

De-Colonizing Art Institutions

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Quartier Flottant
decolonizing mind and body

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Quartier Flottant

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This text is conceived as a sketchlike description of an artistic practice and was created as a response to an invitation by the On-Curating Project Space in Zurich to submit concepts on “decolonizing art institutions.”

In my artistic practice, for more than ten years now, I have taken a question- and learning-based approach to dealing with relations between the Western and non-Western world, or, in a metaphorical sense, the Global North and South.

In 2005, an invitation from a self-organized cultural center in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, confronted me with realities that made the ideology of Euro-centrism and its ghosts directly experienceable for me. Resistance against the racist colonial narrative of white supremacy, along with its violent traces and ramifications as a system of exploitation, slavery and oppression, was unequivocally clear.

Personal experience and the consciousness of bodily and intellectual inscriptions of Western hegemonic thought and research, of the Western archive and its institutions, its power structures, its ways of conveying knowledge, the limitations, exclusions, and commercialization of this knowledge production have led me to call it all into question.

It would have pleased me to simply abandon this powerful framing, but we are part of a world without an exterior. The understanding that diverse kinds of knowledge and epistemic traditions exist, are equal and yet different, demands that we engage in a long, radical, emancipatory process of decolonizing one’s own mind and body, as well as the knowledge systems, so that alternative capacities to think and act may arise and have their influence on changing the “Westernized” institution.

My movement of seeking, questioning, and learning therefore points toward the provocation and the mutual experiencing of situations that are situated beyond the institution as a hard and soft place and beyond its dualistic division between the known and the knower, mind and body, nature and culture. Through displacement into other, unfamiliar contexts, sites, and polylingual spaces, through an encounter with others and the experience of the simultaneity of

different contexts and multiple temporalities, it becomes possible to communicate, transmit, or foster another kind of knowledge, potentially leading in the long term to “shared agency” (A. Mbembe).

In describing the process of my own “creolization” (Stuart Hall) in this quest, that of an identity in flux, I (as a female white artist) question the meaning of a privileged West German, European background with view to fluent, circulating identities. In these open research endeavors, I am seeking cultural producers of various backgrounds and disciplines, at both imaginary and real places in the world, and invite them to join me in a performative process of negotiation. The situations of learning, the experience of displacement and of encounter, the concomitant surprises, coincidences, misunderstandings, and conflicts serve to help orient us in the current transformation of the world and to create new spaces of agency through mutual reflection.

In 2012, the transnational format **Quartier Flottant** arose from this artistic, research-based practice—a format that describes a production context and the relationships with others and can represent its designation for this kind of artistic work. The **Quartier Flottant** welcomes guests and denotes a momentary neighborhood and affinity. As a site or place, it remains unanchored, instead floating in space. The activities found inside move, design, and transform it. The quartier cannot be described by a central perspective. Taking place there with temporary guests are transdisciplinary encounters, dialogues, negotiations, artistic explorations and productions. As a format beyond the institution, **Quartier Flottant** is meant to refuse to submit to a notion of the hegemony of Western knowledge, its archives, methods, classifications, and economies, and instead to communicate, develop, and learn from other diverse pluriversal histories and systems of knowledge and thought.

Astrid S. Klein, 05/2017

English by Dawn Michelle d’Atri

In the project **crossing-boundaries-of-doubt.net**, you will find an example of artistic productions produced by Quartier Flottant in collaboration with temporary partners.

<http://crossing-boundaries-of-doubt.net/>
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Bilingual reading of Sylvie Arnaud's text *THE GREEN, THE GREY, THE RED WHITE BLUE*, with Sylvie Arnaud (r) and Lieko Schulze (l), Quartier Flottant at Crossing Boundaries of Doubt, WKV Stuttgart 2014, Videostill

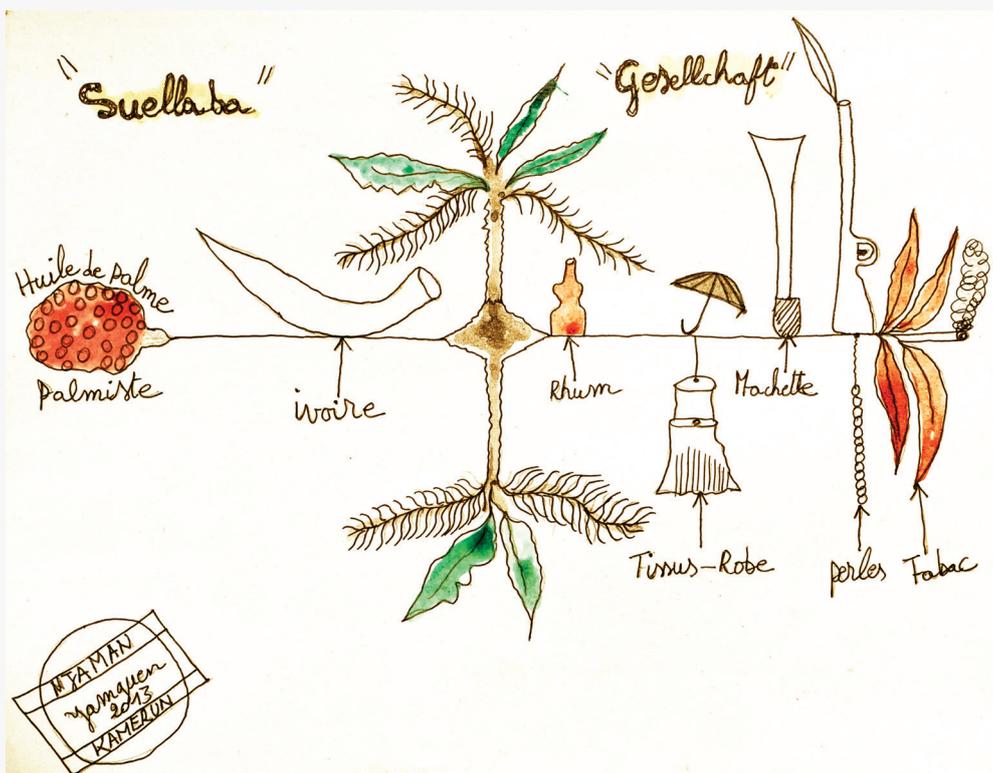


Kola Plant, diasporic guest in the *Quartier Flottant*, travelling from Botanischer Garten Berlin Dahlem to *Disparaître dans la nature*, to decamp, to desert, to evaporate, *das Weite suchen*, *verduften*; Kunstverein Heidelberg 2015, Photo: Astrid S. Klein

CROSSING BOUNDARIES OF DOUBT PASSER LA FRONTIÈRE DES DOUTES ÜBER DIE GRENZE DER ZWEIFEL

<http://crossing-boundaries-of-doubt.net>

Sylvie Arnaud, Gratien Atindogbe, Lady B Bantu, Jean-Godefroy Bidima, Vincent Ndoumbé D, Em'kal Eyongakpa, Justine Gaga, Simone Gilges, Peter Haury, Felix Kama, Astrid S. Klein, Elsa M'bala, François-Stéphane Alima Mbarga, Stone Karim Mohamad, Franklin Aleba Mokala, Serge Nguelou Ngouffo, Platino, SadraK, Vee, Hervé Yamguen, Yam, AdanGo Zulu, and future participants



Hervé Yamguen, drawing from the series *OBJETS DE COHABITATION*
Project: *Crossing Boundaries of Doubt*, 2013