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A Boy Born on Wednesday

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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Abstract

My relocation to America has presented an unprecedented space for self-examination. The components of my identity and personality have been laid bare before me; My blackness in the face of racism and white hegemony, my African heritage in the face of post-colonialism and imperialism, and my faith in the face of an increasingly secular western culture.

Am I who thought I was? Am I more or less? Why do I feel like a different person, and what does this mean for my future?

My research and art practice serve as a form of introspection. I tell an internal story in a quest to unfold my mythos. Actors become possessed characters, serving as spirits and gods. They all represent me and various facets of my identity. Through my practice of directing and writing, I learn more about myself.

In the Akan culture, we are named after our sex and then the day of the week. My name is Kweku, *A Boy Born on Wednesday*.

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Introduction

The psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung described individuation as the process where the individual self develops out of an undifferentiated unconscious. Seen as a developmental psychic process, natural elements of personality, the components of the immature psyche, and the experiences of the person's life become, if the process is more or less successful, integrated over time into a well-functioning whole. In his enigmatic posthumous publication, *The Red Book*, he experimented with this process by writing and painting his fantasies, visions, and dreams. He used this experimentation as to access his personal and collective unconscious, engaging with the archetypes that he identified and discovering his "personal myth." (STEVENS *Living archetypes: The Selected Works of Anthony Stevens*)

My relocation to America has presented an unprecedented space for self-examination. The components of my identity and personality have been laid bare before me; my blackness in the face of racism and white hegemony, my African heritage in the face of post-colonialism and imperialism, and my faith in the face of an increasingly secular western culture.

In psychology, the persona is described as the personality that an individual projects to others, as differentiated from the authentic self. The term, coined by Carl Jung, is derived from the Latin “persona”, referring to the masks worn by Etruscan mimes. One of the Jungian archetypes, the persona, enables an individual to interrelate with the surrounding environment by reflecting on the role in life that the individual is playing. In this way, one can arrive at a compromise between one’s innate psychological constitution and society. Thus, the persona enables the individual to adapt to society’s demands. (Gupte and Encyclopaedia Britannica *Persona*)

The word persona comes from Latin and describes the masks worn or characters played by an actor. Although growing up, we form our personas as we interact with the world around us; our egos constantly balance what we want and what the world expects of us.

However, what happens when the masks you have learned to wear do not fit in a new environment to which you never learned to adapt?

The masks I have been wearing throughout my life in Ghana seem to come apart as I navigate my personality in America. As a result, I feel the need to re-cultivate new masks to fit the environmental changes occurring; The process is daunting, whether conscious or subconscious.

My research and art practice serve as a form of introspection. I tell an internal story in a quest to unfold my mythos. While writing *The Red Book*, Jung discovered components of the psyche and named them. The *personal unconscious*, the *collective unconscious* and the *ego*. He saw mythologies as expressions of the collective unconscious. He called them archetypes whenever stories, images, or symbols appeared in similar forms in different cultures. These represent the common human inheritance of patterns of thought and action or basic psychological instincts. In the book, he wrote about his conversations with beings that represented various experiences and even events that he believed were yet to occur in real life.

When I first arrived in America, I was surprised that the bond I presumed would exist between Africans and African Americans was challenging to identify. There has been a long-existing history of an unfathomable and silently raging rift between Africans and African-Americans or “Afro-Americans”. (Abua). Inaccurate media portrayals, misrepresenting the African continent in history, and an absence of original and historically relevant contributions have catalysed this division.

However, the experiences of Africans and African Americans have created a kind of collective unconscious; we tell the same stories and identify similar archetypes. Our experience is surreal, so our stories are told as myths, though rooted in reality. In our myths and stories, the enemy is common. (Iheduru and Dobbins).

A myth is an oral, symbolic, evolutionary and simple account (in the sense of a tale, a diegesis, or a series of narrative and representative actions) of an extraordinary experience or event with a transcendental and personal referent that shows social classification. Considered, in principle, as bereft of historical testimony, myth is composed by a series of constant or invariable cultural semantic elements which can be reduced to themes, and is endowed with a conflictive (it invariably contains a trial or ordeal), functional character (understood as the transmission of common values and beliefs, and the provision of factual schemata of rites and actions) and etiological nature (expressing in some way a particular or universal cosmogony or eschatology). (Manuel)

In his manifesto about the Afro-surreal, D. Scot Miller discusses about how the Afro surrealist presentation is the artist's lived experience. (Miller) He mentions various black artists, many Africans and African Americans, throughout the manifesto and identifies how Afro surrealism connects us.

Africans and African Americans are like twins separated at birth and reunited. The reunion is tense, love exists and is pursued, there is also friction. African Americans are the younger twin who feels as if the older left them to fend for themselves. Africans are the older twin who, while dealing with their trauma too, are trying to understand how to help the young sibling.

Art and Afro-surrealism are connective tissues that bind us. The mystical elements dig into the unspoken bond and divide, the lost memories and the desperate quest for unity and resolution. In afro surrealism, our utopia is formed, our history is retold, and our future is reclaimed.

“An Afro-Surreal aesthetic addresses these lost legacies and reclaims the souls of our cities”
D. Scot Miller

My foray into Afro-surrealism is spurred by a desire to contend with my post-colonial existence. As a Ghanaian who grew up in an educational system that continues to maintain colonial influences, I grapple with the areas of my art practice prior to the knowledge gained while in graduate school shaped by this system. *So why do I photograph the way I do? How has imperialism affected my ways of seeing?*

I am interested in how afro surrealism can function as a tool for exploring, even dissecting my African-ness and my colonized, imperialized existence. A form of Négritude¹

Through Afro-surrealism, in this mystical space the twins can taste of each other's experiences and learn to see themselves as they truly are.

Afro-Surreal presupposes that beyond this visible world, there is an invisible world striving to manifest, and it is our job to uncover it. Like the African Surrealists, Afro-Surrealists recognize that nature (including human nature) generates more surreal experiences than any other process could hope to produce. (Miller)

The mythical approach is engaged because it highlights the denial of African identity as an integral part of the history of Western encounter with Africa. From the beginning of this encounter to the present, Africans have had to justify their identity. (Anise)

'A boy born on Wednesday' is the first page of a poem about my experience as an African moving to America. It is an interaction between my archetypes. The characters are spirits and gods that embody my perceived and living experiences. The that film serves as a portal into my psyche, a dreamscape where self-knowledge can be gleaned.

In his essay on the Afro-Surreal Expressionist, Amiri Baraka writes about how Dumas's power lay in his skill at creating an entirely different world organically connected to this one. He says the stories are fables; a mythological presence pervades. They are morality tales, magical, resonating dream emotions and images, shifting ambiguous terror, mystery, implied revelation. However, they are also stories of real life, now or whenever, constructed in weirdness and poetry in which the contemporaneity of essential themes is clear. (Baraka) I am interested in creating a paracosm with a complex and deeply felt

¹ Négritude was an anti-colonial cultural and political movement founded by African and Caribbean students in Paris in the 1930s who sought to reclaim the value of blackness and African culture. (Tate)

relationship with this subjective universe. In it, I incorporate real-world or imaginary characters and conventions. (Petrella)

A great example is Donald Glover's *Atlanta*. It is about a place, a world where something feels unreal. The characters see it, and the viewer sees it too, but cannot tell what it is. In a scene, a character asks another, "Is this real?" and the other responds: "no, it is not". The strange occurrences in *Atlanta* do not fascinate the characters who encounter them; they only punctuate the more profound sense of strangeness that something is wrong. (Flight)

The original surrealist used all means to access a world beyond the reality they lived in; they took psychedelics and tried to access their dreams as Jung did. However, the African man, the black man, does not look for the world beyond his lived experience because he has been trying to survive and normally live in his already strange and abnormal reality.

"All you have to do is exist and you are in a surreal situation"
D. Scot Miller

The Afro-surreal brings dreams to life. While Jung wrote about his dreams and even painted images from visions; I am interested in drawing the audience into the dreamlike world I exist in as an African man. As my persona cracks under the pressure of conformity and assimilation versus individuality and collective African or black pride, I turn to my art practice. I try to maintain composure in my persona while the film expresses my inner turmoil. I also search for catharsis within it. Surrealist filmmaker David Lynch, for instance, has a personality that seems to be in direct contrast to his films; this is because Lynch successfully employs the medium as a form of therapy. When analysing his films, one may posit that characters serve as stand-ins for the director. In *Eraser Head*, he processes his deep anxieties around fatherhood and paints every aspect of the experience as horrific. (Palmer)

In my paracosm, I attempt to engage with the ideas of African Futurism and, more specifically, AfricanJujuism. AfricanJujuism is a term coined by Nnedi Okorafor, which describes a subcategory of

fantasy that respectfully acknowledges the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative. (Okorafor) She uses this term to delineate her work and what she considers the western-centred “Afrofuturism”, a frustration with which I can relate. Through the Afrojuist lens, I try to recentre the mystical space of the afro-surreal on the African continent.

Background and Framework

My name is Kweku; in the Akan culture of Ghana, we are named after our sex and the day of the week on which we are born. So Kweku means *A Boy Born on Wednesday*. The film is essentially titled “Kweku,” but translated to English. A Ghanaian would immediately think “Kweku” when they hear the phrase “*A Boy Born on Wednesday*”. The film is about me and an invitation into my mind.

During the 2020 lockdown amid the Covid 19 pandemic, I contemplated the value of the work I was making. In that state of confusion, not having discovered a topic or issue that was compelling, I considered my struggles in adapting to these new systems, social interactions, and expectations as an international graduate student. I tried to understand why I felt like a different person in America. *Why this loss of agency?*

In social science, agency is the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfil their potential. For instance, structure consists of those factors of influence (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability, customs, etc.) that determine or limit agents and their decisions. (Barker)

My interest in psychoanalysis increased as I sought the language that best describes my internal experience. As I learned about Carl Gustav Jung and archetypes and his fascination with the spiritual, I thought of ways to incorporate these ideas with the mystical spirituality of African art and my culture. It is essential that I intentionally incorporate elements and values of traditional African art in my work and tell my story through spiritual realities and folklore. In Akan culture, it is believed that the artefacts and sculptures made by the artists are imbued with spiritual entities that serve as portals to the beyond, the afterlife. (Quarcoopome).

I regard my artwork as a portal into "the beyond", to take the audience beyond their reality.

Actors become possessed characters, serving as spirits and gods. They all represent me and various facets of my identity. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy describes Introspection as the term used in

contemporary philosophy of mind, a means of learning about one's current, or perhaps very recently past, mental states or processes. Through my directing and writing, I learn more about myself.

IRIS

Iris means “rainbow” in Greek.

As I decide whether to speak my mind or hold back my thoughts, I wonder why I am sitting in contemplation about something so simple. Is it because I realise how much I do not know and am afraid to embarrass myself, or is it how I sound compared to these people?

I was raised to speak fluent English, the language in which I best express myself. However, in America, I found that my accent made me difficult to be heard and understood; I became more silent because I had to repeat myself several times before people understood me. In addition, I attempted to pronounce certain words the “American way”. Frantz Fanon described this concerning black and white people in France.

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is.

Black Skin, White Masks, p. 25

This quote is from Fanon's chapter on language. Fanon says it is through language that we develop a sense of ourselves as well as a sense of social hierarchy. France makes Black people feel inferior by claiming their French is bad, for instance, and therefore saying that Black people can never be French or civilized like the French are. Language has this much power to police the borders of who is part of a culture and who is not.

The black man entering France reacts against the myth of the Martinican who swallows his r's. He'll go to work on it and enter into open conflict with it. He will make every effort not only to roll his r's, but also to make them stand out. On the lookout for the slightest reaction of others, listening to himself speak and not trusting his own tongue, an unfortunately lazy organ, he will lock himself in his room and read for hours—desperately working on his diction. (Fanon)

I had to modify my accent. It was a challenge and I slowly learned how this only propagated western imperialism. I worried about how I sounded, how I was seen and was treated.

Accents are a symbol of a person's place in society. Ifemelu first learns this when she registers for her college classes and is treated like she is unintelligent and can't understand English because of her Nigerian accent. After that, she adopts an American accent for a time. While in England, Obinze clearly sees how people are treated differently based on their accents. He wonders if his cousin and his cousin's wife are easier on their kids because they have English accents. And, during one delivery for the warehouse he works at, he and Nigel meet a very

shabby looking man who speaks with a posh English accent. In spite of his looks, Nigel says the man is a “real gent” and Obinze realizes Nigel reacts to the man in that manner because of the man’s accent. (Ltd)

I realise and embody this experience, the aspect of my psyche concerned with my speech and appearance in a being; I create this spirit, she exists in my reality, and I named her **IRIS**.

Iris represents me when I cultivated a way of dressing, learned a manner of speech and adopted an accent from growing up in Ghana. Finally, Iris is me when I arrive in America and become self-conscious of my speech and appearance. *Am I in High School again?*

The character of Iris is the spirit through which I process my presentation as an African. Iris is the rainbow of colours that rearrange and mix up to fit their environment. Iris wants to be beautiful and be accepted. She wants to matter.

In Akan culture and pantheon of gods, Iris is moulded after Asaase² Afua and Asaase Yaa. She is Mother Earth with a double identity. Afua produces vegetation, and Yaa identifies with barrenness and death. (Sawyerr). Both identities are also considered daughters of Nyame (The creator), Twins. Iris is my connection to nature and how I presented myself before I came to America and presented myself after I arrived in America. *Fruitfulness before travelling and barrenness after arriving or vice versa?*

² Asaase means “Earth” in Akan

ANGELOS

Jung writes that the persona is fundamentally nothing real. He describes it as a compromise between the individual and society regarding what a man should appear to be. It is his name, his title and an office he may represent. (Ideas) I perceive my persona as grappling with more than just a compromise with society.

As I learn about the racial disparities entrenched in American systems and the suffering of enslaved Africans in this country, I am filled with rage. However, I am trying to be careful about how I express my anger because I do not want to fit into the stereotype of the Angry Black Man.³

ANGELOS means “messenger” in Greek. Like Jung, my film and art practice serve as a process of individuation. Angelos is the surface that shrouds the unconscious. In my paracosm, Angelos represents the persona. He is the angel, unreal, the mask to protect the various elements of my psyche. Angelos keeps the rage at bay and must contend with the presentation in turmoil.

KWEKU

My arrival in America awakened a side of me about which I became worried. Inconformity and rebelliousness seemed attractive.

After the murder of George Floyd and many black Americans, there were public protests, marches, and riots across America. I was outraged, and the old self that used to hold the “they are also to blame” mindset started to rapture—a desire to tear down the systems and confront the status quo emerged within me.

Jung identified an aspect of the psyche he named the shadow. The shadow represents the personality traits that we suppress because they elicit negative feedback and even punishment from society. The shadow is the dark side of one’s personality.

Kweku may have my name, but he is not necessarily me, though he is a part of my psyche. Kweku is moulded after the trickster spider spirit **KWEKU ANANSE**.

³ Generally, this image involves a black male whose constant yelling and fierce demeanor reveal a rage and frustration that proves intimidating to whites, and reinforces the idea of black men as dangerous and threatening. (Jackson and Harvey Wingfield)

As a folklore figure, he is both human and divine, a person and an animal, creative and destructive, success, and failure. His tales are sometimes myths, sometimes legends, connected with ritual, sometimes not. (Vecsey)

In Akan narratives, he is lawless, asocial and amoral. Kwawisi Tekpetey suggests that Kweku Ananse might be characterized as an incarnation of the id in Freud's psychoanalytical theory. The id functions to fulfil the primordial life principle, which Freud considers the "pleasure principle." Without consciousness or semblance of rational order, the id is characterized by tremendous vitality. The laws of logic do not hold for the processes of the id. The id knows no values, no good or evil, no morality. Unchecked it would lead us to destruction and even self-destruction to satisfy its impulses for pleasure. Safety for the self and for others does not lie within the province of the id; its concern is purely for instinctual gratification without regard for consequence. (Tekpetey). Kweku represents the rage that builds up in me against racism and imperialism. Kweku is the angry black man. He is a paradoxical figure whose antics mock the seriousness of rules, the sacrality of beliefs, and the establishment of rituals. He is a vagabond, an intruder to proper society, unpredictable and throwing doubt on the concept of truth itself. In the tales Ananse attacks the very foundations of Akan life, the Supreme Being and the Akan people themselves. He attempts to undermine the ultimate bases of Akan reality, the sources of Akan being, identity and meaning. Whether we call these foundations religious or social does not matter; the traditional Akan makes no distinction between religion and society. The important point is that Ananse, through his actions, subverts and revalidates the ultimate bases of Akan life. (Vecsey). According to Jung, a person needs to be aware of the presence of the shadow and work to integrate it into the conscious. This is the purpose of the appearance of Kweku in *A boy born on Wednesday*

Unfortunately, there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it... But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected.

Carl Jung

Kweku is also the embodiment of the imposter syndrome⁴ I feel when I am in America. *In Ghana, I am somebody; In America, I do not even know if I deserve to be here.*

TWINS

The twins represent my double personality; who I am in America and Ghana. They also symbolise the African and African American siblings separated at birth and reuniting. The Temne of Sierra Leone tell of mythological twin brothers miraculously stitching together two diverging roads, forever fusing their destinies.

In West African cultures, their position is traditionally ambiguous and paradoxical – two occupying one space, same but different, of this world and, yet again, not. (Daybo)

These are the main characters of the film. My myth is how they are presented and their interaction with each other.

FILMS AND DREAMS

“No other art-medium—neither painting nor poetry—can communicate the specific quality of the dream as well as the film can.” Ingmar Bergman

The very basis of filmmaking can sometimes clue us that what we are watching cannot be trusted as real. (Koresky). In his video essay on Ingmar Bergman for the criterion channel titled Bergman's Dreams, Michael Koresky draws attention to how the filmmaker used films to depict and explore his dreams. Bergman is said to have told himself while dreaming to remember what he saw to recreate the visuals in his films. Unconventional camera angles, abrupt cuts and unexpected sounds are clues that what we are seeing should not be trusted. Bergman's films feature memorable evocations of the unconscious.

⁴ *Imposter syndrome* is loosely defined as doubting your abilities and feeling like a fraud. It disproportionately affects high-achieving people, who find it difficult to accept their accomplishments. Many question whether they are deserving of accolades. (Tulshyan and Burey)

Christopher Nolan's film, Inception, is about dreams, yet he uses it as an allegory for cinema and filmmaking. In the film, the first letters of the main characters' names spell "DREAMS", and their roles in the film mimic those of a film crew. (McCullough and Minoff)

The director draws our attention to how dreamlike films can be. In a dream, you can move from one scene and location to another in a split second without moving your body, and many occurrences do not make sense, and time does not move normally as in real life. Films perfectly capture and depict the dreamscape. I believe that the best way to bring the audience into my afro-surreal existence is through this medium.

Through moving images, I have control over time. Unlike photography, my previous medium of choice, film allows me to dictate, to a large extent, how much attention should be paid to anything I show. The audience has little control over the journey. As I move through chronological and simultaneous phenomena, I want the audience to step into my mind and be saddled with choosing whether to look at what I construct or look at something else; blink and you may miss something important.

Methodology

Making

Film and cinema constitute a significant source of inspiration for my art practice. First, there are artists in specific genres that I admire dearly. Next, I note some of the strategies used and plan how I may employ or repurpose them for the themes I intend to explore. I start by writing what I want to talk about and what it means to me; I then research films where similar ideas are explored and investigated.

Persona is a 1966 Swedish psychological drama film, written and directed by Ingmar Bergman and starring Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann. Characterized by elements of psychological horror, the film's exploration of duality, insanity, and personal identity, has been interpreted as reflecting the Jungian theory of persona. (Contributors)

While Italian filmmakers commented on the post-war fractured modern society in the 1960s, Ingmar Bergman adopted the language to explore the nature of our psychological make-up. One of the popular interpretations of the film is that the two characters are personas of each other, or at least one is of the other. In the film, Alma is asked to take care of Elisabet as one would cultivate and sustain their persona.

My desire, akin to Bergman or David Lynch in many of his films, is not to provide resolution to the viewer or myself. Instead, *A boy born on Wednesday* serves as the first page of a long poem I am writing; A poem in the form of a story, a myth with open roads of meaning.

The storyboards I render aid me in visualizing how I intend scenes to look and play out while also better preparing me for image capture and how I will direct the actors. I write down the characters' names, stories, and motivations; these critical steps help me clarify who will best embody each character and storyline. I begin casting by looking to friends or approaching strangers that I feel most accurately "look the part."

On set, I do not always explain to the actor what they represent, but I try to let them understand as clearly as possible what the character they are playing is supposed to be doing in the scene. I direct their actions

with incredible detail, but I allow them to be creative and give their input on what would feel natural and be more enjoyable.

Portions of the film were shot in both Ghana and the United States, with sets chosen for specific reasons. Selecting natural tropical environments was essential to invoke a traditional African aesthetic; constructing biblical allusions also required gardenized landscapes.

The work is a discourse about and with the African diaspora, many being one, being apart yet linked. Different actors play the same characters. Iris is played by Nana, a Ghanaian living in America; Hannah, a Ghanaian in Ghana; and Vivine, a Rwandan also living in America. Three different characters also play the character Kweku. I did not intend to work in this way. It happened because I travelled and worked with actors who were not always available. However, though all viewers may not notice the changing faces, they capture the dreamlike atmosphere I desired to create.

Because the actors are possessed by the spirits I have conjured from my psyche, they can be anyone. In Akan culture, the Fetish Priests can cause their bodies to be inhabited by spirits and gods. When the being takes over, the man's entire personality is surrendered.

By having multiple actors of different backgrounds play the same role, the community, the diaspora, tells the story.

The dreamlike space is further enhanced because half of the work, the parts happening in Ghana, were directed mainly by myself but shot by a team of videographers I put together. I executed all of the cinematography in America solely. Due to the changes in location, cameras, and camera operators, the film constantly shifts in style and aesthetic. Although I best attempted to conceal them, the differences may reveal themselves to the keen viewer.

I costumed and painted the characters for symbolic and spiritual purposes. For example, to communicate with a god or a spirit, the priest must paint himself with specific symbols to invoke the presence of the being. The entity can then possess his mind and body, then speak and act through him.

The body paintings I employed detail some specific adinkra symbols. However, they are also abstract shapes I create with meanings that I choose not to reveal. Concept photographs were also taken and can be found in Appendix A of this document.

Most of the film is shot in slow-motion. The intent is to heighten tensions and build anxiety and anticipation for following scenes. It demands quiet observation and reminds you that what you see is inaccurate.

The film opens with a logo I designed with Adobe Illustrator. As a mask, it is my current signature for my art practice. Although it combines various elements from masks from different parts of the African diaspora and it is rendered in Ghanaian and pan African colours. It represents my artist persona, ever since I decided to be referred to as Kweku and no more Charles.

...

A Queenly woman walks into the frame and tells a story to a young Kweku. She is dressed in various traditional clothes and adornments from different tribes in Ghana. She talks about gods and how they lose their godhood through oppression, racism, and the colonisation of the white man. Young Kweku represents the state of ignorance and misunderstanding. He is me as a wide-eyed child hopeful about life and seeing the world as black and white and simple, a young Ananse. Kweku leaves on a journey to find and wake up the gods, not knowing that he is one.

...

Iris is shown wearing an African print dress and sitting in the woods in a prolonged scene. In her mouth, a tree branch appears to be growing. This scene talks about the language and accent barrier. Iris in this state is her original self, me before and when I first arrived in America.

...

A voice-over by Sun Ra plays: "How do you know I am real? I am not real; I am just like you. You do not exist in this society. If you did, your people would not be seeking equal rights. You are not real. If you were, you would have some status among the world's nations. So, we are both myths. I do not come to you as reality; I come as the myth. Because that is what black people are, myths." (Coney)

In my reality, I am a mythical being with branches coming out of “my” mouth when she speaks, and this is how I am seen. The tree in her mouth also represents the primitivist view ignorant westerners have of Africa as backward tree climbing savages.

...

Iris is shown walking through a garden and finding a trail of apples. The apples represent European influence through colonization and imperialism. References to the biblical story of Eve pepper this sequence and symbolize the negative but also positive influences of Christianity on Africa. As one of the “three Cs” of the “White Man’s Burden”, Christianity was one justification that European powers used to colonize and exploit Africa. By disseminating Christian doctrine, European nations such as Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands sought to educate and reform African culture. Unfamiliar with the diverse cultures on the continent of Africa, European explorers viewed practices unfamiliar to them as lesser and savage. (Violence in Twentieth-Century Africa). However, many historians often fail to cite that Christianity was not first introduced to the continent through colonization. The first encounter with the religion is recorded in the bible— the Ethiopian Eunuch and The Apostle Philip.

Many parts of Africa are historically documented to have embraced Christianity through trade and other organic means before and outside colonisation and exploitation. Today, many Africans, including myself, reject colonization, slavery and imperialism and are appalled by how Christianity was employed as a tool for these horrible systems. However, we continue to appreciate the faith itself and all its benefits.

(History)

The display of apples, grapes and bread is a reference to the Dutch golden age. The Dutch Golden Age led to a tremendous outpouring of still-life paintings in the 17th century. It was largely fostered by wealth reaped from overseas trading and colonial ventures. Exotic luxuries from all over the world poured into Dutch ports: fruits from across the Mediterranean; tobacco from the New World; spices and precious gems from India; tea, silk, and porcelain from China and Japan; sugar from colonies in Brazil and Guyana; and slaves from Africa. (Editorial and Wolkoff)

I represent the negative aspects with a white hand that takes the serpent's place, tempting Iris (Eve) to eat the forbidden fruit.⁵ Iris is convinced to eat the fruit by the white hand. She changes from wearing an African print dress to a white lace dress. The white dress represents assimilation and post-colonisation. It is the wrongful embrace of imperialism and the underdevelopment of Africa by Europe. (Rodney et al.) The white dress also symbolizes trying to fit in by changing my accent, the way I dress, or generally present myself. It shows the viewer the potential acceptance of ideas propagated by white hegemonic society and colonial ideology while also communicating when I believe the negative representations of Black people.

...

A grown-up Kweku arises in Arkansas with the song Circle of Life (from the feature film Lion King) playing in the background. I use this song because it is a familiar reference to an American film about an African story. It becomes a statement about my father's influence on my life and how I have grown up attempting to meet his expectations and take after him. In the film The Lion King, the song and the film's opening shots announce that this will be the story of how Simba masters his Oedipus complex—how his personality will be structured, and how his desire will be oriented concerning the loving and hostile wishes he experiences toward his parents. (Lang 14-15)

⁵ The grapes represent positive influences. The grapes are crushed to become wine at the end of the film, representing becoming better through difficulty, loss and struggle.

Kweku collapsed in Ghana when he witnessed the temptation of Iris; when he arose, he was a full-grown man in Arkansas. He has two reactions to his arrival in the United States. He dances in the red and blue light, but it's ominous. He is unaware of how scary he looks or how fearful a state he is in, but the audience does. At the same time, he is introduced to knowledge about colonization and racism, and he is angered. He threatens the viewer and is also threatening to break out of Angelos hold.

As Kweku tries to do what is expected of him, he wears a suit and takes pictures in a studio. "He" is taking a photograph and the subject under the lights. It's a performance; I know I am being watched. Angelos, sitting in a chair, struggles to contain the fluxing states of Kweku's reaction to his arrival in America, so he screams, but alas, no one can hear him.

...

Shots of places I spend most of my time in Ghana are juxtaposed with spaces in Arkansas in which I confine myself. I compare the two locations and remind the audience that I have two homes.

The grapes are crushed in the final scene, and new wine is made. The twins represent my double selves. They drink and share the wine. They symbolise my learning to accept the changes coming to my life and embrace my personality's two sides. My identity being reshaped is not a bad thing after all. The music playing is "I am not the one" by KB.

In the first line of the song KB raps

Look, black boy, all white class
Call me the white boy with a black mask
White vocab on the south side (Madden and Genius)

Africans and African Americans are sometimes divided on who is black and who is not. Are Africans blacker than African Americans because we are straight from the continent, or are African Americans Black because they are American and the term *Black People* is most popularised and used in America? KB refers in these lines to his childhood. He was a hardworking student in a struggling neighbourhood. It was not considered "normal" for a black guy to take education seriously, and it showed with his educated grammar and vocabulary. He was called an "Oreo" because it referred to him appearing black but being

white. Through these lyrics, I refer to the idea of having to contend with what it means to be black, especially in America. (Madden and Genius) *Am I black enough?*

Throughout the film, the score of the film *Black Panther* is used to add some emotion to the scenes. I chose this score to reference the film, a story about two brothers, one African and the other African American, separated in their youth and reunited. However, they have different perspectives on the plight of black people and what the solution should be. I mainly used the theme of the villain of the *Black Panther* film for the scene where Iris changes into the white dress.

Methodology

Exhibition/Screenings

Cinema and film played and continue to play a significant role in how I see the world and myself. My perceptions of our place as Africans in the eyes of the world and the ideas I have held about African Americans were shaped by the media I consumed while growing up. Films are still the primary way I assess the society I live in and my roles. Through the simplistic, condensed characterisations and identifiable archetypes, I figure out how to navigate these spaces through the eyes of the storyteller. My thesis film was advertised to be screened once every night for three days. It needed to be viewed as a film in a cinema. One comes in, watches to the end, and departs the screening room. If a viewer misses the opportunity, perhaps they miss it forever. This is how I feel about my experiences. They pass by quickly and there is not enough time to comprehend and process them fully.

The screenings were held in the EMA SculX Lab Room 211. In the space, two projectors were set up on opposite walls to play the film on two channels, and a seating arrangement was designed to allow for two large screens to be witnessed by turning one's head.

The two-channel set-up explores the duality of the black identity; Africans and African Americans, and how they relate to each other. It explores, the double consciousness of Black people in America described by W.E.B. Dubois. (Bois) By making the audience decide when to turn their heads back and forth, I relinquish some of the viewing control, but ultimately intend for the audience to miss some details. Ideally, one would need to watch the film numerous times to see everything.

The film is intended to be relatable to people like me,—and confrontational to people that are not. I am interested in creating a beautiful film that with hints of horror lurking beneath the aesthetics.

There are a few moments in the presentation when footage is used to ground some of the communicated ideas. The found footage allows for relatability, it serves as an accessible portal into the piece.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will discuss some things I have learned over the course of working on this project.

While working on this project, I realised that working as a team and having people who are experts at specific aspects of the whole production creates much better results. Moreover, it is a lot easier on my shoulders when I share the burden of work. I recognised the apparency of the rushed choices for sound and music. Working with musicians and sound engineers to create original sounds and scores that fit the explored themes would be best.

I am considering going to film school, either as a master's student or for a PhD. I hope that the opportunity to network and connect with other filmmakers, experts and enthusiasts will spur more elaborate artistic endeavours.

The temptation to think that the work can be done without meticulous attention to detail can be high. However, I have learned that it is always better to over plan and fail than not to plan and regret. Meaning, major aspects of the final deliverable should be clearly outlined before production starts. Had proper planning gone into the pre-production stage, it is more likely that the three or four-channel presentation would have been realised. There would also have been more time to present to a test audience and note how they watch, their reactions and make necessary adjustments.

I look forward to a career of balance, being an artist who presents installations and screenings in museums and being filmmaker whose work can be submitted to film festivals and eventually be on the big screen. Initially, I had intended for the presentation to be in three or four channels. Though this project was presented in two channels for an artistic space, I am interested in reworking the film to be watched as a single-channel piece. It can then be shortened and submitted for festivals and school applications. I still need to do more research for my practice, especially on the themes and subject matters I am interested in exploring. Afro-surrealism, Afro-futurism, African-futurism, Afro-Jujuism and the politics of

an African transnational identity. Who is my target audience, and how do I more clearly communicate my ideas? It is essential that I pay more attention to the artist that I look at and learn how to use some of the techniques they employ. I can start by copying and analysing, then reappropriating by injecting my way of making and seeing.

I acknowledge that because I did not test-run before the official screening, many aspects of my film can be better presented. It is beneficial to finish early, see how a test audience responds, then make necessary adjustments along the way.

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Appendix A

Figures

The following are concept photographs of the characters.



Iris. Image by Author



Kweku. Image by Author



Angelos. Image by Author



Twins. Image by Author

Appendix B

Gear and Equipment

Cameras Used

1. Canon EOS R5
2. Sony A7RII
3. Blackmagic Cinema 6K Pro
4. Blackmagic Cinema 4K

Lenses Used

1. Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 Macro USM
2. Canon EF Wide-Angle 35mm f/1.4L
3. Sony FE 50mm F/1.8

Projectors

1. LG HU80KA 4K Ultra HD Laser Smart Home Theater CineBeam Projector
2. LG Electronics CineBeam HU715QW 4K UHD Laser Ultra-Short-Throw Projector
3. Apple TV 4K (Streaming from Vimeo)

Post-Production Software

1. Davinci Resolve 17
2. Adobe Illustrator CC 2022
3. Adobe Lightroom Classic CC 2022
4. Adobe Photoshop CC 2022

Post-Production Equipment

1. iMac Pro 27-inch Retina
2. Blackmagic Design DaVinci Resolve Micro Panel
3. LG OLED TV