Documentation for teachers
Around the exhibition
Landversation Beirut
by Otobong Nkanga

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BEIRUT ART CENTER
مركز بيروت للفن

This document is aimed at teachers: it is not meant for students' use. It does not replace the visit, nor is it a record that documents the exhibition. It is a research tool to be used by the teachers to address the exhibition in relation to different knowledge backgrounds so that they can refer to it in the course of their practice. The Workbook exists to facilitate the teachers' use of the visit for work-in-class purposes and to inspire them to invent whatever their teaching practices require.

Contents

I. Curator's statement

Landversation Beirut is a project by Otobong Nkanga that will be exhibited at Beirut Art Center for 2 months, from February 10 to April 2nd, 2016.

Originally presented in Sao Paulo, Brazil (*Landversation 2014*), this adapted version of the project sets out to explore and compare the complex relationship between the human subject and land in Lebanon.

Set in the main space of the Beirut Art Center, the exhibition's 'stage' is installed with a table that will be occupied by persons with a deep connection to 'Land', people whose work requires them to consider the consequential use of 'Land'. Each participant, whether an archaeologist, a farmer or someone engaging in a land-related industrial activity, will contribute to this common theme of sharing a relationship to the Land. The table will provide a platform for meetings and conversations among those individuals and the visiting public who may also share a history and an authorship of this same land, whether cultivating it, developing laws that organize it, or protecting public space. In Otobong Nkanga's words, the notion of 'Land' "extends beyond just soil, territories, earth etc., but relates to our connectivity and conflicts in relation to the spaces we live in and how we humans try to find solutions through simple gestures of innovation and repair".

Additionally, Nkanga will present a series of early photographic works including *Emptied Remains* (2004, ongoing)*, Stripped Bare* (2003-2004) and *Things Have Fallen* (2004-2005) mainly photographed in Nigeria, together for the first time with later works like *Alterscapes Stories* (2006) and *Dolphin Estate* (2008). In the earlier photographic series, Nkanga captures the psychological and phenomenological experience of land and landscape while accentuating at the same time the physical and spatial attributes of the built environment and as it signifies the continuous relationship between man and nature. The photographs depict landscapes as a series of disturbed interrupted movements of development and stasis that address the collapse of time and space.

Dolphin Estate Series (2008) consists of six images that document the first pre-fabricated housing units built in the 1990's in Lagos and how the inhabitants of those units have adapted the architecture to fit their needs, annexing uncanny scaffolding-like structures that would carry water tanks and satellite dishes, thus creating a layer of secondary architecture.

The diptych and triptych of *Alterscape Stories* (2006) shows the artist literally "Spilling Waste" then "Uprooting the Past" on a landscape model, expressing the way mankind handles their own surroundings on a larger scale.

Dream in One Meter Square is an installation that consists of a photograph and an "inside" chamber which can be accessed as if one is entering the image. This "inner" chamber constitutes the backstage where the artist performs on the opening day. Realized for the first time in Sharjah Biennial in 2005, this evocative and thought-provoking piece will be adapted for Beirut.

With the main space of Beirut Art Center acting as an exterior space open to discussions, debates and circulation of language, *Landversation Beirut* also encloses its own landscape in the form of a site-specific fresco which the artist will create on one wall.

Landversation Beirut deals with the contradictory ways in which we inhabit the earth and are dependent on it and the dichotomy of how those two ways of dealing with it connect. By availing ourselves of and profiting from this planet's abundant fertility we haphazardly contribute to its exhaustion, thereby creating huge imbalances that undermine its ability to continue. In response to this destruction we constantly look for palliatives, measures to repair and negate the very damage we have forced upon it. This exhibition seeks to provide a space to sit for a moment and reflect, a space to consider the various possibilities surrounding this ever-complex relationship and perhaps, most important of all, a space for exchanging with words (or for conversation).

Marie Muracciole

II. Otobong Nkanga

Otobong Nkanga's drawings, installations, photographs and sculptures variously examine ideas around land and the value connected to natural resources. In her work, activities and performance permeate all kinds of media and motivate photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, installation and video, though all the different works are thematically connected through architecture and landscape.

Performance is what happens in real time, the "live" of visual arts, and it has a long history. When Nkanga performs, she is activating the sculptures, spaces and installations through gestures, language, singing, storytelling, and in the case of *Landversation,* through conversations with different individuals with a connection to land.

As a human trace that testifies of ways of living and environmental issues, architecture and landscape act as a sounding board for narration and performance. According to the artist herself, she uses her body and voice in live performances or in videos to become the protagonist in her work. However, her presence serves mostly as a self-effacing catalyst, an invisible hand that sets the artistic process in motion. Nkanga negotiates the completion of the cycle of art between the aesthetic realm of display and a strategy of de-sublimation that repeatedly pushes the status of the artwork into contingency.

In many of her works, Nkanga reflects metonymically on the use and cultural value connected to natural resources, exploring how meaning and function are relative within cultures, and revealing different roles and histories for the same products, particularly within the context of the artist's autobiography and memories.

III. Workbook

1. The Body and the Ground

The notion of the relationship to the land, as expressed in Otobong Nkanga's work, can also be addressed as the relationship between one's own body and the ground. What is the nature of the space created by the body's movement in relation to the ground, be it the physical space, with the notions of gravity, of culture, of nutrition; the social space with the notions of sharing and property; or the political space with the notion of border? What are the forces at stake, and how does one affect the other? What is the impact of our bodies on the ground and vice versa?

In the same way Otobong Nkanga produced a series of elements that made visible the work of the groups/individuals participating in the exhibition, the students could try to trace and give shape to the space and the interactions between the body and the ground:

- Observe the position of another's person body
- Using photography, sketching, writing, etc., trace the space that is created between their body and the surface of the ground
- Isolate this space, and study its characteristics (therefore refer to technics as molding, photograph of shades, decoupage etc…)
- Make these characteristics visible in a production (for example: a model, a drawing, a text, a collage, etc.)

In addition to Nkanga's work, Charles Simonds' film *Mythologies* can be used as a way to introduce a literal understanding of the relationship to the ground, showing a kind of continuity between his body and the earth in the form of actual soil or clay:

Figure 1- Charles Simonds, Mythologies

Watch *Landscape-Body-Dwelling* by Charles Simonds here.

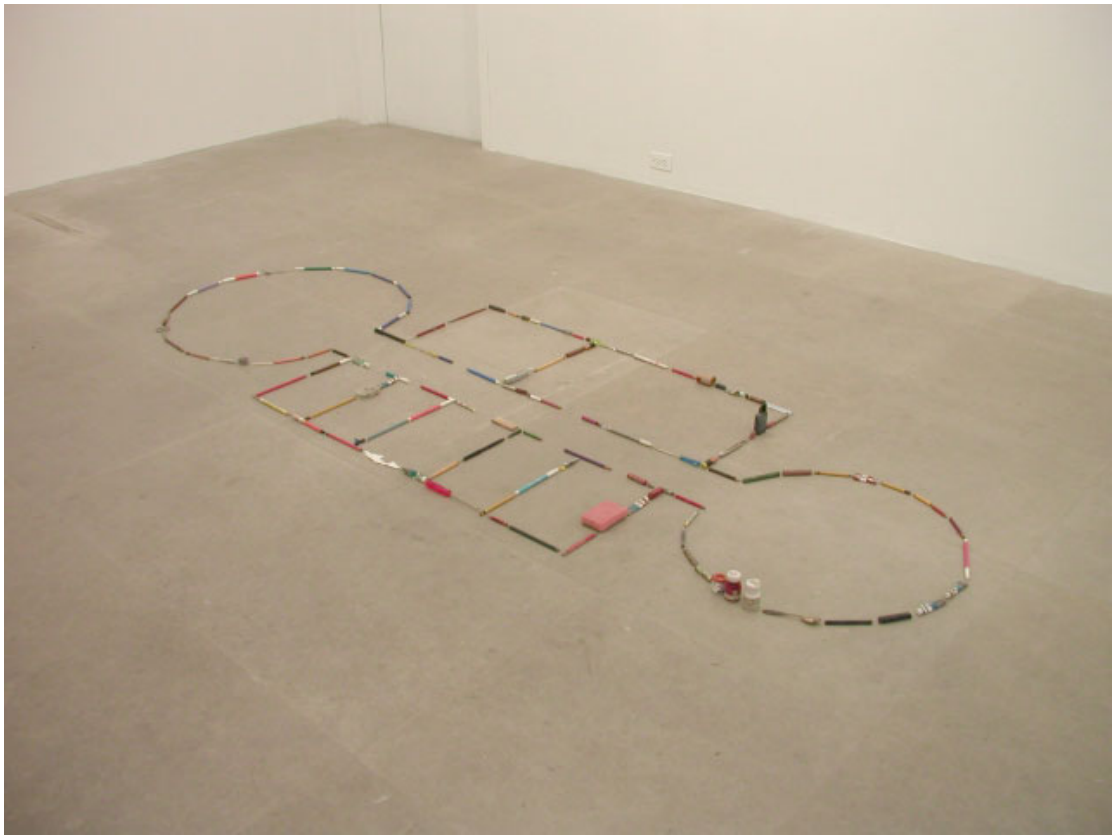

Figure 2 – *Inhabited for a survey* by Mark Manders, 1986
(Writing materials, erasers, painting tools, scissors - 8x267x90cm)

“I made this floor plan in 1966 from all the writing tools I had at the time. These served as the basis for written self-portrait, which was to be formed collectively by seven imaginary persons in a building. It was to be a book without a beginning or an end, one that I would always have to keep working on. I thought it was interesting that it was a dry, formal floor plan, in which no movement whatsoever could be observed. I wanted to project a mental self-portrait into this floor plan, one in which everything would take place only in language. Making a self-portrait seemed to me the most fundamental thing to do. However, while writing I found I did not like the idea of using written sentences to dictate to the audience exactly what they should think. I did not want the self-portrait to become really personal – it had to remain abstract. I became more and more fascinated by the physical manifestation of the floor plan: how I stood there before it as a human being; how tall I was in relation to the things on the ground; how the changing light transformed a ballpoint pen so dramatically; how I could bring my eye closer to an eraser and what then happened inside my head. This zooming-in created a breathtaking cinematic experience; I could move over these objects, and they dictated my thoughts with their color, language, form, and their indescribable physical coherence. I concluded that making a self-portrait in language was not the right thing to do. The world itself is more complex than the world of language which has been embedded in it. I decided to write the book not with words but with objects, and to embed the self-portrait in reality as an imaginary building… If you write a self-portrait using objects, it will be read in a totally different way. Viewers – or readers- of the objects construct their own new thoughts, and the result is a self-portrait that is suspended between the maker and the viewers.
This floor plan was never really meant to be an artwork, it was more like a strange kind of writing machine. Now it is a work of art. It is used as an artwork.”

-Mark Manders

2. Rethinking Dwelling

Figure 3 - Charles Simonds, PS1-New York, 1975

Watch *Dwellings 1972* by Charles Simonds here.

In its *Dwellings* produced in the 70s, Charles Simonds was handling the inhabitants of New York some miniature settlements in the public space. This evocation of a group of *Little People* as he put them, living among the human, was reminding of the myth of the giants and Lilliputians, and addressing the body's relationship with space, power, etc… Simonds was at that time close to Gordon Matta-Clark who himself was addressing architecture and power in his work, inventing *anarchitecture*, and transforming modern ruins into sculptures, entering a building to deconstruct it with opening a significant void, or making a pavilion seem as thin as a piece of paper by cutting it in two - a very difficult task in fact- like in this photograph of the 1974 project, *Splitting*.

Figure 4 - Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, 1974

Architecture, development and landscapes are all questions raised by Otobong Nkanga's *Landversation Beirut*. The idea here is to also reflect upon vernacular architecture and the way it seems to convey a better understanding of the characteristics of the site, as well as a more humble positioning of man in regards to nature. As expressed by Jacques Liger-Belair, an architect from Belgium living and working in Beirut since the early sixties, it "is an architecture of the people, of individuals who have taken upon themselves to erect their own dwellings, built from materials extracted from natural surroundings and the know-how drawn from a living tradition."

Figure 5 - Jacques Liger-Belair, *From Landscape to Architecture*

The students could:

- Try and imagine what a contemporary vernacular architecture would mean:
  - How can we build a home ourselves?
  - How can we establish a respectful relationship to the land and nature?
  - And most importantly: how does our relationship to the land shape our daily lives?

- Research on such organic structures around the world, and on experiences like those of Matta-Clark and Simonds, and an understanding of the functioning of their respective (fictional or real) communities could be a starting point for the project that could take any form:
  - A text narrating a typical day of one of the dwellers and the community;
  - A drawing of a dwelling prototype and a drawing of several units and the connections between them;
  - A series of photographs that capture such organic structures in our current urban context;
  - A model of a neighborhood, …

3. Repair

When I was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1990s, I noticed a piece of fabric made by the Kuba peoples, with applications of French-style embroideries that covered holes made by insects—a gesture of repair rather than decoration.

-Kader Attia, discussion with Miguel Amado, 2013

The idea here is to explore the notion of *Repair* as a means to allow for the viability of an altered structure (cf. to p.14, Kader Attia's text on his exhibition *"Repair. In Five Acts"*, 2013).

Figure 6 - Kader Attia, *Repair Analysis*, 2013

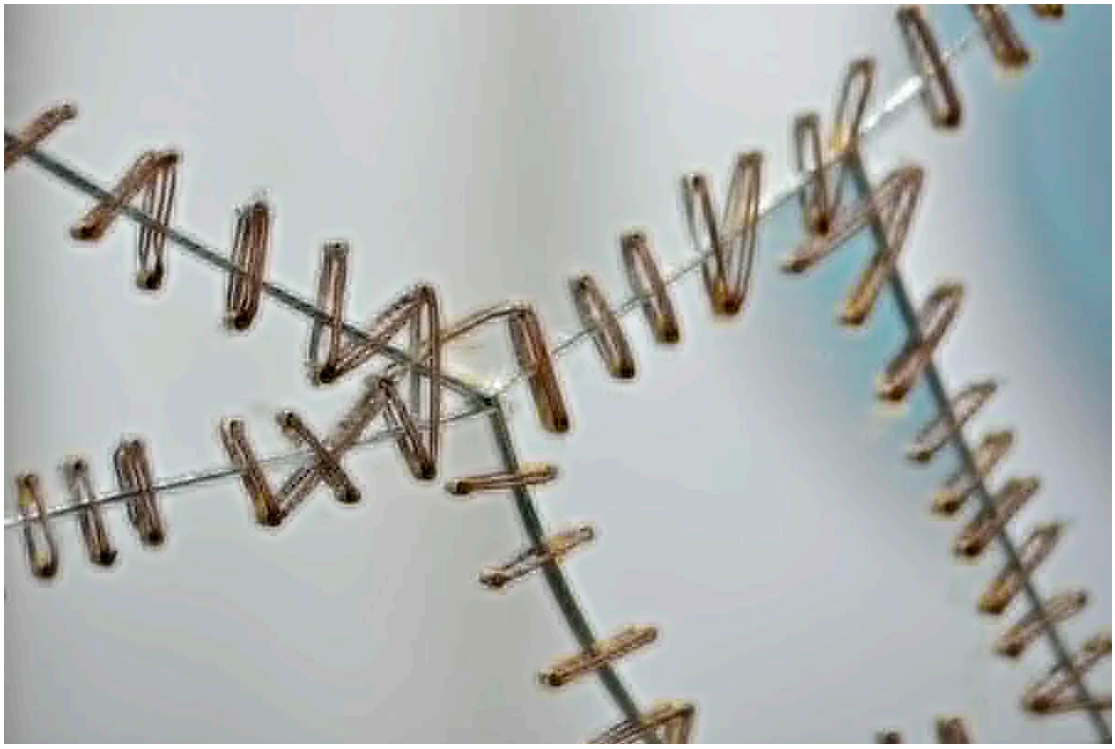

Figure 7 – *Irreparable Repair* (detail) by Kader Attia (2014)

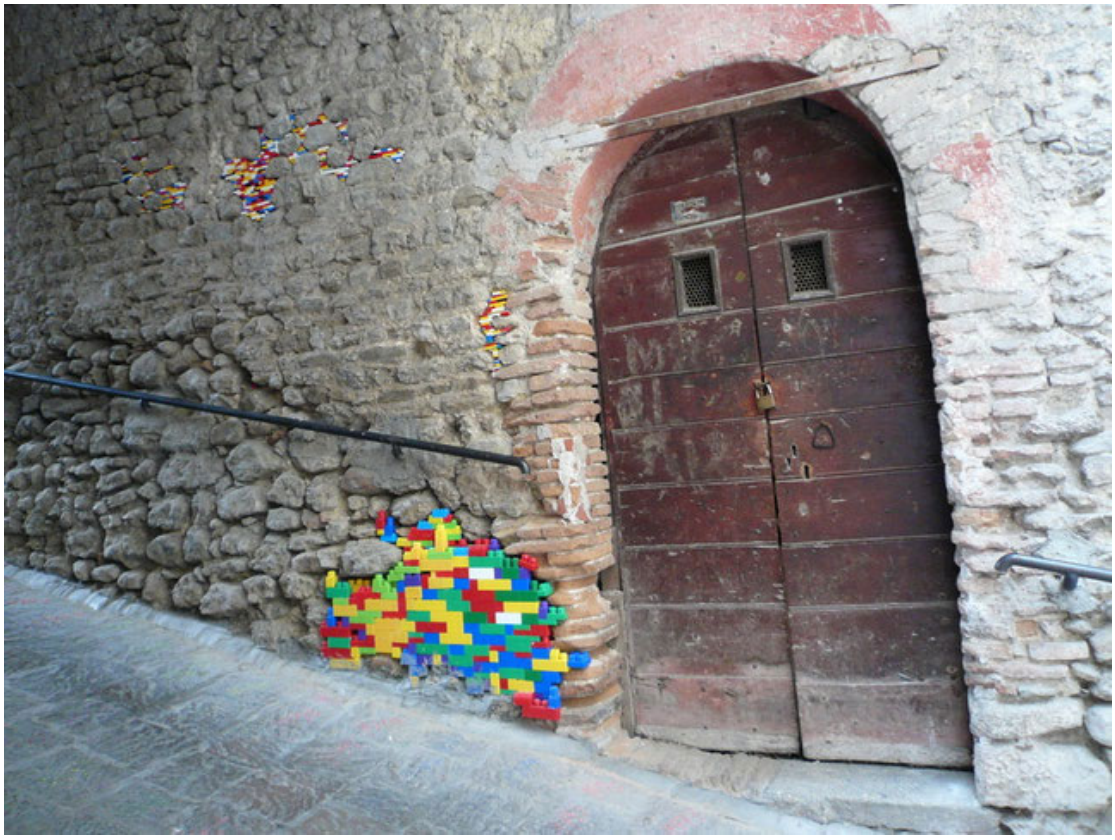

Figure 8 - Jan Vormann, *Dispatchwork*, Bocchignano, Italy (2007)

In 2007, German artist Jan Vormann started identifying damaged buildings and filling the gaps with "Lego" bricks. Individuals and groups in several cities around the world, including Beirut, have adopted the ongoing "Dispatchwork" project as a way to repair altered structures and enhance the community's urban experience.

Following this example, the instructions below could be suggested to groups of 2 to 4 students:

- Identify an altered element in your surroundings (an object, an architectural element, a piece of street furniture, etc…)
- Look around you for elements that you could use to fix it
- Fix the altered element you found while making sure that it still serves the same purpose it was created for.
- Decide if you want the repair to be visible or not. In each case, defend your position: what does it mean to hide the repair of war, of life?

The project can be applied to a variety of scales, depending on the space allocated to the exercise. It could happen in the classroom, on the campus or outside the educational institution, as part of a class trip (in town or in nature…)

Figure 9 – *Beau Geste* (Film still), by Yto Barrada, 2009

In 2009, French-born Moroccan artist Yto Barrada made *Beau Geste (Beautiful Gesture)*, a short film where Barrada asks a group of workers to create a cement support for a tree in an empty lot, hence protecting it from the landowners assault. This 'gesture' addresses a specific reality in Tangiers where the law forbids selling lands where trees grow. In order to by-pass the law, several landowners uproot the existing trees.
Yto Barrada studied history and political science at the Sorbonne and photography in New York. Her work — including photography, film, sculpture, prints and installations, — began by exploring the peculiar situation of her hometown Tangier.

The notion of repair could also be addressed in relation to nature:

- How does nature repair things (Cutting, Grafting, etc)?
- Identify broken or altered parts in the plants around you;
- Use methods inspired by natural processes to repair it.
- Try making a list of disappearing/endangered species in Lebanon. How many did you know?

For this section, the teacher can refer to the project of Le Drageon *eco-center in Bkechtine* (http://www.ledrageon.org)

IV. Additional readings for teachers

Man's relationship to land is at the heart of Otobong Nkanga's *Landversation Beirut*. In this section, we have gathered several texts that echo the questions raised by Nkanga's work through different approaches.

This series of texts means to explore what we could mean by "land" and how can we position ourselves in relation to it. Hans Jonas and David Harvey's texts allow us here to tackle issues related to ecology, nature, and man's responsibility towards the latter, while Bruno Latour's also questions the role of humans in creating facts to describe the phenomena they generated, and Kader Attia's introduces the notions of re-appropriation and repair as a means to question what binds and separates nature and culture in different spaces and at different times. Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* acts here as an extension of the topic to questions related to our perception of the land/territory in relation to culture and ethnicity.

These readings do not pretend to give specific answers or directions, but rather to suggest openings and a deeper questioning of the issues at stake here, as well as to trigger further discussions and exchanges about and around the topic.

Old and New Imperatives

Hans Jonas (1903-1993)

In *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Cambridge, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985 – pp.10-12

Hans Jonas was a German-born philosopher and Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City. In The Imperative of Responsibility, he rethinks the foundations of ethics in light of the major transformations generated by modern technology. His writings have widely influenced environmentalists in Europe. "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life" is considered as a key ecological imperative.

1. Kant's categorical imperative said: "Act so that you *can* will that the maxim of your action be made the principle of a universal law." The "can" here invoked is that of reason and its consistency with itself: *Given* the existence of a community of human agents (acting rational beings), the action must be such that it can without self-contradiction be imagined as a general practice of that community. Mark that the basic reflection of morals here is not itself a moral but a logical one: The "I *can* will" or "I *cannot* will" expresses logical compatibility or incompatibility, not moral approbation or revulsion. But there is no self-contradiction in the thought that humanity would once come to an end, therefore also none in the thought that the happiness of present and proximate generations would be bought with the unhappiness or even nonexistence of later ones – as little as, after all, in the inverse thought that the existence of happiness of later generations would be bought with the unhappiness or even partial extinction of present ones. The sacrifice of the future to the present is *logically* no more open to attack than the sacrifice of the present to the future. The difference is only that in the one case the series goes on, and in the other it does not (or: its future ending is contemplates). But that it *ought to go on*, regardless of the distribution of happiness or unhappiness, even with a persistent preponderance of unhappiness over happiness, nay, of immorality over morality [1]- this cannot be derived from the rule of self-consistency *within* the series, long or short as it happens to be: it is a commandment of a very different kind, lying outside and "prior" to the series as a whole, and its ultimate grounding can only be metaphorical.

2. An imperative responding to the new type of human action and addressed to the new type of agency that operates it might run thus: "Act so that the effects of your actions are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life"; or expressed negatively: "Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life"; or simply: "Do not compromise the conditions for an indefinite continuation of humanity on earth"; or, again turned positive: "In your present choices, include the future wholeness of Man among the objects of your will."

3. It is immediately obvious that no rational contradiction is involved in the violation of this kind of imperative. I can will the present good with sacrifice of the

[1] On this last point, the biblical God changed his mind to an all-encompassing "yes" after the Flood.

future good. Just as I can will my own end, I can will that of humanity. Without falling into contradiction with myself, I can prefer a short fireworks display of the most extreme "self-fulfillment," for myself or for the world, to the boredom of an endless continuation of mediocrity.

However, the new imperative says precisely that we may risk our own life – but not that of humanity; and that Achilles indeed had the right to choose for himself a short life of glorious deeds over a long life of inglorious security (with the tacit premise that a posterity would be there to know and tell of his deeds), but that we do not have the right to choose, or even risk, nonexistence for future generations on account of a better life for the present one. Why we do not have this right, why on the contrary we have an obligation toward that which does not yet exist and never need exist at all – an obligation not only towards its fortunes in case it happens to exist, but toward its coming to exist in the first place, to which as nonexistent "it" surely has no claim: to underpin this proposition theoretically is by no means easy and without religion probably impossible. At present, our imperative simply posits it without proof, as an axiom.

4. It is also evident that the new imperative addresses itself to public policy rather than private conduct, which is not in the casual dimension to which that imperative applies. Kant's categorical imperative was addressed to the individual, and its criterion is instantaneous. It enjoined each of us to consider what would happen *if* the *maxim* of my present action were made, or at this moment already were, the principle of a universal legislation; the self-consistency or inconsistency of such a *hypothetical* universalization is made the test for my *private* choice. But it was no part of the reasoning that there is any probability of my private choice in fact becoming that. Indeed, *real* consequences are not considered at all, and the principle is one not of objective responsibility but of the subjective quality of my self-determination. The new imperative invokes a different consistency: not that of the act with itself, but that of its eventual *effects* with the continuance of human agency in times to come. And the "universalization" it contemplates is by no means hypothetical – that is, a purely logical transference from the individual "me" to an imaginary, casually unrelated "all" ("*if* everybody acted like that"); on the contrary, the actions subject to the new imperative – actions of the collective whole – have their universal reference in their actual scope of efficacy: they "totalize" themselves in the progress of their momentum and thus are bound to terminate in shaping the universal dispensation of things. This adds a *time* horizon to the moral calculus which is entirely absent from the instantaneous logical operation of the Kantian imperative: whereas the latter extrapolates into an ever-present order of abstract compatibility, our imperative extrapolates into a predictable real *future* as the open-ended dimension of our responsibility.

Do Values Inhere in Nature?

David Harvey (1935)

David Harvey is a professor of anthropology and geography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). He is the author of many books, including *Social Justice and the City*, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, *The Limits to Capital*, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, and *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. *In this text, Harvey concentrates on how values are assigned to 'nature', and if they are indeed inherent in nature, how can we, as humans, know what they are.*

There has been a long story with bourgeois life of resistance to and search for an alternative to money as a way to express values. Religion, community, family, nation, have all been proffered as candidates, but the particular set of alternatives I here wish to consider are those which in some manner or other see values residing in Nature – for romanticism, environmentalism and ecologism all have strong elements of that ethic built within them. And the idea is not foreign to Marxism either (at least in some of its renditions). When Marx (1971) argued in *The Jewish Question* that the money has 'robbed the whole world – both the world of men and nature – of its specific value' and that 'the view of nature attained under the dominion of private property and money is a real contempt for and practical debasement of nature,' he comes very close to endorsing the view that money has destroyed earlier and perhaps recoverable intrinsic natural values.

This advantage of seeing values as residing in nature is that it provides an immediate sense of ontological security and permanence. The natural world provides a rich, variegated, and permanent candidate for induction into the hall of universal and permanent values to inform human action and to give meaning to otherwise ephemeral and fragmented lives (cf. Goodin, 1982, 40). 'It is inconceivable to me,' writes Leopold (1968, pp.223-4), 'that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect and admiration for the land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense' so that 'a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.' But how do we know and what does it mean to say that 'integrity, stability and beauty' are qualities that inhere in nature?

This brings us to the crucial question: if values reside in nature, then how can we know what they are? The routes to such an understanding are many and varied. Intuition, mysticism, contemplation, religious revelation, metaphysics, and personal introspection have all provided, and continue to provide, paths for acquiring such understandings. On the surface, at least, these modes of approach contrast radically with scientific enquiry. Yes, I shall argue, they all necessarily share a commonality. All versions of revealed values in nature rely heavily upon particular human capacities and particular anthropocentric *mediations* (sometimes even upon the charismatic interventions of visionary individuals). Through deployment of highly emotive terms such as love, caring, nurturing, responsibility, integrity, beauty, and the like, they inevitably represent such 'natural' values in distinctively humanized terms, thus

producing distinctively human *discourses* about intrinsic values. For some, this 'humanising' of values of nature is both desirable and in itself ennobling, reflecting on the peculiarities of our own position in the 'great chain of being' (Lovejoy, 1936). '*Humanity is nature becoming conscious of itself*' was the motto that the anarchist geographer Reclus adopted, clearly indicating that the knowing subject has a creative role to play at least in translating the values inherent in nature unto humanized terms. But if, and Ingold (1986, 104) notes, 'the physical world of nature cannot be apprehended as such, let alone confronted and appropriated, save by a consciousness to some degree emancipated from it,' then how can we be sure that human beings are appropriate agents to represent all the values that reside in nature?

The ability to discover intrinsic values depends, then, on the ability of human subjects endowed with consciousness and reflexive as well as practical capacities to become *neutral* mediators of what those values might be. This often leads, as in religious doctrines, to the strict regulation of human practices (e.g. ascetism of practices like yoga) so as to ensure the openness oh human consciousness to the natural world. This problem of anthropocentric mediations is equally present within scientific enquiry. But here too the scientist is usually cast in the role of a knowing subject acting as a *neutral mediator*, under the strictest guidelines of certain methods and practices (which sometimes put to shame many a Buddhist), seeking to uncover, understand, and represent accurately the processes at work in nature. If values inherit in nature, then science by virtue of its objective procedures should provide one reasonably neutral path for finding out what they might be.

[…]

In "The Nature of Environment: Dialectics of Social and Environmental Change", *Socialist Register*, Vol.29, 1993

Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene

Bruno Latour (1947)

Bruno Latour is a philosopher and an anthropologist. After field studies in California and Africa, he specialized in the analysis of scientists and engineers at work. He is Professor at Sciences Po Paris where he is the scientific director of the Medialab, and a Centennial Professor at the London School of Economics. Latour is the author of several books and essays, including Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts *(with Steve Woolgar, 1986),* We Have Never Been Modern *(1991) and* Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy *(2004).*

In this excerpt from Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene, *Latour examines our confrontation to a piece of news about global warming, raising questions related to humans' role in creating the facts, but also in generating the existence of the phenomena described.*

"Et pourtant la Terre s'émeut"
Michel Serres, Le contrat naturel

How are we supposed to react when faced with a piece of news like this one from Le Monde on Tuesday, May 7, 2013: "At Mauna Loa, on Friday May 3, the concentration of CO2 was reaching 399.29 ppm"? How can we absorb the odd novelty of the headline: "The amount of CO 2 in the air is the highest it has been for more than 2.5 million years — the threshold of 400 ppm of CO2, the main agent of global warming, is going to be crossed this year"? Such an extension of both the span of deep history and the impact of our own collective action is made even more troubling by the subtitle in the same article, which quietly states: "The maximum permissible CO2 limit was crossed just before 1990". So not only do we have to swallow the news that our very recent development has modified a state of affairs that is vastly older that the very existence of the human race (a diagram in the article reminds us that the oldest human tools are comparatively very recent!), but we have also to absorb the disturbing fact that the drama has been completed and that the main revolutionary event is behind us, since we have already crossed a few of the nine "planetary boundaries" considered by some scientists as the ultimate barrier not to overstep![2] I think that it is easy for us to agree that, in modernism, people are not equipped with the mental and emotional repertoire to deal with such a vast scale of events; that they have difficulty submitting to such a rapid acceleration for which, in addition, they are supposed to feel responsible while, in the meantime, this call for action has none of the traits of their older revolutionary dreams. How can we simultaneously be part of such a long history, have such an important influence, and yet be so late in realizing what has happened and so utterly impotent in our attempts to fix it?

What I find amazing in such a piece of news is first, the number of scientific disciplines involved in producing the set of figures that the journalist uses — from

[2] Rockström, Johan. "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity." *Nature* 461.24 September 2009 (2009) and a vigourous critique in The Planetary Boundaries Hypothesis, A Review of the Evidence http://thebreakthrough.org/archive/planetary_boundaries_a_mislead.

climatology to paleontology — and second, the historical drama in which those sciences are, from now on, so deeply entangled. It is impossible to read such a statement as an "objective fact" contemplated coldly from a distant place, as was supposed to be the case, in earlier times, when dealing with "information" coming from the "natural sciences". There is no distant place anymore. And along with distance, objectivity is gone as well; or at least, an older notion of objectivity that was unable to take into account the active subject of history. No wonder that climatosceptics are denying the reliability of all those "facts" that they now put in scare quotes. In a way they are right, not because all those disciplines are not producing any objects able to resist objections (that's where objectivity really comes from), but because the very notion of objectivity has been totally subverted by the presence of humans in the phenomena to be described — and in the politics of tackling them.[3]

While the older problem of science studies was to understand the active role of scientists in the construction of facts, a new problem arises: how to understand the active role of human agency not only in the construction of facts, but also in the very existence of the phenomena those facts are trying to document? The many important nuances between facts, news, stories, alarms, warnings, norms, and duties are all mixed up. This is why it is so important to try to clarify a few of them anew. Especially when we are trying to understand how we could shift from economics to ecology, given the old connection between those two disciplines and the "scientific world view".

[…]

New Literary History, Vol. 45, pp. 1-18, 2014

[3] Szerszynski, Bronislaw. Nature Technology and the Sacred. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2005; Northcott, Michael S. *A Political Theology of Climate Change*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013.

Repair

Kader Attia (1970)

*Born in 1970 into an Algerian family in Paris, Kader Attia spent his childhood between a Parisian banlieue and the neighborhood of Bab el Oued in Algiers. His childhood between France and Algeria has had a profound impact on his work, and his time spent living in the Congo-Kinshasa, as well as Venezuela, has further informed his vision. His work tackles the relations between the Western Thought and extra-Occidental cultures, particularly through Architecture, the Human body, History, Nature, Culture, and Religions. In 2014, Beirut Art Center hosted "*Contre Nature*", one of Attia's solo shows. The exhibition was the result of an extensive, interdisciplinary research around the notion of* Repair, *and a trace of one of his* Repairs *can still be found on the ground. Through unexpected modes of re-appropriation and repair, Attia's works raised fundamental questions on what binds and separates nature and culture in different spaces and at different times.*

*In this text published on Artforum in 2013, Attia discusses the intellectual framework and the evolution of "*Repair. In Five Acts*"*, a project presented at *KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin that same year (-as told to critic Miguel Amado, curator of the Portuguese Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, and former curator for institutions including Tate St Ives and the PLMJ Foundation in Lisbon).*

I have been exploring what I call reappropriation for many years now. I borrow the term from the French anarchist thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who proclaimed that "Property is theft!" in the mid-1800s. Another source of inspiration is the *Cannibal Manifesto*, written by Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in 1928, which theorizes that Brazil could only get rid of its European cultural legacy by "cannibalizing" it. The writings of Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist from Martinique who took part in the Algerian Nationalist Movement, are pivotal as well for their examination of the psychology of the colonized subject and their path to liberation.

I believe that reappropriation is an endless exercise of exchange among cultures, and I have come to the conclusion that there can only be such a process when there has initially been a "dispossession." For instance, I remember the 2008–2009 exhibition "Picasso and the Masters" at the Grand Palais in Paris, which traced Picasso's works back to their artistic sources. I was appalled to see that there was not a single African artifact on display. In the West, one has to be conscious of this dispossession of the non-Western world, otherwise the cultural amnesia that currently dominates the Western mind-set will subsist.

When I was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1990s, I noticed a piece of fabric made by the Kuba peoples, with applications of French-style embroideries that covered holes made by insects—a gesture of repair rather than decoration. Elsewhere, in the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution, I saw a Congolese sculpture whose original shell-shaped eye had been replaced by an ordinary button. Integrating a Western element into an African object is an intentional act that represents the slave's resistance to the master's power.

It is through repair that I believe non-Western cultures begin to take back their liberties. For example, in the slide show *Open Your Eyes*—which I recently presented at MoMA as part of the "Performing Histories" series—I juxtapose photographs of African artifacts that have been repaired with images of wounded soldiers in World War I whose faces were subjected to rudimentary cosmetic surgery. My aim is to reveal that there is a cultural gap between the Western and non-Western worlds through different understandings of the aesthetics of the human body.

In the current exhibition in Berlin, I take my reflection on repair a step further. The exhibition aims to demonstrate how, across both culture and nature, any system of life is rooted in a continuum of repairs. The exhibition is divided into five parts, each devoted to a topic: "Culture," "Politics," "Science," "Nature," and "Repair in Continuity." Within "Culture," for example, there is a video of LP covers, for which the sound track is a musical selection drawn from the records that elucidates how genres such as blues, jazz, salsa, or meringue were developed by the descendants of slaves in North and South America. They were blended with African styles during the post–World War II period of independencies, although Western musicologists claimed that they were being copied rather then returned to their original context.

The key issue behind the exhibition is the debt that European colonial powers owe to the African men who fought on their side, both in Europe and in Africa, during World War I. This moral question is set against current European immigration policies, which intend to close Europe's borders to the peoples of its former African colonies. *The Debt* is a slide show featured in the "Politics" section of the exhibition that addresses this theme. The work focuses on the *tirailleurs*, the soldiers recruited in the French African colonies, and the *sans papiers*, the so-called illegal immigrants that one could consider the grandsons and granddaughters of the tirailleurs. One of the images included in the work encapsulates its raison d'être. It depicts a tirailleur demonstrating in front of the Palais de la Porte Dorée, which was inaugurated as a museum of the colonies in 1931 and which later became, I would say ironically, a museum of immigration. He holds a sign saying "Our ancestors died for France in 1914–18 and 1939–45. Did they have documentation?"

The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity

Paul Gilroy (1956)

In *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and double consciousness*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993 – pp.1-2.

Paul Gilroy (1956) is a sociologist and writer. He is the Anthony Giddens Professor of Social Theory in the Sociology Department at the London School of Economics. He is also known as an expert in music, and his article Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a "Changing" Same *(1991) is considered a key-essay in this field.* In The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness *(1993), Gilroy questions the notions of cultural nationalism and presents us with the idea that a culture can transcend ethnicity and nationality. He introduces the black Atlantic as a culture that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean of British, but rather all at once. This notion interests us here for the light it sheds on the land and territory not as a set of cultural and ethnical boundaries, but rather a space where a new culture can emerge.*

In this text, Gilroy introduces the notions of hybridity *and* métissage *as an alternative approach to theories that tend to present cultures as mutually exclusive and strictly related to nationalities and specific territories. This notion that was first articulated by Edouard Glissant is central to postcolonial studies.*

Later in 1997, Glissant will introduce the concept of Tout-monde *(Whole-World)*: *"*What I call Tout-Monde is our universe—the way it changes and lasts by exchanging and, at the same time, the 'vision' we have of it*" (Glissant, Treatise on the Tout-Monde).*

> We who are homeless, - Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honourable sense… We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavour for all ideas that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for "realities", we do not believe that they will last. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin. The wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open the ice and other all too thin "realities."
>
> *Nietzsche*
>
> *On the notion of modernity*. It is a vexed question. Is not every era "modern" in relation to the preceding one? It seems that at least one of the components of "our" modernity is the spread of the awareness we have of it. The awareness of our awareness (the double, the second degree) is our source of strength and our torment.
>
> *Edouard Glissant*

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either of both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be

mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has bees viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.

The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. At present, they remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic – black and white. These colours support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of "races" and ethnic identity.

Though largely ignored by recent debates over modernity and its discontents, these ideas about nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity are characteristically modern phenomena that have profound implications for cultural criticism and cultural history. They crystallised with the revolutionary transformations of the West at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries and involved novel typologies and modes of identification. Any shift towards a postmodern condition should not, however, mean that the conspicuous power of these modern subjectivities and the movements they articulated has been left behind. Their power has, if anything, grown, and their ubiquity as a means to make political sense to the world is currently unparalleled by the languages of class and socialism by which they once appeared to have been surpassed. My concern here is less with explaining their longevity and enduring appeal that with exploring some of the special political problems that arise from the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the enlightenment. I have become fascinated with how successive generations of black intellectuals have understood this connection and how they have projected in their writing and speaking in pursuit of freedom, citizenship, and social and political autonomy.

If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the "Indians" they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from each other, then so be it. This seems as though it ought to be an obvious and self-evident observation, but its stark character has been systematically obscured by commentators from all sides of political opinion. Regardless of their affiliation to the right, left, or centre, groups have fallen back on the idea of cultural nationalism, on the overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of "black" and "white" people. Against this choice stands another, more difficult opinion: the theorisation of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity. From the viewpoint of ethnic absolutism, this would be a litany of pollution and impurity. These terms are rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents.

[…]

V. Biography

Otobong Nkanga was born in 1974, Kano, Nigeria . She lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. A visual artist and performer, Nkanga began her art studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria and continued at the École Superieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. She was at the residency program at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, Netherlands. She obtained her Masters in the Performing Arts at Dasarts, Amsterdam, Netherlands in 2008. Nkanga was a guest of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm Artists-in-Berlin Program from June 2013 to 2014.

Nkanga's recent shows and performances include:

MHKA Anvers *Bruise and Lustre* (2015); *Kadist Foundation Paris Comot your Eyes Make I borrow you Mine* (2015); *Diaspore*, 14 Rooms Basel, Switzerland (2014); *In Pursuit of Bling*, 8th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, Germany (2014); *Glimmer Fragments Symposium Landing and confessions*, Stedelijk museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2014); *Sharjah Biennial 11*, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2013); *Across the Board: Politics of Representation*, Tate Modern, The Tanks, London, United Kingdom (2012); *Inventing world: The Artist as citizen*, Biennale Benin, Cotonou, Benin (2012); *Tropicomania: The Social life of Plants*, Betonsalon, Center of art and research, Associated venue of La Triennale 2012 - Intense Proximity, Paris, France (2012); *Object Atlas Fieldwork* in the Museum, Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany (2012); and *ARS 11*, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland (2011).