



*Concepts On the Move –
In-between Pasts, Presences, Absences – and the future*

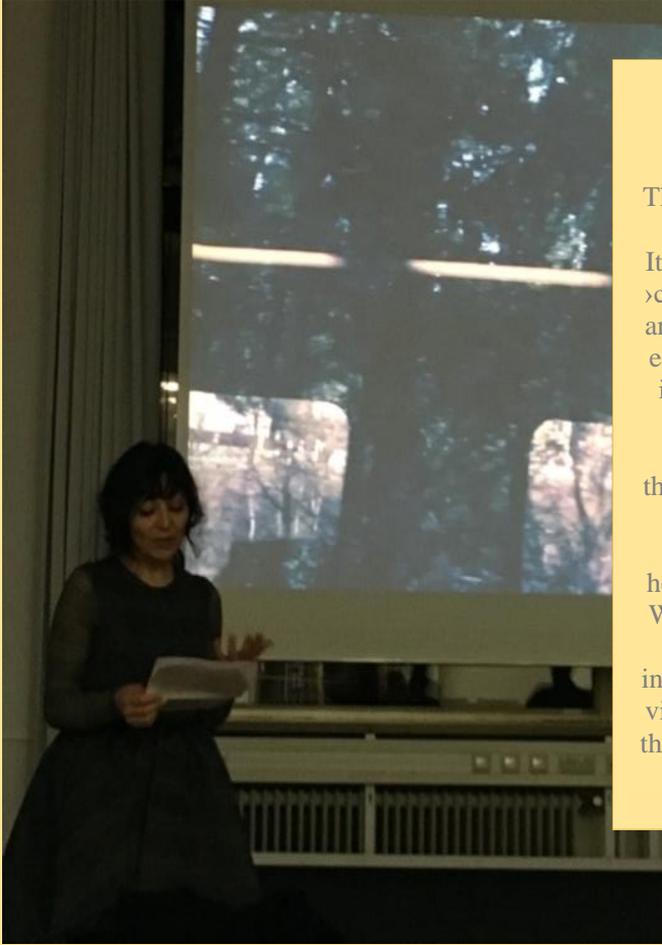
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Images Woven into Sounds–

On »Concepts on the Move – In-Between Pasts, Presences, Absences and the future«

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Abstract

The film addresses the mediality of the AUDIOvisual as an affective space of (and for) dialogue. It acts as and generates an archive of a different kind along ›concepts‹ we use. Dialogical instances seem to be created, and to offer, (not only) with the spoken images, ›diasporic‹ experiences as conversations on the move, in a time-space itself in transit, not knowing itself, and with a view to an *other*. Images are suggestively bound to resonances of hearing, and their meanings are thematized against a thickening background as an affective, epistemological and materializing trace towards un-known shores, following questions such as these: What does the resonances of hearing, and of the sound mean in relation to what is seen? What resonances of reading do the soundscapes of a space generate in the rhetoric of the spoken? How do they influence the ›seen‹, the ›seeing‹, the seemingly transparent view of the camera lens? (How) can an image resonance in the intermediate space of the AUDIOvisual be conceived as critical thinking?

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This essay film is based on interviews with the following academics and artists, guest fellows of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies.

The interviews comprise the following words – metaphors – ‘concepts’ –

image (kara lynch), *history* (Hakim Adi), *literature* (Anne Adams), *digitality* (Moses Serubiri), *aesthetics* (Phillip Khabo-Koepsell), *resonance* (Ingrid La Fleur), *future* (Nabil Barham & Kien Nghi Ha), *queerness* (Abdi Osman), *freedom* (Rinaldo Walcott), ›*race*‹ (Shirley Tate) and *love* (Wangui wa Goro) – along other notions and categories within different conceptions of time, gender, class, colonization, resistance and infinite other(-ed) terms, un-mentioned in-between and beyond the gaps of the dialogic.

As a trace, a thread, out of so many, infinite others, the film archives, (and (happily) fails to do so), ideas around ›concepts‹.



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This text, like the film it in a way substitutes or supplements or both, remains in unsettling relations with questions of the author and the “writer as historical subject”, with writing “as a practice located at the intersection of subject and history”, or rather with different histories and different time- and place-bound subject-positions and positionings, and is at odds with language as part of *normalized* thinking as “a vehicle to circulate established power relations” (Trinh 1989, 6). How (not) to write then, and how (not) to look then, and (not) to see and what (not) to hear are permanent and difficult questions – and in some ways (not in others) luxurious privileges. What both try to accomplish is maybe a very traditional exercise of the idea of transmitting and transference. Both try, (the ‘I’ tries – I try too, through both mediums) to preserve meaningful, mattering instances, encounters, vanishing situations, gazes, conversations, affections, in condensed meanings and readings. Both mediums try to conserve and encapsulate a tiny bit of time and space, of conviviality and friendship, of value, a fist-full of stardust, for a time to come, maybe, for someone to read, to view, to review maybe. For you maybe. Please take them as no more than a possibility for the possibility of possibilities, most of them already in the corridors of past times, echoing other invisible conglomerations and histories with ties around the planet. They may be about the beautiful texture of our wor(l)ds – that remain uneven, but both may lack the faculty to capture them in the right way.

The film may oscillate between different genres. It *tells* a narrative by depicting concepts within an infinite journey and problematizes images and imagery from marginalized positions and positionings. It also emphasizes the role of sounds as well as of listening, and of being heard within a cacophony of (other/-ed) sounds that make speaking (and being heard) a difficult task. Thus, it speaks about and shows an experience of space-time as utterly fractured, but at the same time, as simultaneously collective and singular:

“Paradoxalement, ce moment d’expérience intense de l’espace permet au temps d’être réintégré dans l’expérience de l’espace-temps. Le chaos de l’espace fragmenté et ainsi multiplié rend palpable la simultanéité de ces fragments et fait vivre intensément le moment comme une ouverture sur un espace infini et réduit à la fois.” (Fendler 2017, 118).

It thereby, implicitly takes up the question who speaks, (when and where?) and who is heard (by whom (not?) and where (not?)). ...It also asks how a film can be defined. And it

asks what *makes* a film? And what a film *does*? And who decides? The film appears as an edited trail of images, a trail of signification, a constructed trail of signification, that though, once out there, is its own secretive dis/possession, like any other form and practice of signifying. What and where lies the gaze of the film? Is it within the spectatorship? Is it not already presupposed in the making of the film – and where there, in whose eyes that see and unsee? Or is it ›just‹ part of a more or less, aware, controlling camera lens, its ›real‹ authorship?

Maybe the film, and this film specifically, could be read as a form of *unassigning* rather than of signification or of *resignification*. Concepts are set into a trail that in its affirmations, questions. Maybe the film, within its trajectory, asks how its making and how its reading can become more ›earth-bound‹¹? Maybe it indicates that it is somewhere in those unfinished, moved and moving places, interstices, where it always alludes to (its) otherness? Maybe, it invites to permanently *rethink* place and time – to consider words and their materiality – (and their politics) – and what this would mean, and to which other wor(l)ds this would amount to?

In *Trace et archive, image et art* (Derrida 2014), Jacques Derrida referring to the documentary film by Saffaa Fathy *D'ailleurs Derrida* (1999) – draws a connection between the (secrets of an) inner self as a secret, the politics of the secret, and politics as the politics against secrets:

“[...] *ceci est privé, ceci est absolument privé, ceci est secret, quand en somme on vous montre une porte qui se ferme sur un secret qui doit être gardé, puisque dans le film il y a aussi un motif politique qui consiste à accuser le politique, non seulement le totalitarisme, mais le politique en générale, d’être une violence contre le secret et donc contre le privé? Le film le dit. [...] je ne sais pas si c’est la vôtre, mais j’ai eu le sentiment que ce film montrait un secret demeuré secret, montrait un secret sans le violer. [...] Est-ce que c’est possible d’exhiber un secret comme secret?*” (Derrida 2014, 32)

¹ I borrow the term from Erich Auerbach’s use of *Erdkultur* (earth-culture) in his essay *Philologie der Weltliteratur* ([1952] 2018, 180; for an English translation of the text see, Auerbach 1969); It is not meant in the sense of a ›benevolent epistemology‹ and goes beyond fixed notions of ›identity‹. Rather, it invites thinking beyond fixed categorizations and unreflective generic reasoning in academic learning and critical approaches. Spivak’s concept-metaphor ›planetary‹ (cf. Spivak 2023, p. x ff.), which may go in the same direction, can also be evoked here as a way out of what she calls ›totalizing theoretical correctness‹, a term often (mis-)used as an arbitrary option, and thus overused; both approaches may contribute to carving out space for the other, through which ›we‹ are written, at all ends of the wor(l)d, only then the critical weight of the concept(s) is not lost.

Is that possible? It is as if Derrida is developing an aesthetics of the secret as the secret of aesthetics that cannot be captured by any words or ›concepts‹ or images, but may lie in-between them. And what can be seen by not seeing things as they are (not)? Maybe there are secrets and a secrecy not only in the wholeness of things, but in their parts, and parts, in the words and gazes that carry meanings as parts, wholes, presences and absences? A secret may not only be secretive, but also a shelter and a safe place, and the place (with a back door) that stays open to the other(ed)? It may entail a (safe) place for the idea and be the (safe) idea of the place (Morrison 1996)?

Where is the secret behind the film? What does it reveal and what does it conceal? Especially, as there is also *another secret* within the layers of the film that may drive it, namely, the secret politics of dominant and mainstream discourses and supremacist imagery, where the other is sought from within a dominant gaze (that seeks to find its ›self-identity‹ through othering?) It is the role of the Other – what are they? – within commodity culture and ›interest culture‹ that ›eats‹ the other as other by othering, and where “ethnicity becomes spice” (hooks 1992, 21 ff.). This is the virulent and omnipresent (normalized and yet still almost hidden) secret *against which* the film (secretly) speaks. Although there cannot be a reference.

Derrida compares the work of images to that of concepts, drawing a parallel between images and words (Derrida 2014, 40). What may be less emphasized here or may be the hidden tone of the film in the text, is the role of sounds, both, in the sense of hearing as well as in the sense of listening, which the film as a medium also captures. In this film, sound plays an inviting proposition (of hearing what is not heard) as well as a possibility of reading (what is not read in the film, what can be read out of the film). There is, thus, a multiple setting to work, an *undoing* on different levels that ensues from the *relinking* and *rethinking* of concepts to those of images to that of sounds and the possibility of listening and hearing.

In all those instances, negotiations seem to take place between the images shown and those that are evoked in the sounds of the film in the different ambiances of the interview situations, as if coming from the past, the present and the future. They seem to reflect the affective and sensual economy that thereby emerges and that speaks to itself and to an unknown audience, inviting it maybe to participate in the dialogue within thought and its possible (un)makings.

I think of imagery generally and of this film, and, especially, of its implicit soundscape, as a form of engaged archiving – that always stands in a relation to the politics of the ethical –. It may depict the field of vision as marginality and as the gleaning of remnants, or marginality as the field of vision of the gleaning of remnants.² In this sense, the film in a way, may resemble a substitute for what gets lost and vanishes without notice within the structures of power but which, nevertheless, entails and inhales, and exhales its own power (-structures) and lives on. And in this sense, too, it might preserve its secrets – that continue after the credits and after the instance of its ‘living’, after its end.

Most of the time, we deal with, words, concepts, images, visions metaphors and metonyms to make ourselves understandable or/and/in order to ›communicate‹. But what is it that we ›communicate‹? How do we ›communicate‹? Is there something hidden or in-between the words we exchange ›to communicate‹? Do we just ›communicate‹ with the words when we use them? Those words, what do they say about us? – In and beyond our ›communication‹? Why do we ›communicate‹ with these words? Those words we believe to know, are they that ›natural‹, ›given‹ to us (e.g. by ›history‹)? Why don't we have other words? And cannot even imagine them or pronounce them? Would not other words also mean other worlds?

Words speak of things (un)seen, (never) heard, in-between untranslatability and mistranslations (Apter 2013, 31ff.). This is why languages and their relation in ›translation‹ might be so relevant, so we can see other wor(l)ds and ours forever differently – and begin to build together other wor(l)ds within this cacophony, this inviting music...›Translation‹ in this sense may be translated as a phrase, as ›...it is im/possible‹, a phrase without a beginning or end that opens up into infinite other phrases, always in *missed*translation within the same language, and other languages, within the same mind and many different minds, in the gaps and paths between the mind and its imagery and between the words and their manifold resonances. ›Translation‹ already begins in our ›own‹ language(s) (singular and collective), because we may use the same words differently, and mean different things, without knowing it, creating small bubbles, wor(l)ds that on the way bump into each other. Sometimes they connect, and form larger bubbles, sometimes they burst. The work of ›translation‹ though could be captured in one word (and one multi-faceted, fragmented, paradox and contradictory, resilient world only),

² See Judith Kasper's *Land und Streit* (2024) on the meanings of *Nachlese* within different cultural and sociopolitical contexts, which depicts in a first instance picking after the main harvest, here especially pp. 116 ff.

it could be captured in what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui calls *ch'ixi* (2023) in Aymara. A word that captures the historic entanglement of the world within different structures of colonialism as well as what came out of them in the many conglomerates of its different, incomplete ways, afterlives, and frictions. But *ch'ixi* could also be explored and understood as a value, the value of ›translation‹ as *missedtranslation*, including before and beyond colonialism and colonality, as an infinite possibility of understanding within contradictions and paradoxes. It can be understood as a *ch'ixi baroque* as

“[...] ways of working with, and in, contradiction, whilst developing it. This is the burden of so-called Western culture; it forces us to unify the oppositions, to quieten down that magma of energies unleashed by lived in, inhabited, contradictions.” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2023, 57)

With *ch'ixi* Rivera Cusicanqui, at the same time, iterates and confirms Theodor W. Adorno's thinking along *negative dialectics* ([1970] 2023) as an anti-totalitarian form of thought, and form of thinking concepts, and as a critic of *white* Western epistemological traditions and interpretations of, in effect, 'Christian' descent, and of the enlightenment. Contradiction according to Adorno is a sign of the untruth of certifiable identity as a unity. It negates rather the definiteness of concepts, but remains one that, nevertheless, evokes the appearance of such a unity:

“[Der Widerspruch] ist Index der Unwahrheit von Identität, des Aufgehens des Begriffenen im Begriff. Der Schein von Identität wohnt jedoch dem Denken selber seiner puren Form nach inne. Denken heißt identifizieren. Befriedigt schiebt begriffliche Ordnung sich vor das, was Denken begreifen will. Sein Schein und seine Wahrheit verschränken sich.” (Adorno 2023, 17)

This may be why it appears important to address the (pseudo-)meanings of concepts and the possible ›truths‹ attached to them in different ways. This is perhaps also what describes and remains important in the actual work, in the praxis of ›communicating‹. We ›communicate‹ our wor(l)ds in ›*missedtranslation*‹ to each other. And maybe that is why ›communication‹ always fails. But maybe it does not fail. It only fails, if the ›wor(l)ds‹ in specific ways are absolutized, *without* the negative affirmation that something like justice, something like accountability must remain, must be assumed behind the appearance of the

wor(l)ds ... as, most importantly, maybe – our ›communication‹ does not always happen on equal terms, does it? More than (immediate) relations of power may be in the way, mountainous paths. Bruises and injuries. Murders. No winners. Many, many rifts between us.

We can see it in the way we have constructed the world, globally and locally, in all its possible layers, everywhere, and in the niches of history. This is probably also the architecture of our languages. But there is something in languages that can transcend this architecture of both, and that is *imagination* (the landscapes of language, which are so much richer, fuller, sometimes untouched, full of promises and possibilities, of possible futures, if we listen hard enough to their kaleidoscopic writings, inscriptions, and infinities, without reducing them to manageable entities). We can still take one and the same wor(l)d and make something else out of it... Maybe this is why ›communication‹ always really fails, and maybe this is not such a bad thing! Maybe this is a chance, for the ›you‹ and ›I‹, ...on their ways, and for ›us‹ on ›ours‹.

The term ›concept‹ can be helpful as it encompasses a word, a metaphor, and thus can also embrace an idea, a vision as well as an image, something which we refer to, reject, or desire. Sometimes we take out ›concepts‹ out of our thoughts, sometimes we pass them as we read, sometimes they are based within our disciplines. And yet ›concepts‹ also shape the materiality of our ›reality‹ and sense of ›reality‹. They give shape to our understanding of ›knowledge‹, and of ›the good‹ and ›the evil‹, and of how we (should) feel. Often ›concepts‹ are fixed within discourses, but sometimes they are *reread* anew within new paradigms and epistemes.

I think of ›concepts‹ in Jacques Derrida's sense, as deferrals of meaning – but in many different directions. They seem to circumscribe that which cannot be grasped, no matter how hard we try to grasp it – unless they are stopped at specific points. And even then, it is there, almost palpable, but then also not there, ungraspable. And they seem to move between past, present, and future understandings. They also show the unseated places of absences. Movement, I think, is inherent in our shaping of ›concepts‹ but also in our shaping of our ›realities‹ and – of our ›selves‹, which are interspersed with ›concepts‹. As rather vague, fleeting entities, ›concepts‹, in their movement along such trajectories, can be very decisive in the making of our ›realities‹ and at the same time free our imageries. That is why, I think, they should matter (as materialized and reconstructing matters).

The film may also problematize images and imagery within the invisible effectiveness of sound systems, and ask what their relation might be, and how they may critique, oppose, endure, and support each other without ever understanding or ›communicating‹ with each other, just by bundling up an arbitrary story not really told – and yet they seem to be telling a story - perhaps infinitely many.

Can the film as such be described as a camera obscura? An apparatus for and of thought, as Sarah Kofman has reflected (Kofman [1973] 1999), placed outside? And are there other (un)consciously ›implied audiences‹ that the film evokes, as literature silently does? Maybe the film suggests this somewhere in those unfinished, moved and moving places, in the interstices, where things always allude to (their) othernesses?

Perhaps it invites us to constantly rethink place and time - to think about words and their materiality - (and their politics) - and what that would mean, and what other wor(l)ds that would amount to. Perhaps it tells us where, in what kind of place, we could (secretly) meet (in our inner selves - ›you‹ and ›I‹?) to rethink things, in the dialogic of our wor(l)ds and (un-)seen gazes? For the secrecy and for our vanishing dialogues we will need a place, it may be saying to ›you‹ and ›I‹. Perhaps it is also saying that the images and sounds it essentially produces could be that secret place of dialogues in silence within ›you‹ and ›I‹?

If we think of concepts as frontiers, as Geoffrey Bennington (1996) suggests in his reading (others), then these ›concepts‹ can be represented as *frontiers on the move*. *Frontiers on the move* can open the imagination to other wor(l)ds. *Frontiers on the move* are like constant dialogues, imaginary dialogues within a future space and by a ›future people‹ (Deleuze/Guattari 1994, 108) in dialogue. *Frontiers on the move* resemble de-unification, an expanded and wide space that is concerned with opening up equal un-alikes, like ›you‹ and ›I‹, to each other, and in this way remain in contact over time without claiming possession. (Quite unlike the ›concept‹ of ›social media‹, unlike what it promises?) It may be a moving through, a journey, a caravansary, that takes up people on the road.

Such a caravansary has a political face that looks away from (unwritten) fixed norms and normalized differentiations to the faces at the closed frontiers, on the roads, and

unwittingly addresses those alleged ›nowheres‹ of the wor(l)d that are full of thoughts, resistances, other imaginations. These could be the people addressed in the film. Like a film, these dialogues can be imagined as heterotopias of a ›reality‹ that, although embedded in specific temporal moments, can maintain its futurity because a secret seems to lurk in its unfinished ends. Represented in the light of absences, it strives to emerge from the past and the present, by which ›concepts‹ are marked as such, within (future) histories. It emerges from the politics of power and powerlessness, while also questioning power as power. It looks at alleged powerlessness as the power to endlessly address what it means to have rights (Arendt 2017, 388). The film is, in a sense, an excess (Rancière 2009, 115 ff.), at once posing and imposing itself as a questioning of materiality, of space, of time, of the visual and of language, striving, perhaps, towards the relations we might one day have.

What seems to resonate in the film may be not only the plurality of the dialogic, but also the invisible, inaudible, infinite unfolding of the meanings of wor(l)ds. It involves thinking along the dialogic and/or materiality of wor(l)ds.³ In this sense, it may be “nothing other than a call to productive friction, a confrontation capable of creating another politicity and another public sphere. In short, a friction zone” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2023, 58) on a small, very tiny scale within our hearing and listening view (points).

It traces the idea of ›concepts‹ as small-unit-container-archives that capture more than *just* words – *just* in its folded sense, in the sense of ›only‹ (words), as well as ›fair‹ (wor(l)ds). ›Concepts‹ are thereby understood as archives of power relations, of histories, affects, lives, wounds, scars, desires between ›you‹ and ›I‹, in-between ›us‹ - little wor(l)ds that ,once spoken, invite us to places, on the move, within endless (at least implied) dialogues, to (re)construct wor(l)ds, however vanishing that may be. It never ends. A chance. May come back. It may remind us. To install something like hope.

The film also resonates what the camera lens does, what it captures at its edges, with its ears, so to speak, along its sight and gaze, without noticing. It echoes what the camera hears in its processual engagement with the space of which it is a part and which it breaks down into conceivable units with its gaze. This capture is therefore not exactly

³ I started working on this film project in the summer of 2015 as part of the working group »Commodity and In(ter)vention – Narration, Knowledge and Technology« at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies/University of Bayreuth – a project initially funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

of the camera; it is a resounding of what it captures and what is brought into a rapturous continuity, in the seams of the cuts, in its edited morphology.

This resonance acts as a coincidence of presence/absence, of re-presentation and re-signification of performance and performativity (Rancière 2009, 123). The space that is opened up by it in the form of fleeting accompanying sounds, may resonate the place of postponement, but also of future possibilities.

The idea of resonance, as unavailability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) (Rosa 2019), which, in fact, inevitably and poignantly echoes Jacques Derrida's dynamic terminology (of the deferral, *differance*, specter, gap, hyphen, supplement – it is used in this sense) makes it possible to think beyond any immediate meaning of reference or ›representation‹ of signs in the seen and the heard. *Unavailability* in this sense, for me, describes something like the *kernel point* of *arche-writing*, if it has any – or maybe it has many – *unavailability* may be the knotted structure of its texture.

It is not only about what the spectator, sees and hears. Not only what is heard by the camera, what gives the images a specific sound, and thus seems to foreground, to offer the images, a spatiality of reading and a reading of spatiality (*einen Raum der Deutung* and *eine Deutung des Raumes*). It also stands for the invisible sound that is part of discourses and their historicity. This sound, which the camera, and the process, the technical, capture and cut, reproduce, offers a third place, a place in-between the real and the reel. Maybe it is ›just‹ the clang of the (immune) secret Derrida speaks of. Or it is the clang that reminds and remembers the absences of ›justice‹. It may be the always seemingly absent place of the other, the (hidden or excluded) witness, to the scenes that take place on the outside, in ›reality‹, and to what is archived (what not), to what happens. Or it is the affirmative voice of ›justice‹ that, nevertheless, wants to proceed in time and space – everywhere and always.

There is a silence in its sound. It seems to lurk there like a foreboding answer to an unheard call that tragedy entails. It may be described as the “the call to love”, as bell hooks suggests (hooks 1996, 34), as the call for deep reconfigurations, on the never-ending paths of deconstructive trajectories, haunted by exteriorities (Derrida 1967, 143 ff.).

Concepts on the Move – is an invitation to participate in such nonlinear journeys from within our pasts and presences to unknown futures, and to what *seems* to be, and

can be read *differently*, in all these instances of encounter, of absences and silences, that remain unheard but may be listened to. It thereby may also want to tell a story, in an engagement with our unfinished and ongoing histories, scattered across the earth – maybe to such futures, but seems to fail, it cannot. Can it?

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