrimination reflected the artist's experience as the sometimes only black student in the educational institutions she attended.

[414] Ibid.

[415] Ibid. Dr. Katherine Zubko alerted me to the frequent use of potentially religious vocabulary by the artist, which is not surprising given the omnipresence of Catholicism in Cuba, as well as the African spiritual heritage practiced by the artist growing up. The spiritual place enters Campos-Pons work alongside the intellectual, historic and experiential.

Another important *place* experience that had a formative effect on Campos-Pons and her work after her entry into the National School of Art ("Escuela Nacional de Arte") in Havana in 1976, was the Graduate Institute of Art (ISA, short for "Instituto Superior de Arte") where she started her studies in 1980. While this served as an affirmation of her talent and her calling, it also proved to be an extension of her experience at the National Museum into the next phase, as the field of visual arts in the academic institutions in Cuba was predominantly male (and white), too.[416] And though the conversation among her teacher Flavio Garciandía and his group of conceptualist artists centered on the question "what is the meaning of art?," for Campos-Pons it soon became the question of "what it means to be a woman, especially this tiny little black woman [who is] doing this big painting, assemblage, installation… whatever you call it, who was talking about this absolutely edgy stuff."[417]

Her topics had gravitated to the same questions of meaning in the larger Cuban society—originally steeped in Catholicism, but now exposed to Communist ideology and mandates for more than two decades—and had come to rest on issues of abortion, contraceptives, and chastity (belts). In a world of "machos" and of a history that documents the power of the male over the female body, making art that dealt with intimate *places* and uncomfortable subjects was a reaction by an artist

[416] Ibid. The artist later comments on the inofficial ranking of skin color in her work *Sugar/Bittersweet*. While most "white" members of Cuban society are of Spanish decent, even this group subscribes to: the paler the skin is, the "better."

[417] Ibid.

whose racial and gender identity would have otherwise muted her voice: "I went with those pieces for the shock."[418]

A first place: the body

The first piece to gain her notoriety was *Cinturon de castidad,* or Chastity Belt, 1984-85, [figure 34]. The *place* she depicted, by using a giant triangle to symbolize the pubic area or womb, was both personal and a matter of larger historic significance. The artist experienced a contradiction in how—on the one hand—being a woman in communist Cuba was purportedly about equality and (sexual) freedom, which manifested itself in state-mandated sex education in schools, availability of contraceptives and free abortions. Yet, on the other hand, the reality of life in Cuba had meant that teenagers used abortions in lieu of contraceptives, and any use of regular contraceptives was limited to women.[419]

When Campos-Pons began to research the historical context of these issues and to look for symbols for her work, she encountered a long and international history in which "the idea of control, the site of power, is always [related to and situated in] the women's body."[420] From pre-modern Meso-America, to Africa and

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[418] Ibid.

[419] As the artist put it more bluntly: "The guy doesn't put a tie around his penis." Ibid. Another expression of a double standard in Cuba can be found in regard to racism—while "officially there is no racism in Cuba, it has been legislated out" as the artist put it, Campos-Pons encountered "many incidents of racism all [her] life," in: Lynne Bell, "History of people who were not heroes," *Third Text* 12, no. 43 (1998): 42. She also knows that it persists to this day, see Okwui Enwezor, "The Diasporic Imagination: The Memory Works of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," in *Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Everything is Separated by Water,* ed. Lisa D. Freiman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 78.

Europe, the evidence of abuse of the woman's body by "manpower" was overwhelming, but everything the artist encountered seemed to be topped by medieval Europe's invention of the chastity belt. Using the chastity belt symbol, Campos-Pons could not only tie-in her work on contraceptives, but was also able to connect the past to the present, and even to extend the idea symbolically to oppressed groups everywhere: "There was my link: it was a contraceptive, but even when it gives us freedom it still is [an] abuse of our body."[421] In other words: while being "under lock and key" can provide protection to an extent, it remains an abuse of our human rights.[422] On either side of the womb are guarding staffs, modeled on ceremonial staffs from Central and West Africa and used here to symbolize the male presence and power in the shape of spermatozoids, similarly linking the work to the artist's personal history as well as the international history she explored.

This shaped-canvas painting,[423] which was included in Campos-Pons first solo exhibition as a graduate from the *Instituto*, can stand as an example of the themes the artist explored in the 1980s and the means by which she carried them out. But it also represents a first milestone: Campos-Pons received an honorable mention for it

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[420] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

[421] Ibid.

[422] And thus, by extension, this idea of the chastity belt also applies to restricting travel, a common occurrence in communist countries in the 1970s and 80s.

[423] The artist and scholar Coco Fusco has pointed out that Campos-Pons had been a painter of shaped canvases for many years before turning to other art forms, and has likened her and the works to Elizabeth Murray "but with a real Cuban twist to it." See transcript of MoMA lecture, 1999, accessed June 10, 2011 www.Moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/conversations/trans_cfusco The shaped canvas had entered the artist's repertoire by way of her ISA teacher Consuelo Castañeda, who had been particularly interested in the work of Frank Stella–the originator of the shaped canvas.

at an international painting show,[424] thus taking the work—if not the artist—beyond the boundaries of her island home. The significance of this event is still fondly recounted by the artist a quarter century later: "Back in 1985, when you won a prize as a very young painter [from Cuba] in Europe—we are still looking from the periphery that is Cuba to the center [of the art world] that is Europe—this is a huge stamp of approval."[425]

When Campos-Pons ventured for the first time in her life beyond Cuba in 1988, she had been a visual artist for more than a decade, had begun to make a name for herself with her large-scale paintings (which from the beginning featured 3D or ready-made components that pointed the way to her later installations), and even had become a teacher at the *Instituto Superior de Arte* herself.[426] It was an exchange

[424] The XVIII Cagnes-sur-Mer Painting Competition—though the artist was not able to leave the country to attend the exhibition in France.

[425] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010. The embargo and resulting drought of an exchange of ideas between Cuba and the Western Art World in the 1970s and early 80s has often been cited as a reason for the fragmentation and "flatness" of contemporary Cuban art and is also given as the background for the artist's unique role as a feminist in Cuba in the early to mid- 1980s or rather, as Freiman put it, that Campos-Pons was investigating her place as a female artist in Cuba "a decade after the initiation of the Feminist Art Movement in the United States" ("Everything is Separated by Water," 23). While we can acknowledge that the artist was not working within a "movement" and even suffered a "time-lag" compared to other artists who were her contemporaries in the West, and while certain issues are even more charged due to the hypersexual macho culture experienced by the artist, it is not true that she was working in a kind of information vacuum (as Charles Merewhether had argued in *Made in Havana: Contemporary Art from Cuba,* Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1988, 9) or merely learning from "reproductions." One of the artists that inspired Campos-Pons, the Cuban Ana Mendieta lived in the United States but visited and exhibited in Cuba a number of times in the 1980s, beginning as early as 1980—and became close friends with the artists in *Volumen Uno*, including Campos-Pons's mentor Garciandía, by 1981. All of this precedes Campos-Pons first exhibition by several years.

[426] As Lucy R. Lippard pointed out, this is part of the agreement between the student and the state, whereby the state is "reimbursed" for the "free education" when the graduating

program that allowed students to visit the United States, which finally made it possible for the artist to spend a semester abroad.[427] In the spring of 1988 Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons arrived in Boston to study at the Massachusetts College of Art (abbreviated as MassArt). The artist, who had been rooted in painting (added elements notwithstanding), now explored entirely new media: from video and film, to performance, and installation art.[428] She enrolled in classes that were not offered in Cuba, and produced her first installation *Erotic Garden or Some Annotations on Hypocrisy/Jardín Erótico, 1988* [figure 35] for an exhibition at MassArt.

The *place* of the installation consisted of a wall area filled with female genitalia and contraceptive devices and a floor area populated with roughly 40 wooden staffs which bulged with "strange testicular forms painted with dark acrylic and water-based enamel paints."[429] *Erotic Garden* is in fact an abstraction of intercourse on a gigantic scale—in other words, the *place* in which viewers find themselves is a womb. However, for the moment Campos-Pons was less interested in questions of place and more concerned with a "grand scheme," making her work something that "was more [...] operatic." Thus, metaphor reigns supreme in the shapes the artists depicts: coconuts as breasts/ovaries, flowers as genitalia, plant/trees as spermatozoids or phalluses, while the location itself is perceived as a

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students work as instructors for two or three years. In "Made in the U.S.A.: Art from Cuba," *Art in America* 74 (April 1986): 33. For the artist it was also another instance of being the only black person in the school—this time as a teacher.

[427] And thereby also gain personal access to all the materials, works of art, and the exchange of ideas that had been kept from the artist by the U.S. embargo.

[428] See Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 19.

[429] Ibid, 20.

plain site (a gallery of no particular significance) and is regarded by the artist as an empty "space," to be filled and "conquered [...] by all these spears."[430] While the room was indeed filled, the spaces remained distinct on their two levels – floor vs. wall – even though the height of the staffs could obscure the wall components once the viewer stepped back or out of the room.

Place in Cuba

Campos-Pons returned to Cuba with new techniques and ideas, and—now very strongly—with the feeling of being torn between two places (during her time at MassArt she had collaborated with the composer Neil Leonard, whom she would marry in 1990). The "stretching" of the artist across time and space, both mentally and physically, finds expression in one of the last works Campos-Pons completed and exhibited in Cuba. The work—*Isla*, 1989 [figure 36]—is a shaped-canvas that represents the "life-size silhouette of a naked body cut from wood and painted brown. Depicted from an aerial perspective, the body floats across twenty-two vertically oriented shapes that resemble the turquoise waves of the Caribbean."[431] In addition to the wave-like shapes, the artist also uses another ten swirly symbols of water, resembling the stylized kind commonly found in Aztec art. These swirls are placed around the body as if they are attacking the joints and other exposed and unprotected areas. As I pointed out above—in part one chapter two "The Body as *Place*"—our own body is the first instance of "place" we experience as humans, and it

[430] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

[431] Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 33.

is also what helps us situate ourselves in *place*. The body in *Isla* is not only the artist's body and *place* in the world, but can stand for the island of Cuba itself (and the exhibition in which it was featured, also titled *Isla/Island)*, a place amidst the sea and all of its turmoil—of weather, history, politics, and so on. *Isla* is one of the first examples in which Campos-Pons moves beyond the metaphorical to endow her work with a new "dual" or "multiple" meaning, as she provides a very personal and at the same time very general portrait in one work.

Coincidentally, *Isla* is also the title of a work by Ana Mendieta, created in 1981 and likewise referring to the island of Cuba [figure 37]. Like Campos-Pons's *Isla*, the earlier work by Mendieta shows the island as a body—more specifically a limbless female body—of mounded earth in a shallow creek. Lisa Freiman has interpreted much of Mendieta's oeuvre as an expression of the artist's "nostalgic desire to reconnect herself with her homeland and its natural environment."[432] This desire often comes into being in the experience of diaspora or exile. For Campos-Pons, the same form of expression comes on the heels of her experience of leaving her home country and though she has returned, her heart has found a new home, which stretches the artist between two countries like the sprawled figure she depicts.

Place in the diaspora

While the (female) body presented the artist with a *place* that she intimately knew and could do work with and about, it was only through her "final" departure from Cuba—her choice of emigrating with no guarantee of return—that she

[432] Ibid., 34.

happened to find new and broader subject matter. Campos-Pons vividly remembers that when she left, "some shift came [and] took place… I believe that the context really influenced what you're doing and the way, I always say, to look at Cuba, to have a gaze of what was Cuba for me, the first manifestation of that […] was when I came here [to Boston]."[433]

Being physically separated from the *place* she used to inhabit, and that remained a vital part of her—or as she put it in an earlier interview: "I am emotionally attached to Cuba"—brought to the fore the need to give this *place* shape in her new environment.[434] Thus Cuba did not feature in her work as a communist state, or a political entity in its entirety, and not even as an emblem of a country with a long history of slavery and human exploitation. It was a much smaller and at the same time much more comprehensive object that Campos-Pons chose to (re)present: it was the Cuba she had experienced as *her place*.[435] The artist's investigation of Cuba as a *place* also meant examining her experiences and history, bringing race and ethnicity in as topics, as well as other issues connected to them, such as exile, hybridity, and socioeconomic politics.[436] Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's work featured memories of her childhood, her parents, her African heritage; they dealt

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[433] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

[434] Bell, "History of people," 38.

[435] As the artist put it in 1994: "Now that I live outside of my country, I really [have begun] to see my connection to the land, the place" in Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 44; maybe too much has been made of her work dealing with "identity" as the latter is a matter of individual and/or cultural creation in which one does not necessarily affect or inform [us about] the other.

[436] See ibid, p. 13.

with Cuba from a diaspora perspective and from being in a "double exile."[437] Her works were personal accounts, which the artist shared with the audience, thus making them a part of her *place*. Yet, being away from Cuba not only meant that it was given a place in her art (often quite literally, with pieces of material – soil, plants, photographs – sent from the island featuring in her installation), but her departure also made it clear to the artist, who *she* was in *her* own *place*: "I say nothing clarifies better who you are than stepping out of what it is."[438] Campos-Pons realized that she was "bigger" than the little black woman who was trying to shake up the art world and audience in Cuba with pieces of the feminine anatomy that she created for shock value, and that the issues that needed to be tackled were "bigger" than a single body, as well.

Her new subject matter found expression in a slew of new media the artist chose to work in, moving away from painting and opening herself to the options of installation art, performance art, and Polaroid photography. Installation art was something that Campos-Pons had experimented with during her time at MassArt and which was also a natural extension of her paintings—most of which had already consisted of multiple pieces and even "found" objects. Yet, the form was given new meaning when the artist was confronted by the reality of having a new *place* to call home. In conversations, Campos-Pons has described installation art as "a conversation with place" and highlighted the aspect of "the reclamation of a site, a

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[437] See Enwezor, "The Diasporic Imagination," 78 ff., and in Bell, where the artist states the condition in her own words "Exile is an important phenomenon in this century and for my family it was an important phenomenon a century ago. Exile is rooted in my family's history. Exile is why I am here" (in "History of people," 38).

[438] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010. See also discussion of Geertz in Part One.

reclamation of a location" as fundamental to its practice.[439] Thus it is not surprising that Campos-Pons was attracted by the opportunities this medium presented to express her new ideas.

Choosing a new location was determined in part by having a husband rooted in New England, yet it was also necessary to make this new *place* "home."[440] This did not mean the artist needed to abandon her previous home for the new one. The former had already encompassed two cultures and locations: on the one hand was the public sphere, in which Cuban secular and communist culture dominated, where the artist lived in a city, was cutting edge and at the same time a multiple outsider on the basis of her gender and heritage. On the other hand was the private sphere, her home in a small village and her African heritage very much present in the day-to-day interactions, and yet, it was also the place from which she had escaped intellectually by her "connecting" with other minds around the world. Thus the artist had realized early on that she was a person of many places (see above). Now Campos-Pons became acutely aware of the fact that *place* was much more than geography, and that being "multi-locational" was not only possible but was in her nature: "I believe it's possible to live in America and at the same time, in Cuba spiritually and mentally."[441]

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[439] Ibid. Others have also underlined the potential of installation art for establishing a site. The art critic David Deitcher has called installation art "so flexible in fact that it can function all at once as a means of deconstructing the museum and of reconstructing it." Quoted in Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960, 2nd edition* (London/New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 203.

[440] As we can see in Edward Casey's discussion of *homesteading* (see above, Part One)

[441] The artist in Lois Tarlow, "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," *Art New England* 18 (1997), 25. The artist has further commented: "Home is here and there – so I use Spanish and English in my work. I use the African language too – that is home for me" in

Connecting places past and present

This attitude soon found a reflection in the new type of works Campos-Pons created, which brought the artist's experiences and memories of her life in Cuba into her new life in the United States. Campos-Pons began to (re)create *places* that had shaped her from childhood on. This included *places* that were "abstract" to the artist, such as the depictions of slave ships in her installation *The Seven Powers that Came by the Sea* (1993), and others that were "personal," like the woods that were integral to her father's role as a *yerbero* (herbalist) or even *places* that were "ephemeral" like the memories of child's play as a young girl. Both in *The Herbalist's Tools* (1994) and in *History of People Who Were Not Heroes: Growing Up in a Slave Barrack: A Town Portrait* (1994), the artist pays homage to sites associated with her youth. By then Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons was no longer physically present in the town or even the country associated with those place-memories, but living in a very different culture. To make these *places* accessible for an audience unfamiliar with the original, she stylizes and condenses their essence into installations. And yet, through the processes of abstraction and refining, the artist appears to be able to stay true in translation.

In *The Herbalist's Tools* [figure 38] the vertically placed, rounded logs represent three of the trees in the artist's former backyard (identified as *la ceiba, la palma and la almacigo* in inscriptions).[442] The tree shapes also stand for the

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Bell, "History of people," 38. This idea is taken to another level by MwangiHutter, who is able to be physically in two places at once due to the fact that the artist has two bodies.

[442] The work gets its title from the tools used by the herbalist to gather the plants: the machete and the *garabato*, for cutting plants, and the *alforja*, a bag traditionally used to carry herbs and fruit. These are usually placed along the walls along the installation, as

different levels of involvement in *place*: the sacred, the national and the local. The woods are the *place* in which the herbalist carries out his work and they do not exist in a vacuum either. Even in an art gallery (located anywhere on the globe) the *place* Campos-Pons created is integrated in and interconnected with a larger system of places and meaning. Through her installation the artist connects the three general *places* of her life—Africa, Cuba, and the United States—with the specific place-memory of her "backyard." For Campos-Pons, Africa was not far away, but second-nature "in the way my father talked" and "in the place where I grew up."[443] The feeling that Africa was close to home affected how the artist perceived herself and how she related "to all these issues of territory and displacement and what they mean."[444] In *The Herbalist's Tools*, "Africa" enters in through allusions to the spiritual world of *Santería*—the religious tradition native to Cuba, which combined elements of Yoruba beliefs with Catholicism. Thus the artist incorporates offerings for the spirits that would have been encountered by the herbalist. Further, the dual association of her father with Africa and with the role of the *herbalist* gives an abstract *place* concept a concrete expression. Though Campos-Pons acknowledges that her father was not a professional herbalist, "he knew all about plants [and] used to bring herbs for anybody in town who needed them for a ritual or medicine."[445] This knowledge, of "what to take and how to take it," asking permission before

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for example in the exhibition *Rejoining the Spiritual: The Land in Contemporary Latin American Art* (1994) at the Maryland Institute of Art or at the mid-career retrospective *Everything is Separated by Water* (2007) at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

[443] The artist in Bell, "History of people," 36.

[444] Ibid.

[445] Ibid, 38.

entering the forest ("knocking on the trees and saying *Con permiso*"), and presenting an offering before taking a plant, made him authentic enough in his daughter's eyes.[446]

The Cuban element in the installation is represented in the kinds of trees and in their Spanish names, which are inscribed in glass bowls on top of the logs. The bowls serve a dual function of marking the trees' names and representing the offerings of water, which would be put in high places in the house for the dead.[447] Cuba is also reflected in the setting of the installation, which includes fresh herbs such as lemongrass, cinnamon and rosemary, displayed on tables or chairs, as well as framed herb specimen native to Cuba. The latter are hung on green walls, which the artist has covered with large black line drawings of the plants the herbalist would collect.[448] And lastly, Cuba also features in particular habits the artist remembered and integrated in her installation: "In Cuba people put offerings in the bottom of a tree, they create a little temple in which they reproduce everything that was outside, inside [...] now I'm doing it in this piece! I open up the trees to make a little place to contain offerings; you can look inside and the texture looks like the skin or bark of the tree."[449] Her abstract trees—carved wooden columns—have little doors at the bottom, which open to reveal iron pots to hold potential offerings. This feature of the trees also alludes to another specific *place*: the home. The general reference, in

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[446] Ibid.

[447] As the artist describes in Tarlow, "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," 25.

[448] Bell, "History of people," 39.

[449] Ibid. This references the forest as the spiritual center of Santeria, which is not a prominent feature but an undercurrent in the artist's life (see Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 43).

which the woods were home to the gods or spirits, is made specific here, as the artist joins "*house* and *tree* in a symbolic union, which along with all the other elements in the installation, recreates a space of family, geography and memory"[450]—or in short: a *place*.

Two other elements of the installation bring the past into the present and Africa and Cuba into the galleries of North America. The bundles of fresh herbs add a crucial element to the *place* experience, also addressed through the senses of sight and touch. Though the herbs and other elements can differ from exhibition to exhibition (for example, photographs can replace the actual machete, which is often deemed too dangerous), the installation remains more or less the same. This includes the "soil" placed around the trees, for which the artist uses the same kind of cornmeal that her father once used as the offering to the woods and spirits within.

History of People Who Were Not Heroes: Growing Up in a Slave Barrack: A Town Portrait [figure 39] is the other place-memory installation Campos-Pons created in the same year as *The Herbalist's Tools*. While the latter pays homage to her father, the former serves as a memorial not just to her family but to the larger Afro-Cuban community, which is generally "ignored in mainstream historical narratives."[451] It highlights their history in connection with the town of La Vega, both because this is where the artist grew up and because it can serve as "a model for the larger black experience in Cuba, where descendants of slaves are still living in a

[450] Suzanne Garrigues, Yadira de la Rosa and Mona Pennypacker, "Field Notes for Re-Creating Our Home," in *Rejoining the Spiritual: the Land in Contemporary Latin American Art* (Baltimore: Maryland Institute College of Art, 1994), 25.

[451] Lisa D. Freiman, "Circling Campos-Pons," in *Unpacking Europe. Towards a Criticial Reading,* ed. by Salah M. Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2001), 314.

place connected with slavery."[452] To stand for the town she remembers, the artist chose a handful of icons or special *places*: "a wall, the tower of the sugar factory of the plantation and a fountain."[453] In her reconstruction of these key features, the artist also used materials that modeled those of the originals with the intention of imparting similar meaning on her symbolic renditions. Thus, for the tower she used reddish clay tiles taking over for the adobe and red brick; for the wall, she constructed a metal frame filled with the same reddish clay tiles as well as lighter colored clay and glass tiles, alluding to different building structures and shapes; the same kind of frame is also used for a "door," which features an interior of textured glass panels and photo-transfers instead of wood, and serves for the viewer of the installation as "a point of passage, a liminal threshold between there and here, then and now."[454] For the dome-shaped fountain, she again used the lighter colored clay on the outside and glass tiles (reminiscent of the clear water) on the inside. In addition to these physical markers, Campos-Pons also provided the ephemeral aspect of her memories through three projections of black-and-white video, titled *Rocking Chair, Flowers,* and *Water Images*.

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[452] In Bell, "History of People," 34.

[453] Ibid., 35. Curator Julia P. Herzberg goes so far as to say that these represent "key places in La Vega which most specifically define her family's collective notion of place and rootedness," in "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Town Portrait Text," CUNY Lehman college art gallery, 1998, accessed May 11, 2011 http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/vpadvance/artgallery/gallery/campospons/TextTower.html This may be stretching the scope and intent in the wrong direction, as the work is about more than La Vega or the Campos/Pons families, while any kind of "rootedness" is expressed only superficially.

[454] Herzberg, "Town Portrait Text." The door is not functional, and the viewer does not literally enter a different time and place through it, but following the mental step, the physical step through the exhibition does eventually take the audience on this journey.

Each of the constructed components fulfills a different function, yet they are tied together as each is literally inscribed with a fragment of the history the artist wants to commemorate: On the tower and the wall, Campos-Pons has carved Spanish words into the tiles—the recollections of her family and herself.[455] The tower—representing a distillery tower from the former sugar mill—was one of the highest buildings and thus became one of the town's landmarks. It brought the history of slavery into the present, as children learned about its previous function in stories their parents would tell. However, these associations did not deter them from re-purposing it—as a place to climb in, hide in, and play around. One of the memories Campos-Pons inscribed on her tower reads: "The tower was that place that let me know that home was near. How long had it been there, what was hidden between its red brick? The lost ones and those who defied all, even time."[456] Similarly, the wall text bears words of that which the town's walls would have witnessed – from the celebrations of Santeria ceremonies and saints' feast days (no names, just the dates) to the persons who had lived in the town. In a memory of the artist's mother, Estervina Pons, the faceless victims of slavery are given a name, as she recalls "a woman called Maria Perdomo, an ex-slave. She used to tell stories of the hardships of her life under slavery."[457] Most of the text in the installation is in Spanish, though the work was actually made in the U.S. In fact, the artist could not leave the country and go back to Cuba for this project and instead had to instruct her

[455] This was actually done before the tiles were fired, and thus maybe more appropriately called "stamped."

[456] Translated in Herzberg, "Town Portrait Text."

[457] Ibid.

family as collaborators via mail and expensive long distance calls, to supply her with family photographs and archival images as well as their own stories and memories.

Yet, there is one structure which features English text, making it stand out all the more to the primary audience.[458] The inside of the fountain used copper wire shaped into letters and "baked" into the glass tile to recount one of the artist's memories of her childhood: spending time with her sisters. A part of the text reads: "We would string garlands of wildflowers," recalling a popular activity—picking the flowers found around the fountain and then turning them into ornamentations for themselves. Campos-Pons also remembered games of ring-around-the-rosy and discussions about what they were going to be like as grown-ups. In addition to sharing these memories with her audience, the artist also tries to impart a *place-memory* on the visitor similar to the one she holds: the fountain releases its "secret" text only in circumambulation. In other words, the viewer has to go around the fountain in the same fashion as in the game of ring-around-the-rosy played by the artist and her sisters. Following Campos-Pons in her footsteps brings the audience also closer to the artist's recent past (which included assembling the piece in just such a manner), and it allows them to experience a *place* that is distant both chronologically and geographically.

Though the verbal messages weigh strongly in this installation, as they bring to life the otherwise silent memories witnessed by her structures, there are also equally strong non-verbal elements. In addition to the structures and the video

[458] The installation has been exhibited a number of times in North America, and many of those times in academic settings—beginning with the showcase at Lehman College and most recently being included in an exhibition at Smith College— which possibly hints at a particular need to critically explore the subject.

projections, there are the photo transfers on the glass door. According to the artist these represent "every single scene that is significant for [her] in the town."[459] There are images of the actual front door of the artist's childhood home, of the home itself, of the plantation tower and bell, and others of her family and ancestors. Through her references to buildings and people Campos-Pons underscores the message of her installation as a whole: it is the specific relationship between the physical habitat and those inhabiting it that defines (the particularities of) *a place.*

Both installations, *The Herbalist's Tools* and *History of a People… A Town Portrait,* were created during the artist's time as a Bunting Fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe College in 1993 and 1994. Her new home-place in New England was thus instrumental in transforming her old home-place into artworks, providing her with the studio space, research time, a stipend and assistants, which the elaborate installations required.[460] The artist was aware of this melding/interdependence of her worlds from the beginning of her chosen exile: "My work is as much about what is left behind as it is about what I encounter in the place I arrive in."[461] This is one of the guiding principles of numerous museum or gallery commissioned works, which would not have come into existence if it were not for the *new place* playing host to

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[459] In Bell, "History of people," 35.

[460] In her essay "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons 1990-2001," curator Sally Berger quotes the artist's view on the issue: "It's important to show people that art is the transformation of ordinary things into a vision, a new dimension that wasn't their original purpose. The substitution of one meaning for another, of giving material a new life, is crucial to my work." In *Authentic/Ex-Centric. Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, ed. by Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe (Ithaca, NY: Forum for African Arts, 2001), 122. (NB: the quote is not native to the source cited by Berger, rather it can be found in an interview with the artist by Tarlow, "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," 24).

[461] The artist in Bell, "History of people," 38.

the *old*. Three other installations commonly linked with Campos-Pons's *History of a People…* series, are examples of this symbiotic relationship of the artist's different *places*.

A place in and of exhibitions

In the art-world, the possible *[re]presentation* of *place* is often affected by the limits of the *given place*. As discussed in part one—specifically the chapter on place in phenomenology—the "coming into being" of a new *place* is always based on an existing *place*.[462] The past two decades in particular have seen changes in the art world such as an increasing number and market-power of biennials and other temporary exhibitions, which have drawn more attention to the temporary *places* such grand shows create.[463] However, every exhibition in history, whether permanent or temporary, has come into a *place* at some point and with this "entrance" has had the power to transform or change that *place*.

In 1998 Campos-Pons herself became an integral part of such a place transformation at the Museum of Modern Art (abbreviated as MoMA). Her story shows how the interactions of ideas and politics, of ideals and pragmatism, and of a black Caribbean woman artist with a white Western art institution, are played out to reveal that the *place* we find and grow fond of, is not always the *place* that it was supposed or intended to be.

[462] See Casey, *Getting Back into Place* and "Space to Place."

[463] See Enwezor, "Place-Making," 106 ff.

It began with an invitation to do a show at the MoMA. The artist recalls how excited she was and how the submission of her proposal was also met with similar enthusiasm on the other end. Campos-Pons visited the museum to take a look at two choices for a potential exhibition space, and she quickly decided on a preference (a space on the second floor). All set with maps and measurements, the artist began to make detailed plans for her installation *Spoken Softly with Mama*, 1998 [figure 40]. The work would be shown in a dark room and consist of seven fabric-covered and embroidered ironing boards, each of which stands upright and onto which video and images are projected. The boards and dozens of *pate de verre* irons and trivets distributed in patterns on the floor constituted a tribute to the artist's female family members—grandmother, mother, aunts and cousins. Campos-Pons commemorated the tradition of ironing she associates with these women, whether it was for themselves, for their family, and as their profession.

The curator of the exhibition, Sally Berger, later described how the different elements of the installation came together to "combine fragments of memories, iconographic symbols, and spiritual precepts integrating the artist's lived experience within a larger Afro-Cuban historical context."[464] Yet, this *place* created by the artist, in which she "integrates the past with the present; conflates the sacred with the secular; intertwines indigenous, African and western artistic and religious practices,"[465] among other things, almost did not come to be.

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[464] Sally Berger, "Campos-Pons 1990-2001," 135. In a 1999 talk at MoMA, Coco Fusco discusses how the "rituals" Campos-Pons documented in this installation are able to "generate, for individuals, a sense of place," accessed February 4, 2011, http://www.moma.org/interactives/projects/1999/trans_cfusco.html

[465] Ibid, 141.

In the same months during which Campos-Pons' installation was to be featured at MoMA, the museum also planned a "big, big, big retrospective" of "an artist that I admire, Chuck Close."[466] In order to have enough room for his works, the museum informed Campos-Pons that they would have to take "part of my space to put [up] his piece."[467] The artist remembers that "when I received the note about that, I said to my husband: *I'm going to say NO! I'm canceling this, I'm not going to do this show, this is enough*!"[468] The work she had envisioned would no longer fit into the space left for her. She was also furious over the obvious downgrading: "I found [...] that they were not taking a space from Chuck Close and giving it to me, they were taking a space from me to give it to Chuck Close!"[469] However, the power of *place* itself and the associations of exhibiting at such an institution as the MoMA led to an intervention by none other than Campos-Pons's husband, Neil Leonard, who argued quite plainly: "Magda, if they give you a shoebox at MoMA, just do the show in the shoebox!"[470] And so the exhibition took place – with five boards, instead of seven, to fit the smaller space.

The *place politics* that transpire in a museum and that are hinted at in this anecdote will have to be treated in a separate study. At this point, the important postscript to *Spoken Softly with Mama* is not that it was later shown in its originally

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[466] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

[467] Ibid.

[468] Ibid.

[469] Ibid. Though it was certainly not intended as an act of discrimination based on race and gender, it presented to the artist an unfortunate reiteration of the white male winning all the power battles.

[470] Ibid.

intended constellation at the Venice Biennale in 2001 or that it also has seven boards at its new home in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, but that the discussions about the exhibition space that were prompted by Campos-Pons's piece eventually resulted in real changes—both architecturally and ideologically. As the artist tells it: "I remember one of the curators telling me [...] when they did the renovations of the museum, that my installation in that area really made an impact in how they were deciding to design the *new media* [exhibition] room [to accommodate larger size works]."[471] While the artist herself may not have had the space she had envisioned for *Spoken Softly with Mama*, Campos-Pons's show did have a lasting impact on the *place* future artists and exhibitions would find at the MoMA.

Place limitations do not generally elicit such strong reactions from the artist. All gallery exhibition space is finite, limited by existing walls and ceilings—at least in the traditional gallery space, which is "indoors." While the artist gets to examine or choose the location(s) within the museum or gallery there are usually no "perfect" spaces. And just like *Spoken Softly*, many of the artist's installations were originally commissioned works, created with a specific location in mind. This is also true for another one of the works commonly associated with the artist's series of *History of a People...* titled *Meanwhile the Girls Were Playing,* 1999 [figure 41], which was commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Created for an exhibition with the same title, the installation features three circle shaped floor pieces and four video projections. The floor pieces are like large skirts, made of differently colored metallic

[471] Ibid.

organdy and silk fabrics and ornamented with hundreds of abstract glass flowers. In the center of each piece, an oculus like opening serves as the projection surface for three of the videos, while the fourth video is projected onto an end wall of the gallery. The idea for the piece came from the artist's memories of the Sunday dresses she and her sisters used to wear, each wearing a different color: yellow, green, and blue.

Like the installation *Spoken Softly With Mama*, in *Meanwhile the Girls Were Playing* the room is dark. The artist appears to shield these very personal memories from the bright light of scientific investigation, which she permits in installations that refer to something more "public" (as for example the *History of a People… Town Portrait* or her *Sugar/Bittersweet* installations show, both of which are displayed in fully lit galleries). In *Town Portrait* she joined words with the images, however in *Meanwhile, the Girls Were Playing* the visual material has to stand on its own. As Lisa Freiman has pointed out, everything in the installation turns and repeats—not as a vicious cycle but with the more therapeutic effect of repetition.[472] Thus, the artist is seen spinning in the wall-projected video, bringing to mind the playful dancing of children, the celebration of the Catholic *Virgen de las Mercedes* (Lady of Mercy), and the choreography performed by initiates in Santería practices (and other not-culturally-related practices, for example of Dervishes dancing in trance). And yet, in spite of all the suggested movement the installation is firmly grounded, the airy "skirts" are weighted down by their heavy glass ornamentations.

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[472] Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 51. Curator Sally Berger has described the entire skirts as "pools of shimmering fabric," which works well as a visual image, but in the interpretation of the piece it is distractive—bringing in a water metaphor alluding not to the "fountain" but to the "island" view the artist takes later ("Campos-Pons 1990-2001," 128).

The viewer also has to stand quite still to catch the glimpses Campos-Pons provides into her personal history. More than a mere "reflecting pool,"[473] which would only let us see ourselves, the oculus in the center of each of the differently colored skirts allows a view into a different world and time. They are windows that give us a peek of the carefree feeling of children's games, the freedom associated with wild birds, and the "sweet" taste of childhood exemplified by sugar.

Campos-Pons returns to the theme of "sugar" in other works, but here, in its first incorporation in a video of fingers pulling apart pieces of cotton candy, the charged icon of sugar belies the suggested fondness of the memory. As the artist herself put it: "Do you know of anything more innocent than cotton candy? But is anything more evil than how sugar came to be in Cuba? Or in any other place? Sugar was the blood of slavery."[474] The artist knows that this is not the obvious first impression, but the layers beneath are what Campos-Pons really wants to share. It is a different experience of sugar, one in which each sweet spoon has the bitter taste of the heinous crimes committed against her ancestors.

One of these layers is the retrospection possible for adults, who can put the innocent games of their childhood into the context of the contemporaneous, volatile situation in the world-at-large. Yet another layer takes the viewer to the meta-level and the tensions between figuration and abstraction, and between lofty ideas and grounded reality. Like the abstraction used in *The Herbalist's Tools*, the stylization

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[473] This is how Freiman describes the circular opening.

[474] Quoted in Michael D. Harris, "Meanwhile, the Girls were playing," in *Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons: Meanwhile, the Girls Were Playing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Art Center, 2000).

here allows viewers to relate to a very personal experience on a general level. On this plane, the issue of *place* becomes important again, as the artist situates herself (and us along with her) on the continuum, effortlessly shifting between her own past, the world's history, and our common present in this gallery to reveal that though different and distinct they are all (inter-)connected.

Experience of *place* through installation art

Even though the *symbiosis of places* is important for Campos-Pons—with museums and galleries in the North Eastern United States providing a *place* as well as funds to showcase her re-created *places* from her native Cuba—the works themselves are not usually "site specific." They are mobile and often exhibited multiple times before and even after finding a permanent home, though in each of these implacements a new relationship with the "host-place" is created. Multiple exhibits (chronologically as well as geographically) thus allow for slightly different viewpoints to emerge. Over time this produces a personal history of meaning for each work. Due to the different spaces available in these different exhibition locations, the artist often has to adjust works to fit a specific site or current gallery—another expression of the fluidity of *place* the artist has had to adapt to.[475] In one of Campos-Pons's recent solo exhibitions, *Sugar/Bittersweet* [figure 46] (see below), two such adjustments had to be made: one due to spatial limitations and the other due to safety concerns. As Smith College Museum of Art (SCMA for short) Curator Linda Muehlig explains, the installation *Meanwhile, the Girls Where Playing* "is

[475] As this is usually part of the exhibition planning discussed above, the artist can either agree with this step or suggest an alternate work to display.

usually shown in a gallery larger than the space we could provide, so the artist made the decision to slightly reduce the circumference of the 'skirts.'"[476] Here, the artist's adjustment did not result in a dramatically different experience of the installation as the proportions and overall atmosphere were maintained.

However, the other "adjustment"—the curator's decision to limit access to the installation piece that gave its title to the exhibition—resulted in a significantly altered experience for the viewers. The decision was based on understandable safety concerns posed by the work—dealing with both "fragile (glass) and sharp objects (spearheads)," it was certainly not completely safe for visitors to walk "inside" the installation. To limit the museum's risk, it restricted the viewer's access. In this case the decision meant that the artwork could not be experienced as intended.[477] The (re)created sugar field was intended to be walked through, thus making the audience aware of the dangers that lurk within the real thing. This experience could not emerge by merely looking at it.

Creating a new *place* in the art world

The new millennium would bring the artist several opportunities to step back, by traveling to Cuba and reconnecting with her roots, and to step up in the art world, beginning with the 49th *Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, 2001). Here, Campos-Pons's MoMA installation *Softly Spoken…* was on display in its originally conceived format, presented alongside other works of Contemporary African Art in a dedicated pavilion.

[476] Email communication with Linda Muehlig, April 15th, 2011.

[477] Ibid. Probably because "safety" was at stake, the artist did not object to this.

The exhibition titled *Authentic/Ex-Centric, Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*, marked an important development in the history of the very traditional Biennale: it was one of the first exhibitions conceived and organized by African curators to focus exclusively on art categorized as both *Contemporary* and *African*.[478] In addition to Campos-Pons, the artists featured were: Willem Boshoff, Godfried Donkor, Rachid Koraïchi, Berni Searle, Zineb Sedira and Yinka Shonibare. The even division of four male / four female artists represents a nod to a less discriminatory approach to curating, which is further reflected in the choice of artists, standing for different aspects of art on the large continent of Africa. The two South African artists experienced the modern colonial system of Apartheid, while the Algerian artists faced discrimination based on religion. Also included were artists from Nigeria and Ghana, both living in chosen "exile" in the West (London), and in the person of Campos-Pons an artist with Nigerian roots who grew up as Cuban.

Just as her exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art had signaled to the artist that she had finally "arrived" in her new chosen home country and in the art world in general, the inclusion in the Venice Biennale—one of the major events in contemporary art—meant that Campos-Pons now had become truly "international." In 2001, the artist had already spent a good decade living and working in the United States, and had become fluent in a number of new languages, both verbally and

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[478] As co-curator Salah M. Hassan pointed out in his preface to the exhibition catalogue for *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, the only "African" country regularly represented at the Venice Biennale up to that point was Egypt, commonly classified as or grouped with the "Middle East;" while the presence of South Africa was curtailed in response to the country's politics. See "Preface," in *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, ed. Salah M. Hassan and Olu Oguibe (Ithaca, NY: Forum for African Arts, 2001), 6. The traveling exhibition *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale* (1993) was not as general, as it highlighted artists from a specific "region."

visually. A native Spanish speaker, the artist now spoke English on a daily basis—especially once she began teaching in several of New England's art institutions. As for the visual languages, the development took place in two fields. The way the artist seized upon installations after her experience of displacement and her attempts to find her *place,* was maybe an obvious choice, considering the medium's inherent *place-making* qualities. However, the other medium the artist made her own in the 1990s, does not appear to have the same kind of connection to *place*: Polaroid Photography.

The opportunity to work in a new medium was part of the attraction. However, it was the combination of the resulting still image (linking it to the artist's painting origins), the "dialogue between performance and creation of an image," and the immediacy of the process that made up its particular appeal for Campos-Pons.[479] Like other black artists, Campos-Pons was not interested in a merely documentary function of photography (see discussion in IMRH chapter), but in constructing and "performing" for the camera, as well as creating intersections between this and the other media she has worked in. Even more than her paintings and installations, her Polaroid creations are rich in symbols and feature multiple layers of meaning. They usually intend to be the starting point and not the end point of a discussion.

Place **beyond the limitations of the medium**

Though the works themselves are limited to the format of the Polaroid camera (20 x 24), the artist brings *place* into play on a number of levels. As curator Sally

[479] Berger, "Campos-Pons 1990-2001," 131.

Berger has observed, the artist's use of multi-panel compositions underscores the "duality of being in two places at once, divided physically/practically and spiritually/mentally."[480] This is also mirrored on the thematic level, in Campos-Pons series *When I am Not Here/Estoy Alla* (1994-97). All the works the artist has grouped together under this title deal with the dilemma of being geographically separated from home or family: the mother away from the child, the enslaved person away from her culture, the individual stuck in exile, the member of a minority suffering from being different, etc.

One subset of images, which is known by the title *Identity Could Be a Tragedy*, 1995 [figure 42]—the phrase inscribed on the mud covered artist's upper chest—can be seen addressing all of the above individuals. Adding to the anonymity and universality of the person depicted, the artist has her eyes closed and the photograph is cropped above her breasts, which takes away the gender identifiers. Her skin color is indeterminable due to the mud application and the different exposure levels she has chosen. At the height of the "identity" discussion in the art world, Campos-Pons's work thus makes poignant statements: Knowing one's *identity* does not prevent suffering. An assigned *identity* is often the beginning of misery and pain, which become obvious in the "identities" that were "documented" in photographs such as the ones Louis Agassiz took in the 1850s. Thus the very idea of a "fixed" identity itself has to be seen as a fallacy, as the constant change within and around a person would effectively preclude such permanence. And finally, on a more

[480] Ibid., 132. This quote is taken from an artist statement by Campos-Pons in which the artist talks about the spaces she inhabits in these "dualities: Cuban vs. American, to live in America physically and practically and at the same time in Cuba spiritually and mentally" (in Freiman, "Everything is Separated by Water," 52).

playful level, the artist's commentary mocks the "identity" discussion by comparing it to a Greek drama: a tragedy showcases the suffering of the protagonist to amuse the audience. And considering the work in connection with the commercial aspects of art, it also questions the popular use of categories: if being "identified" as an "XYZ" artist makes one fashionable/collectible today, the same classification can be unfashionable tomorrow and the artist is stuck regardless of the contents and kinds of work he or she is producing (this, of course, also applies to the trendiness of "identity" exhibitions).[481]

Campos-Pons further comments on the idea of being trapped in *Tríptico,* 1996 [figure 43], which is also part of the *When I am Not Here* series. One of the three images features her in "white face" with the inscription "PATRIA UNA TRAMPA" (Homeland [is] an entrapment) scratched across her chest. Her eyes are open, staring at the viewer from behind a dainty "cage" of threads hanging down from her sculpted hair. The feeling of being trapped—either in the U.S. or in Cuba—due to the restrictions on travel, must have been particularly pronounced for the artist in the mid 1990s, as half a decade had passed since she had chosen love over family, opportunity over status quo, and a new *place* over the one in which she had roots –all without the possibility to return to the other. But this experience also allowed the artist to see how the entrapment works on a number of levels and can affect even those who are unaware of such a trap. As the home country is responsible for shaping one's views and restricting one's actions, it "traps" inhabitants with mental shackles and precludes certain physical movements. In regard to US-Cuban

[481] See also discussion about benefits/disadvantages of being "labeled" in the chapter on IngridMwangiRobertHutter.

relations, this meant limited intellectual exchange and travel. Applied to those living in a colonial society or even an apartheid system, it meant that certain places and actions, and even ideas were off-limits. And in a post 9/11 world the artist could not have foreseen, the "trap" metaphor is still equally valid, because it has now reversed to include all Americans in the "trap" of being potential targets of terrorism. The concepts the artist targets—i.e. homeland, identity, knowledge—are complex. They generally have a fixed meaning and are firmly entrenched in Western thought as fundamental in structuring our world. For Campos-Pons, however, an individual and artist "of many places," these meanings are restrictive and archaic.

As discussed in part one and in the two other artist case studies, the body is one of the primary *places* we experience. Using her own body as the main object of the Polaroid works, the artist "reflects the body as a house. […] It is a place of pain, imagination and dreams."[482] This is particularly evident in her early works of the *When I am Not Here/Estoy Alla* series, in which the artist evokes the history of the slave trade, the spirituality of her Yoruba ancestors, and experiences related to displacement, motherhood, and nourishment. As it provides only one still image, excluding all senses except the visual, the artist has to carefully stage the scene, giving thought to every last detail and preparing all the different components that make up the final product. It is no surprise that color plays an important role here, both in its aesthetic and its symbolic function.

In two Polaroid works in the *When I am Not Here/Estoy Alla* series (both created in 1994), the artist makes references to her Yoruba ancestry through the use

[482] Berger, "Campos-Pons 1990-2001," 132.

of the colors blue and yellow [figure 44]. The first image features a blue background as well as the artist nude from the neck to waist, with every bit of her skin entirely painted in blue with lighter blue and white waves. She is holding a wooden vessel in the shape of a (slave) ship's hull and has two baby bottles with milk connected by a tube dangling around her neck and over her breasts. In the second image (a set of two, the artist setup differing in nothing but the hand gesture), the artist is similarly cropped and painted, except the background here is yellow and the blue body is covered in yellow waves. In both images the artist is seated. While in one photograph she is holding the wooden vessel (above a box with five objects) as if offering it to us, in the other she has dipped her hands in it, revealing to the viewer that the vessel is full of honey, which is now dripping back into it.

Campos-Pons has utilized every bit of symbolism she could squeeze into the image without cluttering it visually: the colors are associated with the Yoruba goddesses Yemaya (blue) and Oshun (yellow); the number five and the offering of honey also belong to Oshun; as a river goddess, Oshun is appropriately depicted with waves; Yemaya, as the orisha of the seas, also has the appropriate waves and as a goddess of maternity showing her with a boat slowly filling with milk from the surrogate nipples is doubly fitting.[483] The container used also does double duty: it is an object and a term. The *vessel* is the ship that brought the artist's ancestors to Cuba and it is the bowl both for the offerings to the gods and also to her child "when

[483] Allusions to her mixed cultural heritage, which includes Santeria and Yoruba influences, are made throughout the artist's career. It is not always clear where the inspiration originates, because the artist does not make that distinction and blends personal experiences, with family and community stories, and research.

I am not here." Using her nude self as the "canvas" furthermore fits with the common depiction of the goddesses in their nude female form.

Yet, this is only one layer of the work. Another layer is linked to the history of Campos-Pons's ancestors. Forcibly uprooted and separated from everything they knew, the artist's displaced forebears managed to keep enough of their cultural heritage intact to pass it on from generation to generation. Through this they built a bridge from the past to the present, connecting Africa to Cuba and to the United States, which becomes visible in the artist's narrative. While the images display the spirituality, they also remind us of the sea voyage and they do so all the more poignantly for their lack of actual people in the boat. They tell of the experience of separation and absence through the faceless torso with the surrogate breasts. And they underline the loss of family as well as the importance of nourishment and strength to keep going in spite of it all.

And there is yet another layer to reveal: the issues of female fertility and motherhood, which have been present in the artist's work from the beginning of her career.[484] The title of the works allude to the absence of the mother, though the female form is depicted in the photograph and it is actually the "child" that is absent. However, the reference also applies to the artist as a child of her mother and to her experience of being separated from her indefinitely due to the US-Cuban political situation. The *sustenance* her mother has left her with, from life-lessons to spirituality, and the surrogate *sustenance* she receives through letters and rare

[484] As Freiman puts it, the pictures are "an ode to Cuban motherhood, [and] to the sister goddesses of maternity and fertility who have guided the framework of Campos-Pons's artistic production throughout her career" (in "Everything is Separated by Water," 53).

phone conversations are functioning as the milk bottles and vessel: all of these serve to sustain her when physical touches and face-to-face interactions are impossible. Now a mother herself, Campos-Pons similarly indicates how the milk in the bottles will provide her child with nourishment when the artist is unable to do so herself. Finally, all of these layers come together in *place*—the *place* of the artist's body we see depicted.

The last, but not least way in which *place* is integrated into Campos-Pons Polaroid works, is through multi-panel compositions. The grids serve as a kind of a window looking out on an *imaginary place*, where the viewer can share in a journey of the mind but not enter in as an actual *place* experience. In the first decade of the new millennium, Campos-Pons began working almost exclusively in these giant Polaroid compositions that require complex preparation of "little installations," to be assembled and photographed.[485] Oftentimes, these works allude to a particular *place* in their titles: *Constellation* (2004), *De Las Dos Aguas* (2007), *Dreaming of an Island* (2008), and *Blue Refuge* (2008). Adding another twist to her multi-locational past and present, the artist only found out as an adult that she also had Chinese ancestry (see discussion below). Her 21-panel Polaroid *My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese Painting Lesson,* 2008 [figure 45] takes up this anecdote and shows the artist's attempt at processing it through creating a Chinese inspired setting, wearing an appropriate costume, and learning to paint in a Chinese style (with a brush dipped in black ink).

[485] See ibid., 55.

(Re)Creating *place*

In *Sugar/Bittersweet*, 2010 [figure 46], one of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's most recent works, she returned to making installations. Commissioned by Smith College and exhibited in the Smith College Museum of Art (Northampton, MA, Sept. 2010-Jan. 2011), the artist recreated the site of a sugar field. After experimenting with different ideas in her studio and trying to turn her "sugar field" into a multi-sensory experience without making it too literal, the artist settled on using African and Chinese stools as bases, African spears as stalks, and disks of either cast-glass or raw sugar stacked on top of each other to represent both—the sugar cane in the field and the final product. Campos-Pons likes the contrast of different materials, which consist here of wood, metal, sugar, and glass, as well as the combination of ready-mades with those elements she creates.

To help her visualize the installation during the development phase, she worked with sketches on translucent paper, which she could layer on top of each other to build up the piece. As each spear is drawn in black ink, the relationship between them is established and then arranged and rearranged to fit into a whole. The artist also chose to work with a number of different sugars, which provided her with the color palettes both of sugar and of the Cuban population—one reflecting the other in the value assigned to them by such matters as "taste" and by those in a position of power. The white, or refined, sugar being the most popular, is followed by mestizio aka turbinado sugar and a darker sugar called *panela*, and finally by the "black" molasses sugar, which is what remains after the long process of refining, and is used—among other things—for feeding animals. In her choice of colors, Campos-

Pons consciously excludes the lush green of the actual sugar fields, in favor of those tones that also symbolize the skin colors of the different groups involved in the sugar triangle. By creating the work as an installation, the artist is able to extend her own dialogue with *place* and can "bring people to the conversation of the location [and] of the exploitation [that took place on] the sugar field" while at the same time providing her audience with "the experience that many people don't have: what is the physicality of a sugar field?"[486]

Through the installation *Sugar/Bittersweet,* Campos-Pons enables the audience to travel both geographically and historically. *Place* once again gets a concrete component through the use of objects whose origin clings to them like an *aura* and brings this *place* with them into the new environment. The spears and stools serve to tie the installation into the history of slavery—as African slaves were brought to Cuba to work on the sugar plantations—while also referencing the transatlantic trade route known as the sugar triangle. The spears are used here also as symbols of masculine power: the phallus imagery of her earlier work makes a reappearance, in particular the arrangement of "spears" in the installation *Erotic Garden* (though the early work represents an entirely different *place*; see discussion above). The whole shape of the spears emulates that of the flowering sugar cane, while the blades serve to remind the viewer of the sharp edges of the leaves that grow at the top of the sugar cane stalk, which can blind those working in the sugar fields. The sugar disks, stacked on top of another and held in place by the spears, leave a distinct smell in the room that changes in intensity as the visitor moves through the

[486] Ibid.

exhibition. Adding yet another dimension to her (re)created *place* (sight and smell are covered, even tactility—one knows better than to touch the pointy spears!), Campos-Pons incorporates a video component, which features interviews of people from Cuba and other sugar-producing countries, and brings in both faces and voices belonging to another place.[487] Her respective Cuban and African heritages are not the only nods the artist made to personal and international history in *Sugar/Bittersweet* – she also included elements of her Chinese ancestry.

After the abolition of slavery, Chinese laborers were brought into the country to work in the increasingly mechanized sugar mills.[488] In fact, some of the stools the artist used, taken for African at first glance, are actually Chinese. For each of the two cultures the artist uses the stool as a foundation for the towering memory of pain and suffering.[489] In the installation, the role of the indentured laborers in the sugar production is made visible by a set of roped Chinese weights, which symbolize the weighing of the crop after the harvest. In reference to the sugar field as a representation of the exploitation and dislocation of peoples on an epic scale, which specifically highlights the tragedy that transpired in her region of Cuba and her own family's history, Campos-Pons expounds on the title of her work: "Sugar makes me

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[487] The artist has used the method of appealing to all the senses in a number of her installations, notably *The Herbalist's Tools* and the more recent *Guardarraya* (2010), an installation created with sugar bricks and video, in the *Queloides* exhibition at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh.

[488] In Linda Muehlig, "Overview," exhibition brochure *Sugar – Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons*, Northampton: Smith College of Art, 2010.

[489] Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, lecture at Smith College, Northampton, MA, November 11th, 2010.

cry. And the tears are salty and bitter."[490] In a lecture accompanying the exhibition at Smith College Museum, the artist recalls the impact of the collective suffering on later generations, reflected in her inability as a young child to drink a sugary drink without crying.[491]

With this installation, Campos-Pons has now completed her tri-partite memorial to La Vega, the place of her childhood. Originally, the artist had envisioned three installations in which the first provided a portrait of the town and her family, the second a portrait of her family, and the third a portrait of herself. The latter was to feature "objects made of sugar," and thus symbolize what "sugar" has meant for her home and town: "sugar is the reason the town was built as a plantation, [...] sugar is why my ancestors were brought to America, sugar is what my ancestors worked in, sugar was the main product of La Vega, sugar *is* Cuba."[492] These ideas meant the piece would have "a lot to do with home, place and territory," making it an odd choice for a "self-portrait," but the artist always saw the portrait to be about the absence of "the person who has stepped outside the town, outside the country."[493] In addition to her absence, the work would also be about the *place* that had been and would be a part of her life forever. In the exhibition at the Smith College Museum, two earlier works were shown in adjacent spaces–*History of a People Who were Not Heroes: A Town Portrait* and *Meanwhile the Girls Were Playing* (see discussion

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[490] The artist statement on the exhibition brochure *Sugar – Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons*, Northampton: Smith College of Art, 2010.

[491] Campos-Pons, November 11th, 2010.

[492] Campos-Pons in Bell, "History of people," 35.

[493] Ibid., 34.

above)–evoking the idea of the tri-partite memorial. In an updated version of her original plan, the pieces now feature histories of the personal, the local, the national and the international — not in separate installations for each, but rather as layers of meaning in each installation.[494]

Notwithstanding her grand scope and aspirations in this installation, the artist is quite aware of the limited time and reach a single person generally has: "I'm very modest in my thinking about my reach and my capacity as an artist, but I think that it's the accumulation of little insertions that may do something [over time]."[495] So she puts her own experiences and extended family history into each of her installations, trying to reach out to different viewers in different ways: "What you do [is] you keep giving people the opportunity to think and reflect and reconstruct an re-imagine and maybe – maybe – in the time of being around you have an impact."[496]

These days, the artist is "around" in a number of places: as a professor of painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (SMFA for short), she gets to interact with a new generation of artists on a daily basis; as an artist represented by Stephan Stoyanov Gallery in New York (until 2012 she was with the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in Miami, which closed) and Zadok Gallery in Miami, she has made her work accessible to national and international collectors; in her regular solo and group exhibition appearances, Campos-Pons interacts with audiences in

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[494] This three-part format was already also achieved in previous exhibitions, which—prior to *Sugar/Bittersweet*—included the installation piece *Spoken Softly with Mama*, discussed above.

[495] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

[496] Ibid.

talks and performances as well as through the works on display—most recently as an artist for the Cuban Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013); and last but not least, the artist is also increasingly present in the virtual places provided by the world wide web. As data storage space increases and as art institutions extend their role of documenting and archiving into this new medium, more and more exhibitions can be found online—even after they have been long gone from the gallery. This is no different for Campos-Pons. Though the artist does not maintain a personal website, she is represented—or "around"—on a number of sites, from her gallery profiles, to archived exhibitions, to her faculty page at the SMFA, and last but not least on artist search engines such as *artfacts.net* and *artnet.com*.[497] The virtual presence on the internet also means that an artist/the work can be experienced in times and locations far removed from the "here and now" of much contemporary work. For the first time in history there is a venue for artists that does not face the same limitations experienced in a museum (exposure that is both temporary and spatially limited), at least not as far as we can see now.

[497] This is a sampling of sites that were accessed on May 9, 2014:
http://www.stephanstoyanov.com/Maria-Magdalena-Campos-Pons
http://scma.smith.edu/artmuseum/On-View/Past-Exhibitions/2009-2010/Sugar-Maria-Magdelena-Campos-Pons
http://www.smfa.edu/facultymodule/view/id/79/src/@random4a83044d9a8b2/
Her own web address www.mariamagdalenacampospons.com is a no longer functioning link to the website of the Indianapolis Museum of Art's retrospective of the artist in 2007.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored *place* and how it is reflected in the art and lives of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, IngridMwangiRobertHutter, and Wangechi Mutu. At the same time, the pages themselves have become a *place* shared by you the reader and me the writer and several aspects of *place* have emerged as shared themes, which I would like to revisit and highlight here.

The experience of displacement and being an outsider

Taking Relph's categories of outsideness/insideness as a starting point, we can acknowledge that there are different kinds of being an *outsider*, none of which are fixed or permanent. The general development in *place* is to become more and more familiar and thus move from being an outsider to being an insider. This crucial development in our experience of *place* changes our lives by giving us back control over factors that were once "outside" our reach. Growing up in Nairobi, the artist IngridMwangiRobertHutter was aware of her environment, but it took the experience of displacement to make *place* an important part of her art and it was through making art that she found *her place*. In her performance art and video installations, both of which are temporary, process-oriented *place* experiences, the artist enters into a relationship with the audience and creates shared moments. This movement from outsider to insider is accomplished through this act of *relating*: "The simplicity of the shared moment is like balm for all hearts. It cools our heated minds and carries us away to a different place, where things are better and we rest in a

sense of sameness."[498] Therefore, processing her outsider experience and presenting this process in her performance was partly done as a therapeutic act. At the same time, MwangiHutter points out, it was also done because *place* is "all about relating," which means having her art reach out to the audience and bringing them back into her *place*. The viewers who have not gone through this experience or the processing themselves, have now, through the shared moment, become a part of it and can no longer remain ignorant. Just as David Seamon emphasized in his analysis of Relph, arguing that "the more strongly an environment generates a sense of belonging, the more strongly does that environment become a place," the efforts of MwangiHutter to establish belonging through relating effectively transform essential outsideness into essential insideness.[499]

For all three artists in this dissertation, the outsider experience was projected onto and experienced by the body—especially their own. Being in a different geographical and cultural environment, visibly different as female and as African, turned the body into the protagonist and the marker of this "otherness." Wangechi Mutu has turned her acknowledgement of the fact that displaced persons feel they have "infested or invaded a place where [they] don't belong" into the visual forms of collaged bodies that equally don't fit.[500] The outsider experience is linked to

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[498] IngridMwangiRobertHutter, *Intrusion*, unpublished.

[499] Seamon, "Singular Impact," 5.

[500] Mutu in Kruger, "Interview," 119. See this understanding of the displaced as "invader" also in the art of IngridMwangiRobertHutter, especially the work/performance *Intruders* (2011).

displacement and the experience continues to affect her art making: "Displacement anxiety and fractured identity are implied in my drawings."[501]

Campos-Pons's experience of outsideness began even before her physical displacement, during a visit to the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, Cuba. The discovery that the collection contained "no women — no blacks" made the thirteen year-old aware of the place accorded to people like her, though it also strengthened her resolve to do something about this.[502] The artist now operates on a continuum, *a place of her own* that allows her to shift effortlessly between her personal past, the world's history, and our shared present time, and which dissolves our illusion of category boundaries to reveal the interconnectedness of our human experience.

Yet, the experience of outsideness or having outsider status is not always seen as negative. It is an essential quality in maintaining one's identification with a particular group, especially in regard to having diaspora status. In the instance of the latter, it represents a *choice* of not trying to fit in with the new environment and instead belonging to an "outsider" group (a choice that can have advantages, as the category discussion below indicates). Nostalgia, fear of the unknown, and specific belief systems can also be motivating factors in maintaining a particular group affiliation, and are not perceived as obstacles until the individual recognizes the limitations these factors can impose.

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[501] Mutu in Firstenberg, "Wangechi Mutu," 142.

[502] Campos-Pons, October 29, 2010.

The body as place

This crucial aspect of the artists' works transitions us from the experience of displacement to the experience of re-implacement. In Mutu's work, as in the immigrant experience, the body is the invader and the visible marker of perceived otherness, and thus the body becomes the central element of the struggle of displacement/re-implacement. The artist completely departs from the use of locations as *place* (though she evokes physical places, see below) and instead focuses on the complexity of the body as *place*. The many layers of meaning belonging to *place* are shown and translated into the many layers of collaged elements—from the embodied representation of *place* (i.e. the physical figure on the paper), to the title of the work and to its placement among other works in an exhibition space. Here, the power of the body relates to those who are disempowered, and the power of *place* to those who are displaced. The fragmented body shown in Mutu's collages represents the experience of the fragmentation of place, which—although she re-enacts the violation of the body through the mutilations of the paper original with her x-acto™ knife (splitting up bodies never to be reunited again)—is then repaired by the artist who takes the pieces and joins them together to create a new, beautiful, and intriguing, albeit somewhat grotesque whole.

Unlike the artists MwangiHutter and Campos-Pons, Mutu does not use her own body in most of her works (namely her collages, sculptures and installations; her body does appear in video works). Still, she puts herself into the works as their creator and through the labor and time-intensive process. Her focus on the black female body underlines the many layers of place (i.e. the long, charged history of

objectification of the black female body, see *gendered places* below) and highlights the experience of a power differential, especially with the felt presence of the visually absent male colonial body. In addition, by using images already in circulation and thus already inscribed, the artist can more emphatically apply her technique of fragmentation and disruption to call the objectification of these bodies into question.

In contrast to Mutu, in both the Polaroid photographs of Campos-Pons and the performances of MwangiHutter the artist and art object merge in the body of the artist herself. The artists dissolve existing binaries and distinctions. The work of MwangiHutter echoes how the artist eliminated the distinction between male/female, German/Kenyan, and black/white through the process of morphing their personal and artistic identities into one being called IngridMwangiRobertHutter. In the art of Campos-Pons, the many layers already gathered in the body of the artist (African and Cuban, mother and child, free and oppressed, real and virtual—to mention but a few) alert us to the fluidity and non-exclusivity of categories. These layers in the body are also representative of the many layers gathered in *places*. Finally, it also reveals the ultimate gathering power of the body as *place*—comfortably able to hold opposites, and the entire spectrum in between.

In the oeuvre of Campos-Pons, the body appears as *place* even in some of her earlier works. Her *Chastity Belt* [figure 34] is an example of a *place* the artist knows intimately and that stands as a symbol for the power struggles between patriarchal systems and the women they seek to oppress. It is a physical place, but it is also personal, metaphorical, and abstract, after all, the artist has fortunately not had to wear an actual chastity belt. And the work *Isla* [figure 36] brings together the

personal, the national, and the global, representing the artist's body, her birth country, and her *place* in the art world—related to artists like Ana Mendieta and Frank Stella, but with a voice entirely her own.

Lastly, the body as *place* also enters into our personal interaction as viewers with each of the artists, as it is our body/our *place* that we carry into each exhibition and encounter. Only thanks to my body can I experience the art works, interact with a performance, and react to the placing of works in the gallery space as I move through it. Ultimately, without our own experiences of *place,* we would not be able to understand the artist and her work.

Places are still gendered, especially in the art world

Although the three artists in this dissertation are women, this does not make their art "feminine" or give scholars permission to classify them as "women artists." If anything, their artistic output has to be seen as confirmation that using such a category to understand their work is invalid and ludicrous. The majority of their experiences are shared by all human beings—in particular the experiences of *place* and the body as *place*—though not all human beings are treated equally. As differences continue to be made based on class (social and/or economic), race, and—most importantly in this context—gender, they continue to affect our human experiences.

Gender is highly relevant in the experience of limitations on *place*: there are places women cannot go without repercussions (ranging from simple to the most severe forms of harassment) and there are other *places* from which women are just

excluded entirely. Going back to the seismic shifts in the 80s and 90s, one of the *places* that discriminated based on gender (and race, place of origin, etc.) was the art world. The artists in this dissertation have shown where things have started to change and how female artists, even those not born in the USA or in Europe, can be successful commercially, but this is not yet a brave new world. The gender ratios in graduating classes in North American art schools are strongly favoring female students (who make up between 60 and 70% of the student body), a trend that began in the late 19070s and is mirrored in the general college population, however, the ratios in the artist rankings are inverse (i.e. still heavily skewed toward male artists), and thus do not reflect this reality.[503]

One artist who has examined the art world's *gendered place* is Micol Hebron. Her project *The (en)Gendered (in)Equity: The Gallery Poster Project* (2014) follows in the footsteps of the famous Guerilla Girls "weenie count" campaign, and began with a similarly empirical approach and field research: the artist's tally of male/female artists on the roster of Los Angeles Art Galleries. She had noticed an inequity in the print ads for art openings in the art world's trade publications and had wondered if this was reflective of the actual representation in art galleries or if this skewed picture was due to other factors.[504] Her own, unscientific findings

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[503] On art school ratios see rankings of individual art institutes, schools, and colleges at USNews & Worldreport; on college ratios see articles in Forbes and the Guardian; http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/specialty-arts http://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2012/02/16/the-male-female-ratio-in-college/ http://www.theguardian.com/education/datablog/2013/jan/29/how-many-men-and-women-are-studying-at-my-university

[504] See article and interview by Jillian Steinhauer, published March 2014 in *Hyperallergic* http://hyperallergic.com/117065/tallying-art-world-inequality-one-gallery-at-a-time/

supported the initial assessment that about 70% of artists represented in commercial galleries were male. Hebron then invited other artists to join her in a crowdsourcing project called *Gallery Tally*, tallying gender ratios in galleries across the country. Each artist who participated not only had to do a count but was also expected to create a poster visually representing their respective findings. This led to an exhibition of about 300 posters at a Gallery in Los Angeles (which in fact brings the project full circle).

Mutu's art openly challenges the practice of *gendered places*. Her mutilated protagonists are turned into cyborg heroines with the help of motorcycle parts and modified skins. The artist's explosion of stereotypes (in particular commonly held views of African women, beauty standards, and victimized gender) is a result of her personal memories of gender inequality and the power of women in the face of adversity. The fact that the naked black female body succeeded not as a means of seduction or a sign of submission, but as a form of political protest, affirms Mutu's presentation of the fragmented body as a powerful force.

Campos-Pons's childhood experience of the racialized and gendered art world was one of the obstacles the artist worked to overcome in her career. Through her repeat participations in the Venice Biennale, her exhibitions in major art institutions (MoMA, National Gallery of Canada, etc.), and in her role as an instructor, she has questioned the system and opened doors for others. Using her own body as the object of her Polaroid tableaus conveys to her audience that throughout history the

"idea of control, the site of power, is always [connected to] the women's body" and that only our way of looking at the body can change that pattern.[505]

Art creates place

The different elements that are crucial in creating an experience of *place* are all present in the exhibitions of MwangiHutter, Campos-Pons, and Mutu. They share the need for a physical space (though for MwangiHutter, this can also be a virtual space), for an audience, and for a relationship that develops between site, viewer, artwork and artist, however, the way in which this is accomplished is different for each person. The performances of MwangiHutter bring together several components of *place*: a location — which can vary from a vacant, fenced-in inner-city lot or a sewage-flooded street corner to the clinically white and clean space of an art gallery; an audience — ranging from random passersby to dressed-to-the-nines exhibition opening guests; a protagonist — the artist him- or herself, representing an opportunity to establish a "relationship;" an experience — provided by the performance context and content; and a range of factors that impact the particular *place memory* that will be created, including but not limited to air temperature, time of day, climatic occurrences, smells, sounds, sights (beyond those already mentioned), and even tastes.

The installations of Campos-Pons aim to (re)create a *place*. The format of the medium—most installations are large enough to require movement on behalf of the audience to fully grasp the work—lends itself particularly well to the experiential goal

[505] Campos-Pons, October 29th, 2010.

of the artist. Over and over again, in each of her works, installations, and exhibitions, Campos-Pons shares both her memory and her experience with her viewers. In many instances she uses text, inscribed on panels, bodies, and bricks, to relay the memories she has literally embedded in the structures. Sometimes she adds a "body-memory"—the physical interaction with a site—to the experience of her audience, as for example in the fountain of *History of People Who Were Not Heroes*, which has to be circumambulated to reveal its message, moving around just like the artist did in a game of ring-around-the-rosy. This helps develop a specific relationship between the physical place and those inhabiting it in present, past, and virtual spheres, which is the true *place*.

In *Sugar—Bittersweet*, Campos-Pons created a "field" of sugarcane: abstracted as cast sugar and glass rings (that look like very large donuts), speared through the center and stacked high, with the blades of the rusty weapons emerging at the top. The field of stools from China and various African countries and the ringed spears helped evoke the slave-based history of sugarcane cultivation in Cuba. However, this work was not for viewing in a picture or from a distance—it was an installation to be experienced by moving through it. Walking through this field changed every aspect of the viewers perception: the sharp blades at eye level made the audience aware of the dangerous nature of working in the field, the smell of cast-sugar was a powerful reminder of why this work was done, and the stark visual contrast of colors of the stacked rings (light and dark, and various nuances in between) served as reminders of the racial discrimination in Cuba reflected in the color/value of various sugar products (white=highest quality, black molasses=animal

feed). In this work, *place* becomes thus a matter of experience–bringing together the memories of the artist, with the historical, cultural, and physical aspects of the sugarcane plantation, the present tense background, and the aesthetic as well as sensory experience of the viewers.

The presentation of Wangechi Mutu's work in the gallery is a continuation of her approach to art as collage. From the titles of the work, to the hanging of her individual collages, to the visual interaction of the art with the viewer, the combination of elements creates a larger collage in the gallery space (in fact, the gallery should be seen as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*). In *place* terms, each of her works gathers and then carries *place* with it—from its inception (which includes the experience processed by the artist) to its creation and exhibition history. The interaction of the viewer with each collage then adds a layer of experience to the layers that are already present in the work. Thus, just as Mutu's collages represent *place*, her extension of collage to every aspect of her work and to the interaction with the audience implies an extension of *place*—in other words: the experience of *place* itself becomes a collaborative process of creation.

Place stays with the work

As each artist creates, the works themselves acquire a history of their own—they are gathering *places* as they travel around the globe, through different exhibitions, galleries, collectors, and as they enter into scholarly and critical discourses. In the installations of Campos-Pons, works are adjusted from one venue to the next based on spatial or safety limitations, while Mutu's collages are grouped

together and arranged in infinite variations of her available oeuvre. The uniqueness of *place* that is represented in each work is the foundation for the audience's interaction with the work—or as MwangiHutter puts it: "[…] it is quite amazing how people relate to the same thing quite similarly, because it's a human experience. And that is the basis of my work […]"[506]

Places create art

Just as no *place experience* is alike, no art experience is alike. Yet, for each artist, certain things stand out about a particular *place*, and these markers connect the artist's works. Wangechi Mutu uses objects associated with particular sites and cultural practices to evoke physical place, such as "African" sculptures, luxury and status symbols, motorcycle and plant parts. She also uses the visual language acquired through her life experience on three different continents to create imagined and metaphorical *places*—beginning with the objectification of the female body by the male gaze and the colonial gaze, and extending into the present and continued fascination with the "exotic," especially the "exotic woman."

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons cares for *places,* which she nourishes and maintains even if they are not "material." From her teenage realization that there was a *place* far from the present geographical location of Matanzas, Cuba, a *place* where she could be "in communion" with her heroes Rilke, Mann, Wagner, Achebe and Lispector, to her contemporary work linking her Chinese and Yoruba ancestry with her experience of the legacy of Cuba and the world's 21st century problems,

[506] MwangiHutter, December 1st, 2010.

Campos-Pons's *places* are both unique to her life story and globally omnipresent, despite our ignorance of them. Still, there are physical places, too, that impact her work. Coming from the island of Cuba, she looks back at its geography, its history and its culture. She cherishes the Yoruba heritage of her father, processes the Catholic practices of her youth, reacts to *the good, the bad, and the ugly* of the Communist regime, and traces her roots back to Africa and forward to New England. Ultimately, Campos-Pons always goes back to the body as the *place* that holds all *places*.

IngridMwangiRobertHutter uses her *place experiences* to help shape her surroundings and her skills as an artist to transform "something very immaterial, like your thoughts and ideas, to something manifest [like a work of art.]"[507] This allows her to emphasize the agency we have in dealing with our environment, and empowers her viewers.

Place is flexible and virtual

Art about a place/*place* does not have to be made *in* that place/*place*. The *places* of our lives can be shared and made meaningful for others even when or especially when they are presented in a different *place*. Both Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and IngridMwangiRobertHutter (re)create *places* in their installations, which bring the audience into a meaningful and shared experience. Both artists also underline that the *places* the viewer has experienced are rather randomly assigned, and that each of us could have been in their place instead. Through their art, they

[507] Ibid.

invite the audience to switch and put themselves into the artist's *place* for a while, to improve our understanding of what *place* means.

The artists have also revisited *places* that are a part of their respective histories, like their birthplaces, immersed themselves in them and now they invite the audience to do the same. Thus, for example, in Campos-Pons's multi-panel compositions, we are presented with a window looking out on an imaginary place, which allows us to share in the artist's many journeys of the mind or, as she has put it, to live "spiritually and mentally [in two places at the same time]."[508] In her installations, the viewer can experience equally *places* the artist has experienced as historically abstract (the Middle Passage), deeply personal (her father's role as an herbalist), or as ephemeral (memories of childhood).

MwangiHutter allows her audience to access her work in any number of ways: in person, through the lens of critics and scholars, and in the virtual realm. The latter in particular shows the flexibility of *place*. The artist's website *IngridMwangiRobertHutter.com* serves as documentation of her works—including ones already in collections and those not for sale, as a teaser (for those who are curious), as a mnemonic aid (for those who want to "relive" the experience), and as a forum of exchange (by contacting the artist directly). It is a virtual *place* the artist continues to mold. Yet, MwangiHutter acknowledges that she had to relinquish control over other virtual manifestations of her work—particularly video clips of her performances both taken with and distributed via smartphones. Rather than being

[508] In Tarlow, "Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons," 25.

upset by this, the artist attributes to these rogue manifestations of *place* the power of creativity perpetuating itself.

A different kind of *virtual place* can be found in Mutu's collages. Mutu takes *place*, dissects it, reassembles the pieces and adds new elements. Her collages evolve from figures on blank backgrounds, to carefully placed props creating environments for her figures, to grand compositions either within the work itself or by means of multiple works placed together. She thus introduces us to a new world of her own making, establishing families, genera and species, and relationships between them. Yet, in this new world we are not merely observers, but participants. Her creation does not stay on the paper, it becomes bigger and envelops us in the *place* experience of her exhibition—or as Courtney J. Martin states: "To be inside the installation is to have entered into one of Mutu's collages."[509]

Looking ahead: *place* and art

The overview of themes and artists in Part 1 chapter 1, "place as location" is highlighted as a key feature of art throughout its history. Through the subsequent case studies, I assert that *place* has much more to offer. That is, the lens of *place* can be used to highlight both similarities and differences between artists who have been grouped together (even if this grouping was made on the basis of a set of arbitrary markers only vaguely related to their art) and it can make meaningful connections between artists who have not. I would like to conclude with a few examples of other

[509] Martin, "Fracture and Action," 54.

artists who have complex approaches to art and *place,* although a detailed examination of them will have to await a future study.

Julie Mehretu is one of the artists who would expand on notions of place explored in this dissertation. Compared to her peers, her ascent to art world stardom was much more rapid and pronounced, and her experiences of *displacement* seem further removed. Also, her works appear more closely linked to the "place as landscape" tradition than "*place* as experience." Still, using the lens of *place* would grant both the viewer and the scholar a way to access Mehretu's work in all its complexity, rather than seeing it as abstract historical commentary on specific geographical and social environments.

Considering, for example, the issues of *gendered place*, of the *diaspora experience*, and the pressures of the commercial art world, Julie Mehretu brings more *place* experiences into her art than one might imagine. While the artist's continental displacement (from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to East Lansing, Michigan) is only a childhood memory, her association and start as an "Ethiopian Diaspora artist" is much more recent (she participated in the *Ethiopian Passages* exhibition at the Smithsonian in 2003). Similarly, her family connection with geography goes back to her youth, however, the many hours spent studying maps and tracing the outlines of public squares and historic façades of Berlin, Germany, happened less than a decade ago (2008/9). And despite being a fixture in the art world, with major exhibition appearances dating back to the early years of the new millennium, she has other

concerns that go beyond fame and fortune (her wife and two kids, to name an obvious one).[510]

So, what can *place* tell us about Mehretu's work that a different lens cannot? The layers found in her large scale works allude to the complexity of *place* and can help us untangle the chaos; her works' titles indicate the power of *places* and remind us of the relationships that develop (thus serving as a continuous verbal-visual-experiential feedback loop); and the way her canvases merge the representative with the fictional and the imagined allows her audience to experience *place* both as something new and as something familiar.[511]

While Mehretu may still be an obvious choice (on paper she meets the same art world "minority markers" as the artists analyzed in this dissertation), the lens of *place* should not be limited to those who have experienced displacement or who have been pushed to the margins ("outsides") of the art world. *Place* is also a great lens through which to explore complexities in the works of mainstream artists, for example the typologies of Bernd and Hilla Becher. Here, *place* allows us to see not only the relationships between the objects, but also the relationships between object and community, history, and culture, and it lets us anticipate the not-yet depicted future in which the objects are transformed into industrial world heritage sites, and museums, even theme parks. Equally, in the large-scale photographs of Andreas

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[510] See interview with Jason Farago in *The Guardian*, June 20, 2013. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jun/20/painting-art

[511] Case in point: I saw her work first at the Carnegie International in 2004, before knowing her as an artist. Most recently, after researching her for almost a decade, I saw her canvases at Documenta 13 (2012). Despite the different locations (Pittsburgh, PA and Kassel, Germany), audiences, venues, contexts, and different works, they held both: the excitement of the new and the comfort of the familiar—recognizing *place* in her work.

Gursky and Thomas Struth, *place* means we can see more than an organization of "space" and more than our spatial relationship with the built environment. *Place* contextualizes where we come from and who we are, and therefore the images highlight our quest of getting back into *place*.

The lens of *place* creates meaningful inquiries into many artists and their work, however, some are more attuned to *place* than others. One example of the latter is Andy Goldsworthy, whose artworks focus on being completely emplaced (if only for a moment). Their temporary nature requires that the relationship is inherent, or already present, in the *place* of their making. The artist often achieves this by choosing materials that are at the site or that have a connection with the particular location. With his work he emphasizes the importance of being rooted, of *finding place* and entering into a relationship with it. In his documentary *Rivers and Tides*, the artist underscores that his process requires being familiar with—or in Relph's terms, being an *insider* of—place: "I've lived in places for four or five years and moved on and that is not enough time, it really isn't enough time to understand the changes that happen in that place."[512] Although most of Goldsworthy's works are ephemeral—the dry shadow cast by his body laying on the ground as it is starting to rain is a good example of just how short-lived they are—the imprint they leave is more marked than it appears at first. Again the example of the body-print can illustrate this: it is captured in photographs and shown in the documentary on the artist. The viewer can see the artist on the ground with gentle rain falling on and around him, or she can see the contrast of the darker, wet ground and the lighter

[512] See Thomas Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides* (Docurama, 2004), DVD.

colored outline left by him. Clearly one cannot exist without the other, though both cannot be seen simultaneously. This complex relationship is a result of Goldsworthy's local knowledge: he has gotten to know the weather, the ground, and the time it will take to make this "print." This is the *place* in which the artist, the location, the action, the present and future audiences, the aesthetic experience and the understanding of this moment come together. The print is instantly more meaningful, and ultimately becomes an emplaced memory and a shared *place*.[513]

Another artist whose work shares *place* with his audience in very simple and yet intimate ways is Richard Long. As discussed in Part 1, his main medium is "walking" — or the experience of moving through an environment by means of his own two feet and legs. Fortunately for this audience, and for art institutions, collectors and scholars, he documents his work in less ephemeral ways through photography, writing, and sculpture. Applying the lens of *place* to Long's artworks reveals several layers beyond the simple shapes and grand vistas he documents in sculpture and photographs, respectively. Like Goldsworthy, Long does not usually prevent "nature" from reclaiming the changes he has made to a place. In fact, he anticipates them: blades of grass go back up, stones on the glacier or in the river move with the current, and sticks get moved by the wind. With each walk, Long adds a layer to the work, as he brings with him memories of earlier walks and extends creative output. He also brings *places* together. For one, his body as a gathering *place* carries many other *places* with him, but he also brings aspects of his *place*

[513] Goldsworthy comments on this: "People lived and worked and died here and I can feel their presence in the place that I work and I am the next layer upon those things that have happened already." In Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides.*

experiences—certain rocks, soil, sticks, and specific words—back into a more formal exhibition area, where they are left as *place offerings* or a means to evoke a particular *place*. All of Long's works invite the viewer to retrace the artist's steps, whether actually or virtually. And he acknowledges that in his work, the *place* and the medium he chooses become one:

> My outdoor sculptures are places.
> The material and the idea are of the place;
> sculpture and place are one and the same.
> The place is a far as the eye can see from the sculpture.
> The place for a sculpture is found by walking.
> Some works are a succession of particular
> places along a walk, e.g. MILESTONES (Ireland 1978).
> In this work the walking, the places and the stones all have equal importance. [...]
> A good work is the right thing in the right
> place at the right time. A crossing place.[514]

In addition to photographing his work, as well as creating and recreating it in sculptures, Long uses words to share his *place* experience. The written artworks take *place* to a level that is both abstract and removed and yet very relatable, as the images and associations forming in the mind of the reader are his or her own. With this, Long balances between the visual and literary arts in a *place* that is both real and virtual, past, present, and future, personal and universal, specific and generic.

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[514] Richard Long, "Five, six, pick up sticks," in *Richard Long. Selected Statements & Interviews*, ed. Ben Tufnell (London: Haunch of Venison, 2007), 17 and 19. I would like to note that Long does not exclusively use "place" in the sense of "location," but he also does not provide "his" definition of place.

Although the lens of *place* is useful to explore the work of many artists, those who are processing the experience of displacement still create some of the more powerful works about *place*. Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira, and Ghada Amer all have explored different ways of looking at place. Hatoum's installations, Sedira's video and photo works, and Amer's embroidered canvases relate their *place* experience to the audience.

Ghada Amer's female nude figures speak of the *gendered places* that remain part of our experience. They comment on power relations that exist and allow one gender to be objectified. They highlight the discrimination based on gender markers, which the artist herself experienced – first upon returning to Egypt as a teenager, when the turn from secularism meant that the veil was making a comeback as a clothing requirement, and again as an art student, who was not allowed to learn oil painting at the art school because her professor did not teach women.[515] Her resulting invention—a way of painting that would "belong only to women"—uses colorful embroidery to "paint" on the canvas, while her subject matter—nude female bodies copied from porn magazines—underscores her effort to reclaim the body and to liberate it from the limitations placed on it by the *gendered places* of both the art world and the real world.[516]

Zineb Sedira focuses on postcolonial places and the Diaspora experience. Growing up in France as the child of Algerian parents and now residing and raising

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[515] Ghada Amer in conversation with Sam Bardaouil, taped at the *Modern Art: Objects, Histories, and Methodologies Mathaf - AMCA Academic Conference*, Day One, Part two *Encounters between the Modern & the Contemporary: In Conversation with Artists from 'Interventions' and 'Told/Untold/Retold'* December 2010. Accessed on June 2, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeSToJEwKlc

[516] Ibid.

her own daughter in England, gives her a unique perspective on the issues facing the displaced. Her body holds many roles, including those of being a woman, a daughter, a mother, an artist, a photographer, a videographer, a historian, and an activist, and these personal experiences of *place* are carried forward into her work. Even simple moments captured by the artist—her mother and her daughter in conversation (*Mother Tongue*, 2002), images of solitary figures in a vast landscape (*Transitional Landscape,* 2006), and large lightboxes of abandoned shipwrecks in the ocean (*Floating Coffins*, 2009)—become complex answers to the question "what is it about this *place* the artist wanted to share?" and help us understand the connections between the local, the national, the international and the personal.

Mona Hatoum is one of the more financially successful female artists of the new millennium, and this high commercial profile probably also translates to a more popular awareness of the artist. Like the works of Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Hatoum's installations retrace some of her own steps—albeit mostly on a much larger, global scale. Hatoum focuses on codified representations of geographical place (i.e. maps and globes) to question our system of categorizing and valuing *place*. In her soap-map of Palestine (*Present Tense*, 1996) the boundaries are intended to dissolve as they have in so many peace talks; her marble map of the world (*Map*, 1999) seems ready to fall apart at the slightest tremor; and the glow of her globe (*Hot Spot III,* 1999) threatens to burn anyone coming too close. These precarious positions reveal the limited understanding we create through "factual" presentations.

Amer, Sedira, and Hatoum work with the body, the diasporic experience, and the recreation of *place* in ways that are similar to Mutu, MwangiHutter, and

Campos-Pons. Although, if they were contrasted with each other, it would highlight how each one of them contributes a unique and rich perspective to the discourse that is not yet provided by the artists featured in this dissertation.

On a final note, I would like to go back to the discussion of seismic shifts in the art world. Despite continuing imbalances and inequities, the art world has come a long way in my lifetime. Curiously, it is not the scholarly community that has spearheaded some of these changes, but the commercial realm, where the struggle to free oneself from limiting labels is sometimes further along than we might suspect. Adrian Piper wrote that she had earned the right to be called an *artist* — not a woman artist, female artist, black artist, African American artist, or one of the eighty-four other permutations that add a qualifier that effectively limits her achievements. While art critics and art scholars still use (and often struggle with) these labels, the art market has found a much simpler solution to the question: "When is an artist *just* an artist?" It actually has little to do with the person or the content of the work; it has everything to do with the price tag.

During my research I was very surprised to find the same artist listed in two very different auctions (as auctions are generally given a title they fit in well with the category system art collectors and scholars have in place). The auctions were held on subsequent days at the same auction house, but one was limited to "diaspora art" of a particular region and the other was focused on contemporary art. I asked myself why the artist would be assigned to two different categories and found my answer in the dollar figure assigned to the artwork—in the first case, it was under $10,000, in the

second it was over $100,000. I believed this to be a fluke, but have since found multiple instances of this kind of designation.[517] Thus it is not the gender, race or class of the artist or the content of the work, but the price tag that determines whether one has made it as an *artist* or whether one is considered a woman/ contemporary African / African Diaspora or other [insert collectable category here] artist. This observation leaves me to conclude: if an artist can belong to multiple categories, and can be moved back and forth without any effect on the work, then all categories are fundamentally the same and have little value beyond determining a price tag. What the artist tries to do with the work and what we get out of the work is not tied to the category, and we learn nothing new from the category, thus presenting us with a defunct system. In contrast, exploring art through a *lens*—from large lenses like *place* or the body, to smaller ones like location or relationships—can provide us with much more rewarding outcomes.

[517] There are other variables that can determine the figure on the price tag and thus the designation of the artist. It also depends on the medium or on the type of work, whether an artist is considered "diaspora" or "contemporary." For example, multiples, such as prints, are less expensive and more likely to be found in a category like "Africa" or "Latin America," whereas paintings and "originals" are often considered "Contemporary art."

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