

In *Poetic Intention*, the Caribbean poet and politician Édouard Glissant writes “I build my language with rocks.”<sup>1</sup> Declaring his material intent to forge a new language of specificity that grapples with the painful histories of transatlantic slavery and the vertigo of the Middle Passage, he seeks a language that breaks away, like an island, from the main. It was a way of speaking that accords that which is rendered as stony, a communication in the making the geographies of place. Glissant was searching for a poetry that would hold the enormity of the body of experiences that have shaped subjectivity in the specifics of Caribbean geography, with its islands, archipelagoes, and Indigenous and multiethnic amalgamations of being, alongside the scale of loss, which characterized the geotrauma of colonial lives and afterlives. Glissant wanted to hold a mode of description on his tongue that spoke with the unspeakable and which dissolved the edges and objectification of colonial language, and broke its homogenizing grammar, which worked against communal becoming and communication with and through the earth. As colonial languages had cast Blackness into inhuman dimensions, Glissant put the rocks in his mouth. Refusing the ascribed muteness of rocks (as they were rendered by colonial geology), Glissant held with the testimony of the rock, understood as an inhuman witness to inhumane acts. Rocks became like seeds—working against organic and inorganic separateness—to hold a history of racial and ecological violence, and imagine a different being in collaboration with the earth.

*I Build My Skin with Rocks* (2022), writes Sandra Mujinga. Imagining what the human can become, freed from the shackles of colonial earth and its prescriptive script of the human that was built on so many absented and exposed persons-coded-as-bodies, necessitates the growth of new skin. When I first saw Mujinga’s sentinels they didn’t so much as look back, as if to loiter with a gaze that would fail to apprehend them, but instead they held a strong affirmative presence-ing, as if belonging to a council that did not and would not disclose itself. Maybe this was the council of repair? The missing affective reparational committee that would unleash a reckoning with the calculative error of race and its ongoing deployment? A sentinel stands as sentry, guard, watch and lookout—*Spectral Keepers* (2021). What sentinels would provide the necessary methodological repair to these broken earths and subjugated subjects? Mujinga’s figures seem to instigate an unknown near-future prophecy, a time that would come or should have come to question and hold to account. Opening a path to imagining the possibility of reparative pasts-futures they ask us to engage in time travel. The figures seem to trigger a dark but strong unconscious that has yet to be fully unearthed. They speak of other earths.

One way into the river of affect that inflected a form of subjectivity sedimented by colonial reflexes is to look for figures to hold onto, to guide us through the vortexes of incommensurability. Like conceptual handholds in a universe that is so much bigger than a body and yet grounds itself there. What if it is time that we had a look and took account of the texture of experience? If it is the work of time that hardens the contours of subject, object, and life-forms that are marked by the imperative of “now,” then what if “we” (a differentiated collective) loosened the frame of time’s coherence, as Sandra Mujinga does? Stretching time is a way of releasing its grip, showing us ways to use it differently, to occupy it with different intentions—*Stretched Delays (1–4)* (2017). Dimensions need to shift. What different account of history organizes the possibilities and scope

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“Je bâtis a roches mon langage,” in Édouard Glissant, *L’Intention poetique* (Paris, 1969), p. 43.

of what becomes and is becoming? What might we see differently if the figures changed and if the scale shifts?

We learn important things through the figurations of our imaginative guides that show us how to actualize the future through the affects of their non-compliance or difference with the present. Charting the imaginary that speaks to the earth (that is violently obscured by the calculative logics of colonialism and its contemporary neocolonial kin), gives us entry points, portals, into the way in which time and space (and all the social configurations and subjections within) can be felt differently. Sentinels direct us into other territories—*Sentinels of Change* (2021).

How might we learn to see, in the dark and possible corridors of reason's underbelly, a different earth, guided by time travelers that show us their skin as a porous and fabricated barrier to another cosmos? The other earths are already inside us, the bodies seem to tell us. Landscape is continuous and contiguous with being. What attachments to whiteness and supremacy in the psychic trail of violence might be shaken, across indeterminate boundaries, so that we see differently in the skin of an elephant? In another skin, *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), Michael Ondaatje writes, "Before the real city could be seen it had to be imagined, the way rumors and tall tales were a kind of charting."<sup>2</sup> On the far side of skin is a map, a cartographic relation to another surface. What collective historical training in whiteness would need to be dismantled to challenge the efficacy of what the Martiniquan writer Franz Omar Fanon called the "epidemiology of oppression?" Fanon calls the racism of colonial earth epidemiological, but we know now from the Anthropocene that it is planetary too. Oppression differentiates at the skin and so the skin becomes a surface of all that is carried inside as history and belonging and geography. Why is it so difficult to see beyond the skin? What scales of apprehension need to shift to see the exchange between bodies, in this world, and the many that are obscured by its sterile rendering of life-forms and forms of life that makes ghosts and future ghosts of the earth? The architecture of epidemiological-seeing is rooted in the temporal: temporal scripts of whiteness as the apex of human supremacy made by paleontologists (or pale-ontologists) in the context of colonial subjectivity, to both justify and explain their murderous rage and theft of persons, ecologies, and land. Sandra Muijunga shifts the weight of these cultural-somatic sediments. The ghosts become solid sentinels. They keep watch.

The strong architectural shadowings of Sandra Muijunga's work, its attention to fashion as another skin, disrupt the place of the ghost as "merely" a haunting, that is somehow in excess of, and only partially in the world. The sentinels are actually there. The spectral is substantial. And something troubles at the seams of a colonial consciousness and its capital insistence on particular and racialized organizations of value, which are captured through measurement and representation. Ways of seeing and ways of knowing—what we in the academy call colonial epistemologies—are dis-remembered. The figures shift and transform without edges to do the work of containment. They do not haunt so much as make manifest another worlding that challenges the (Enlightenment) light of reason that sought to build carceral containments of the languages of many worlds; a world-building that was built on pain and erasure of the multiplicity of worlds. The sentinels hold to account; they are accountants of time. They are enfolded but live a different flesh. They build their skin with rocks and other materialities. They refuse a fungible body, yet they hold to the potential of flux.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion* (London, 1987), p. 29.

The skin plays with an aesthetic of genetic co-emergence belonging to other not yet fully realized worldings. The altered quality cuts down the single root or the purified origin stories that smack of race and the inheritance of propertied claims. They went through the earth to build a defense to the eyes that would burn through them. The skin of an elephant (like the skin of a rhino)—*I Build My Skin with Rocks*—plays on a metaphoric trigger for toughness, a misplaced and misaligning account of creaturely sensitivity, when we know that elephants grieve and do much else besides. Petrification recalls other figures whose skin has been presented in unfeeling registers and on whom violence is unleashed. It is both the process by which organic matter is exposed to minerals over the longue durée and is turned into a stony substance (like Glissant's rocks in his mouth) and a state of fright. The petrification of fear that Glissant talks about, in the ship's hold of the Middle Passage, is what built a new experience of the porousness of subjectivity, one that was shared and did not feel itself alone. Glissant rescues from this petrification an insight and a collaboration with the world and one another. Sandra Muijunga's hybrid human-animal recalls the figuration of inhumanism that colonialism deployed in its material and metaphorical attacks on Black and ecological life, of how the division of species spilled over on the colonial table to suck in an account of anti-Black life that was made sticky in its (over-)representation in relation to other accounts of skin. Alien aesthetics recall deep and violent ongoing colonial histories of encounter with what were seen as "alien" peoples and "alien" ecologies in "New Worlds" and imperial empires. The skin is the boundary in which difference is made to live. It draws the lines of violence and possibility. It holds a lot of affect in. It maintains how colonial histories and geographies, with their vertiginous orders of the human, are lived in us. Sandra Muijunga replaces this with a more intimate futurity that demands another kind of living and another kind of world-building through the earth: *Reworlding Remains* (2021) as a collaborative experience of being in a shared skin, with other beings. Stretch the perspective and the landscape changes, she seems to say to us.

In *I Build My Skin with Rocks* (2022) the portal asks us about the figures that we need to make another world with. Rather than an ark of salvation or biblical projection of a universal end, the portal tells us about a way of seeing, of apprehending the past and its hidden worlds as a way of opening the future. Is this the first or last creature? Why must it, alone, bear the weight of questioning? The space is a hold: holding with the hidden spaces of the past, understanding that time travel requires a sense of the places that have made the syntax and have come before. Something is left in the hold. The trans-figurations have come from a hold that is also an abyss that scrambled the easy paths of belonging. They have crossed over, but to where? Who knows where these beings are going and what they want to take with them. A different imperative lands on to the skin of beings that do not hum with the imposed imperative of extraction and extermination. Maybe these other guides are beings to follow and maybe they have less deadly end-game fantasies. Temporal guides might take us to a place that does not live through buried racialized undergrounds to substantiate its smooth plastic surfaces (or skin) of privilege. Losing the coordinates of a recognizable body is a way to expand. To push the imagination towards underworlds and open our eyes to the scale of the relation and to shake what these scales stabilize and hold down. Maybe the council requires more than speculation. Maybe it asks: What dreams make the repudiation of violence in our everyday and planetary lives possible? What figures of fiction and fabulation are needed to uncover those and that which are silenced by the powers of the day? What is clear is that these figurations refuse to be tethered to a learnt view.

In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), Saidiya Hartman demonstrates how the method of "critical fabulation" can configure the possible but absent lives of wayward Black girls in Philadelphia through an engagement with the archival traces of their erasure.<sup>3</sup> It is one of generating what the dynamics of calculative racialized and racist life destroys: namely the freedom of Black space through narrating the strength of unscripted riotous lives. Speculating and subject-building with what the world wants to forget is a way to build worlds, where inhuman and inhumane memories mobilize as future praxis for a kinship that knows itself in another dimension of time and space. What future-beings must be imagined for the reparative work of fighting the forces that would flatten (Black) life in the present—*Nocturnal Kinship* (2018). Maintaining boundaries is how colonial metrics function to govern identity and its valuation. Enforced visibility is how the state sees. As scale gives way to a shifting body in the portal of seeing, coordinates drift, and skin is disrupted. What kind of body is an earth body, a body that inhabits the earth? Identification is denied. Speculative guardians of the near future have a story to tell. The entrance to the portal is open. Total access is repudiated. A mode of captivity has become a ship to elsewhere. There's an elephant in the room of the art world. Does it gesture towards an otherwise, does it have skin in the game? Otherworlds exist that need critical fabulation to disrupt the colonial fictions of languages, land, environments, bodies, and consent that would smother them. Sandra Mujinga invites us to listen with our eyes to the time an elephant's skin holds, and what is held in that relation, with a body that refuses to function at the scale of capture.

<sup>3</sup> See Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (London/New York, 2019).

## Die Wächter\*innen der nahen Zukunft

Kathryn Yusoff

Der karibische Dichter und Politiker Édouard Glissant schreibt in *L'Intention poetique*: „Ich baue meine Sprache mit Steinen.“<sup>1</sup> Damit erklärt er die materielle Absicht, eine neue und spezifische Sprache zu formen, die sich mit den schmerzvollen Geschichten des transatlantischen Sklavenhandels sowie dem Schwindelgefühl der Middle Passage auseinandersetzt und ebenfalls eine Ausdrucksform sucht, die wie eine Insel vom Festland wegbricht. Es handelt sich um eine Weise zu sprechen, die dem entspricht, was als steinern wiedergegeben werden kann, eine Kommunikation, die die Geografie eines Orts entstehen lässt. Glissant war auf der Suche nach einer Poesie, die das ungeheure Ausmaß jener Erfahrungswelten tragen konnte, welche die Subjektivität der speziell karibischen Geografie geformt hatte, mit ihren Inseln, Archipelen, Indigenen und multiethnischen Verschmelzungen des Seins, längsseits des Ausmaßes von Verlust, welches das Geotrauma von kolonialen Leben und Nachleben charakterisierte. Er wollte eine Art und Weise der Benennung auf seiner Zunge halten, die mit dem Unaussprechlichen sprach und welche die Ränder und die Objektifizierung der kolonialen Sprache auflöste und mit ihrer homogenisierenden Grammatik brach, die gegen ein gemeinsames Werden und eine Kommunikation mit und durch die Erde arbeitete. Da koloniale Sprachen Schwarzsein in unmenschliche Dimensionen verworfen hatten, platzierte Glissant die Steine in seinen Mund. Die den Steinen zugeschriebene Stummheit ablehnend (so wie sie von der kolonialen Geologie beschrieben wurde), blieb er bei dem Geständnis des Steins, den er als nichtmenschlichen Zeugen unmenschlicher Taten verstand. Steine wurden so etwas wie Samen, die gegen organische und anorganische Getrenntheit arbeiteten, um eine Geschichte ökologischer und rassistischer Gewalt in sich zu tragen und ein anderes Sein in Zusammenarbeit mit der Erde zu imaginieren.

*I Build My Skin with Rocks* (2022), „Ich baue meine Haut mit Steinen“, schreibt Sandra Mujinga. Es braucht das Wachsen einer neuen Haut, um sich vorzustellen, was der Mensch werden kann, befreit von den Fesseln der kolonialen Erde und dem verordneten Skript des Menschlichen, das auf so vielen fehlenden und entblöbten, als Körper kodierten Personen fußt. Als ich Mujingas Wächter\*innen das erste Mal sah, schauten sie nicht zurück, als würden sie mit einem Blick herumlungern, der sie nicht zu verstehen vermag. Stattdessen besaßen sie ein starkes, behaftetes Da-sein, als gehörten sie einem Rat an, der sich nicht entblöbte und es auch nicht tun würde. War dies vielleicht der Rat der Reparatur? Das fehlende, entschädigende Komitee, das eine Abrechnung mit dem rechnerischen Fehler von *race* und seiner andauernden Anwendung freisetzt? Ein\*e Wächter\*in steht als Wachposten, Wache, Wacht und Ausblick – *Spectral Keepers* (2021). Welche Wächter\*innen würden die notwendige methodologische Reparatur für diese gebrochenen Erden und unterjochten Subjekte bereitstellen können? Mujingas Figuren scheinen eine in der nahen Zukunft liegende Prophezeiung anzuregen, eine Zeit, die kommen würde oder hätte kommen sollen, um infrage zu stellen und zur Verantwortung zu ziehen. Sie öffnen die Möglichkeit, sich entschädigende Vergangenheitszukünfte vorzustellen und bitten uns darum, eine Zeitreise zu durchlaufen. Die Figuren scheinen ein dunkles aber starkes Unbewusstes auszulösen, das immer noch gänzlich zutage gefördert werden muss. Sie sprechen von anderen Erden.

<sup>1</sup> „Je bâtis a roches mon langage“, in: Édouard Glissant, *L'Intention poetique*, Paris 1969, S. 43.

Ein Weg in den Fluss der Affekte, der eine von kolonialen Reflexen sedimentierte Form von Subjektivität beeinflusst hat, besteht darin, nach Figuren zu suchen,