

THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF A GEOGRAPHY OF THE COMMONS. JAZZ AND THE INVENTION OF AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on a key epoch in which an essential articulation between history, geography, politics and music allowed for a short time a radical opening of invention and emancipation. The 1960s not only deconstructed the conservative ideologies of the previous decades, but through such a subtraction made possible a different discourse about universalism and about the commons. My investigation connects political events (like the independence of some African states or the fight for racial and social justice) to musical events (like free jazz) in order to advance the hypothesis not only of a potential history (a concept already defined by Ariella Azoulay in 2019), but also of a potential geography. Such a geography represented an opening that allowed the imagination of an authentic existence of the commons, a dimension that seems now to have been lost, but that would be and is worth re-enacting.

Keywords: potential geography, musical geography, commons, invention, jazz

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*Independence has been turned into a cage,
with people looking at us from outside the bars,
sometimes with charitable compassion,
sometimes with glee and delight.*

Patrice Lumumba
in his last letter to his wife
December 1960

FROM ACCRA TO OAKLAND TO ALGIERS

It is important to position the theoretical work of this research from the start: it examines the articulation, in the 1960s, of several political events (the independence of some African states and the fight for racial and social justice) and aesthetic events (the emergence of free jazz). Events are forms of interrupting the usual (and often academic) narratives which prefer to regard them either as accidents on the longer course of the evolution of societies or as facts that can be fully explained in their contexts. The work of this text is not, in the main, an explanatory one, but rather a narrative one, a choice which allows for the testing of several conceptual hypotheses, relevant both to the period under discussion and to the modalities of defining and constituting the forms of interpretation that make an event visible and readable to us. As such, the concepts of potential history and potential geography may open different paths for the disciplines involved in identifying

and understanding what events are and how they affect our present. A few stories will thus be told in the hope of an epistemological gain or at least of a rethinking of the concepts and perspectives through which we usually understand time and space.

When Frantz Fanon arrived in Accra in April 1958 in order to take part, as a delegate of Algeria, at the All-African Peoples' Conference, the times (and we could add: spaces and territories) were indeed *a-changing*. Bob Dylan's song with the same title would only be composed in 1963 (and released in 1964 and by that time a lot of the things and stories that this text deals with were already in the past). Music seemed to come afterwards, in a slight delay, a kind of reflection reacting to history and facts. By that time President Kennedy had been assassinated and Fanon himself had died (in 1961), at 36 years old. The first of these events would continue to obsess American minds for the next decade. However, one could point out without reserve that the legacy of Fanon would be far more important to the reshaping of the world and the paradigm shifts that were to follow. It was also far more important in the act of imagining a world based on an ethics *of the commons*.

Between 1958 and his death, Fanon published two key books, *A Dying Colonialism* (1959) which tackled, among other key concepts, the idea of decolonising the mind, and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a book that was immediately censored in some parts of the Western world, including France. Regarding Africa, from a virtually unknown figure upon his arrival in Accra he became a guiding light for many of the movements for radical change, on the issue of independence, racial justice, civil rights as well as social justice. The 1958 congress was organised by Kwame Nkrumah, himself an important writer and political theorist,¹ and the first Prime Minister of Ghana after this country obtained its independence in March 1957.²

When Fanon began to speak on that day in April 1958, few had heard of him. Some misspelt his name even afterwards, in their telling of the event, like in the case of South African writer Es'kia Mphahlele. Yet Fanon's words and his voice enraptured the audience: "in staccato French he carries the audience to the horrible scene of French atrocities on Algerians ... He gets the loudest and longest ovation of all the speakers" (Mphahlele, 1960, p. 38). Fanon's success was due in no small part to his articulating perfectly the mood of the times and their impatience to change. His legitimisation of violence in view of independence certainly hit the right chord: "if Africa is to be free, we cannot beg. We must tear by force" (cited in Zeilig, 2015, p. 2). Although he spoke of his Algerian experience, he was speaking at the same time of the whole continent and, it has to be noted here, of a *geography-to-come*, an Idea of Africa that would transcend the frames imposed by the colonial past and by the tumultuous present.

In 1961, ill with leukaemia, he travelled to the Algerian border specifically in order to speak in front of the National Liberation Army as they were getting ready to fight the French. He used words to build a fighting spirit, "he read to the assembled troops, many of them illiterate, from his draft of what would become the most famous chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth*, about

¹ Early on in his education he was influenced by authors like W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. He studied in the United States where he met C.L.R. James and was identified by the F.B.I. as a possible communist. His writings did indeed connect decolonisation with revolutionary socialism. He was deposed in 1966 by a coup orchestrated by the CIA which led to the realignment of Ghana with the Western Bloc.

² Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who later was known as a key Barbadian poet and a Professor of Comparative Literature at New York University, was in 1955 in Ghana and witnessed Kwame Nkrumah coming to power and Ghana becoming the first African state to gain independence. His poems and especially his trilogy, *The Arrivants*, explored, through complex narratives and rhythms influenced by jazz, the relations between the Caribbean, Africa and the Western world.

the pitfalls of national consciousness” (Zeilig, 2015, p. 2). He was thus speaking not only of a future to come (a dream of independence), but also of problems that would be encountered in this liberated future, the main one being nationalism.

Beyond the coloniser’s military strength, the whole continent was bound to tackle a different, more powerful, and monstrous enemy: the coloniser’s heritage. In his 1961 book for example, he predicted that after independence the national bourgeoisie would become “an acquisitive, voracious, and ambitious petty caste, dominated by a small-time racketeer mentality, content with the dividends paid out by the former colonial power” (Fanon, 2005, p. 119). To counteract this, the continent needed an *Idea of Africa* that was more suitable to the global struggle that was emerging, one for which independence was not the ultimate target but only the first step.

Fanon’s adoptive Algeria did gain independence in 1962 after a bloody eight-year war. There (and not only there) he would be remembered as a hero and celebrated as a revolutionary in the 1960s turbulent struggles. However, he was only politely acquiesced in academic circles and, as the 60s died and were retroactively tamed, his work was sanitised³ according to the new ideological needs:

“the academy’s adoption of radical thinkers is always a sanitising process, turning revolutionary action into passive reflection, analysis into academic pontification. To read Fanon in the 1980s was to cherry pick from a post-modern orchard, divorcing his work on racism, subjectivity and lived experience from its wider revolutionary context and its untidy dialectic” (Zeilig, 2015, p. 5).

But for a while things looked like they could go a different path and on that different path everything seemed to change: the atmosphere, the paradigms, the hierarchies, the times, but also the space. And this path included the emergence of Africa – the Idea of Africa, a world not only free from colonialism, but different, a possible creation of an opportunity not to be missed, that of a world, a society and indeed a geography that would not, for the first time, follow the model of the West but offer something new, something better: a *common* territory or a geography of the commons.

1960 was declared the Year of Africa. Seventeen countries gained independence that year and the armed opposition to apartheid in South Africa began. In the later analysis of James H. Meriwether, the events of that year strengthened the link between the African Americans and the global struggle against domination especially on an African-centred basis. It allowed for the link between the struggle against white supremacy in the American South and in South Africa. (Meriwether, 2002, p. 194). In all this Frantz Fanon was the proverbial man of the times, not in the sense that he only reflected the changes, but that he was a key active part in shaping them. His own narrative, the changes that affected him and made possible his revolutionary ideas were, for this French citizen born in Martinique, in no small part due to Africa:

“Without Algeria, Fanon would have been a brilliant and courageous psychiatrist, probably practising in France, but not the revolutionary we celebrate today. Fanon, after departing France for Algeria in 1953, continued to write important psychiatric papers. But after he left Algeria at the end of 1956, all his major work spoke of his engagement with the FLN; he wrote for Algerian national liberation and against France’s genocidal war” (Zeilig, 2015, p. 14).

³ The same sanitising process would happen with jazz’s relation to the Idea of Africa. Beginning with the 70s and increasingly in the next decades, the political engagement of jazz performers in the 60s began to be regarded at best as a phenomenon entirely related to the context of the times and thus something to be reconsidered retroactively with a distant eye and at worst as a regrettable naivety of the performers.

The fact that Fanon was an internationalist and regarded ‘liberation’ as an impossible goal, a utopian objective if it remained within the frames of the nation state, proves that for a time – albeit ephemeral – it was possible to envision a postcolonial world that would not follow the model (including the geographical one) imposed by the West. The Idea of Africa was something different from a coalescence of new nation states – a world at once free and common, in spite or maybe even due to the many differences and particularities that the continent contained. In his view, “for a truly human society to arise, national consciousness must be transcended, dissolved, and broken down on the terrain of global society (and struggle)” (Zeilig, 2015, p. 9). In this respect, the fact that Fanon based his deconstructive view on key Marxist insights on economy and that his vision could be – sometimes without him noticing the articulations – connected with fundamental communist ideas did not help him, being aggressively rejected by most of the West and, by the way, slowed his acceptance by moderate activists for independence and racial justice.

In tune with many of the ideas promoted on the eve and during the Russian Revolution:

“Fanon’s work can be seen as his own highly original attempt to pull back together – and examine – the twin strands of national freedom and international ‘humanist’ liberation” (Zeilig, 2015, p. 12).

If such views made him unacceptable for most of the liberals and so-called academic experts, they brought him closer to another key movement and struggle of the times: the civil rights movement and its culmination in the formation and success – albeit for a limited time – of the Black Panthers in West Oakland, California, USA.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded on October 15, 1966, by two key figures that met at the Merritt College University: Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. It would gain adherents in over forty US cities, with subsidiary information centres (called National Fronts Against Fascism offices) across the nation. The works of Fanon and the situation of Africa were essential elements in the development of the movement and its success. Bobby Seale introduced Newton to the works of Fanon through *The Wretched of the Earth*:

“A notoriously slow reader, Newton would read the extraordinary book six times. For Newton, and for many other Black Americans, Fanon’s words were a revelation, not merely of African colonial conditions, but of the world’s problems and why Black America was in such a wretched state” (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p. 3).

What Fanon offered these American readers was, beyond the obvious political message and an exposure and deconstruction of the prevailing ideologies of the world, a new understanding of space, territory, and man’s relation to them:

“Black folks in America saw themselves in the villages of resistance and saw their ghettos as little more than internal colonies similar to those discussed in Fanon’s analysis” (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p. 4).

With emancipation of the mind came a new geography reflecting both the authentic relations of power (beyond the rhetoric of liberalism) and the necessity to change. This new geography was already proposing a new understanding of the world as a globe: not any longer the generalisation and expansion through all types of violence of a perceived superior model (the Western one), but as a potential voice for a new imagination of the planet, in which Africa and the US South, Latin America and Asia would connect according to a new rewritten history and new points of reference:

“Fanon’s analysis mixed well with Malcolm’s militant anti-establishment oratory. Malcolm spoke often about the anticolonial liberation movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He spoke also of the Bandung Conference (1955) in Indonesia where African and Asian nations pledged support to the anticolonial movement” (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p. 5).

It is of course nothing new in connecting Fanon's ideas, the transformation of Africa towards a postcolonial continent and the movements for racial and social justice in America. What is however in focus in this text is how jazz contributed actively to these changes and how one such change was represented by the creation of a different perception of space, the act of imagining a new geography. In a way, our point here is that the times, political and musical, were already preparing or working towards a planetary⁴ view *avant la lettre*. In this regard it is certainly interesting to observe that when Fanon arrived in Accra, Louis Armstrong had already been to Ghana and encountered the public to great success.

Armstrong had arrived in Accra in May 1956 as part of a tour that included mainly European destinations, so the African stop was in fact an interesting and relevant *detour*. This event took place some time before the propaganda tours that the US State Department would organise in order to counteract the influence of communist ideas and to market the success of liberal capitalism, ironically through those that were its chief victims. He was greeted at the airport by a band which he immediately joined playing his trumpet and he later performed in front of a (very) large audience outdoors in the presence of a clearly emotional Nkrumah. The visit had an effect on Armstrong himself who, before, had been known for ridiculing those (for example Babs Gonzales) who tried to connect everything to Africa. The experience was so important that by July 1957, when the State Department tried to use him for a propaganda tour of the Soviet Union, he refused: "The people over there ask me what's wrong with my country. What am I supposed to say?" (Monson, 2010, p. 130).

The position of the jazz players was thus indeed complicated. They were intensely aware of the problems at home, and yet, compared with people in Africa, they were regarded in terms of progress, liberation, and even privilege:

"African audiences across the continent seemed to view black American jazz musicians as sophisticated examples of African progress" (Monson, 2010, p. 130).

In this, music played an essential part, and it is important to note here that it was simply a reiteration of the cliché of music as a universal language, but the evolution in specific circumstances of a language that was African in its roots. The reception offered to somebody like Louis Armstrong in Accra was thus one of politics and not aesthetics or, even better, one aware of the strict relation between politics and aesthetics. And if this was evident in the case of the music of Louis Armstrong⁵ (which by the 1950s seemed too mellow and too tolerant to more radical performers like the bop players), it would become even more clear a decade later when performers deeply rooted in free jazz and the fights for civil rights, racial justice and equality arrived in Africa. A lot seemed to have changed in the meantime.

In 1969, Algiers hosted the Pan-African Cultural Festival, which debuted on July 21 and continued for eight days. There were nightly concerts by the likes of Miriam Makeba, Nina

⁴ The concept of planetarity has been coined in opposition to the imposition of globalism at the end of the 20th century. See Spivak, 2003.

⁵ It has to be noted that Armstrong resumed his collaboration with the State Department propaganda endeavours, and one such low point was the recording in 1961 of a musical written by Dave Brubeck and his wife Lola called *The Real Ambassadors*, which ambitiously tackled many ardent problems of the day trying to imprint on them a pro-US view. The musical was set in the fictional African state of Talgalla and contained such enlightened lyrics as "always be a credit to your government." Although the writers dared to criticize some aspects of (especially) racism in the US, they were entirely convinced of the positive Cold War policies of the State Department.

Simone, and Archie Shepp. In his documentary film⁶ on the festival, William Klein captured Shepp's jazz improvisation with Touareg musicians, during which he was filmed shouting that 'Jazz is Black Power!'. The performance enjoyed great symbolism as an emblematic example of Pan-African artistic collaboration. It also contained symbolism on a difference in understanding the values of civilisation and humanity: the Western world was pompously celebrating the moon landing as a clear success of opening new frontiers and proving the superiority of the US social, economic and political model. The festival was more concerned with frontiers on Earth and celebrated what was already called post-imperialism. If the USA portrayed itself as the pinnacle of Western civilisation, Algiers was defined, in clear opposition to this propaganda, as the Third World capital⁷ of a new planet. The times were different, and change was in the air. For a while it looked like Algiers could be a paradigm shift, one that would make possible forms of cultural revolutionary citizenship, a new perception of the globe, and, potentially, an authentic revolution.

POTENTIAL GEOGRAPHY: A HYPOTHESIS

The atmosphere of the 1960s was certainly enthusiastic:

"it was the mid 1960s, movements were circling the globe like fresh winds blowing through stale, unopened, darkened rooms" (Abu-Jamal, 2004, p. 1).

The decades that followed put away quickly and relentlessly those hopes, like a return to closed shuttered rooms. From a retroactive (and mostly reactionary) view, strictly interested in facts, the language of the times, the projects and the movements that were born with them become simple circumstantial evidence of how it was then in very different seasons. A historian, as well as a geographer, does not spend a lot of time and energy in dealing with unrealised potentialities. They usually archive them under the terms of utopia or romanticism and return to scientific endeavours. They move on, deal with the evidence at hand and, sympathetic or not, keep the past in the past. This is certainly true of the ideology we live in, one that pervades the media, the political discourses and even academia, but not exclusively, not every time, not everywhere.

When Walter Benjamin wrote his 1940 theses on the concept of history, he was certainly moving against the tide of historiography. His famous injunction, "to brush history against the grain", meant precisely the act of opening up possibilities that are not allowed by the triumphal march of the historical continuity of the ruling classes and ingrained ideology. One of the key elements of historiography that he questioned was the way in which an event was transformed – in the eyes and through the judgement of the historian – in a historical occurrence (where historical means that the event is declared over, it has become a thing belonging to the past). Such a procedure disconnects the event from the present and it is only through this disconnection that the historian understands his position (legitimised as scientific and objective). What is also important here is that in this way the event has ceased to be a danger for the present: it has no longer any relevance, beyond the academic work of archiving, which also means that the event

⁶ See William Klein, *The Pan-African Festival of Algiers, France/Algeria, 1969*, 90 min.

⁷ Incidentally this is the title of American activist Elaine Mokhtefi's 2008 memoirs: *Algiers, Third World Capital*, Verso, 2008. Born in New York and relocated to Paris in 1951 (where she met, among many others, Frantz Fanon), she moved to Algiers in 1962 where she did various jobs including in the University, but more importantly she helped many Black Panthers exiles, including Eldridge Cleaver.

has failed. In many ways this is what has happened to the event that we will call here “the invention of Africa” (or *Uhuru Africa*, to borrow a title of a key jazz album) as an emancipatory form of imagining the commons beyond the ideological frameworks accepted then and now.

The enthusiasm of the independence, the strong belief in a different possibility beyond what was (and still is) accepted as possible has been declared a historical occurrence, an event of the past and thus a (predictable and, for many historians, desired) failure. What happens here, if we follow Benjamin’s analysis in the fragments N5a,7⁸ from *The Arcades Project*, is not that the event is considered independent of the complex network of social, economic, and political context in which it was produced, but that *now* it is perceived independent of the process in which it survives. It doesn’t concern us anymore, beyond the scientific, academic, or museographic (neutral, objective) attention.

Michael Löwy, in his close reading of Walter Benjamin’s theses, offers an illustration of the demand to “brush history against the grain” by articulating the German philosopher’s ideas with those of Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano, author of *Open Veins of Latin America* (1981), a history of the continent written from the point of view of the victims. According to Löwy, “to write history ‘à contre-sens’ is to refuse any affective identification with the official heroes, the Iberian colonialists and the European powers” (Löwy, 2001, p. 56). The process is one of “demystification” and it certainly requires an act of invention similar to the historical events, and thus one that keeps the active quality of an event. In the same vein, “the concept of ‘African history’ marked a radical transformation of anthropological narratives” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 190).

The very idea of a history viewed from another point of reference than the standard Western one proved to be a challenge and had wide repercussions. In the opinion of V. Y. Mudimbe, it was no less than a reconfiguration of the understanding of history and “the invention of an African history” which articulated with a simultaneous “critical evaluation of the history of the Same” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 190). A work of deconstruction was initiated, one that was bound to reassess both what history is not, and essentially *what it should be*. In this context it was relevant that:

“during the methodological renewal of the 1950s Lévi-Strauss, in order to celebrate the ‘savage mind’, relativizes the very concept of history, which as he put it, ‘is a disconnected whole, formed of areas each of which is defined by a frequency of its own’” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 190).

The invention of Africa could thus be regarded as a utopian endeavour only within the bounds of the conservative understanding of history. Nothing comes easier for the historian than to pinpoint an event as a (passing and threatening) utopia, easy to romanticise, but one which the scientific eye needs to keep in its place. Unable to perceive its own powerful ideological position, such a historian develops a barely disguised hatred of utopia which, as Miguel Abensour observed, is “a repetitive symptom which, from generation to generation, affects the defenders of the existing order, who are prey to the fear of otherness” (Abensour, 2000, p. 19). There is no doubt that imagining a potential history would fall under this categorisation as utopia. Such an endeavour is however the work of a radical author of our times which is unsurprisingly closely connected to Walter Benjamin.

⁸ “Barbarism lurks in the very concept of culture – as the concept of a fund of values which is considered independent not, indeed, of the production process in which these values originated, but of the one in which they survive” (Benjamin, 1999, pp. 467-468).

In 2019, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay published *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism*, a book which does not shy away from a powerful diagnosis:

“historians are guilty of inhabiting the position of judge in the court of history, as if the struggle was over and they themselves are removed from history” (Azoulay, 2019, p. 377).

And to this the only solution is an act of imagination:

“imagine historians going on strike, turning accepted imperial facts into criminal evidence. Imagine historians who understand that what sounds like a heavy charge against them is rather a charge against their discipline, which they have the power to radically change” (Azoulay, 2019, p. 379).

Potential history can only be achieved through an act of *unlearning* the past guarded by the archive, an ability to read history aware of the traces of crime which historians are unable to see, formatted as they are to find crime only in those documents where the intention to commit crime is explicitly written down. An unlearning that allows, as was the case for Walter Benjamin in 1940, the imaginative historian to take sides, to not shy away from, for example, admitting that the Native Americans were “the good guys” and to understand that there is no neutrality in the writing of history or the understanding of time. And, we may add here, in the understanding and distribution of space.

The invention of Africa is thus both a sign from the future (an almost Kantian horizon of understanding) and a redistribution of the past (history) and present (geography). For Tsenay Serequeberhan, “African liberation struggle is a world-disclosing phenomenon that offers the possibility of concretely reclaiming and establishing the historicity of African existence” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 10). This is of course not far from Martin Heidegger’s key insight that *die Welt weltet* (the world worlds). There is no natural, objective world; the moment meaning, values and identities come to the fore, the world is always produced or rather produces itself in an act (or event). To be able to perceive this opens the possibility to understand that there is no privileged view upon things and thus, in the case of Africa, to grasp the essential fact that “Africa is not heir to the European heritage” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 10). The key is not that by ending colonialism an authentic African history and geography would emerge. There is no such thing.

However, through decolonising and even through epistemic disobedience,⁹ a different history (outside the bounds of Western expertise) and a new geography (outside the criteria of Western geographers) could emerge. There is no real disconnection between historiography and geography. “Histories produce geographies and not vice versa” (Appadurai, 2013, p. 66), which means, according to Arjun Appadurai, that there is no natural founding and legitimising ground for the understanding of historical space or time. Space is produced as an event, it is part of a network of events, it should not be understood as a natural decorum:

“space is part of the continuity of the events within it. It is in itself an event, comparable with other events. It is not a mere container” (Berger, 2016, p. 132).

The idea that space is an event immediately attracts attention to all those figures that generally remain in the margins of scientific discourse: nomads, refugees, homeless people, stateless persons and even noncitizens. As long as space is perceived as organised and part of a parcellation that allows the governing of those that live within the accepted borders, these nomadic figures are just noise that affects the clear perception of structures. Their existence (which, again, is only perceived when space is understood as an event) questions political bearings and subverts legal and institutional decisions. Just as, for Walter Benjamin, the

⁹ The concept is at the forefront of Walter D. Mignolo’s work. For details see Mignolo, 2004.

ragpickers make necessary a questioning of the methodology of doing history/historiography, those that are 'mapless' require a similar questioning of geography as science:

"people, many people, have lost all their political bearings. Mapless, they do not know where they are heading" (Berger, 2016, p. 132).

We could venture to say that *mapless* implies here that space has no world. What does it need then for geography to perceive space as world?

It is appropriate here to meditate on what lessons geographers can learn from Heidegger's *die Welt weltet*. The concept of world emerged in close articulation, for the European identity, with the concept of history.¹⁰ It provided the geographical space necessary, in the imagination of European colonialism, to legitimise its dealings with the alterities encountered. In this sense the invention of Africa (as a spatio-temporal matrix of emancipation) does not stand as a *new* option in a series of possibilities, but as the elaboration and comprehension – through this horizon – of the key contradictions, tensions, but also potentialities of this – first of all – deconstruction of the colonial *worlding* of the world. It is also essential to notice that this was not only an African problem, and thus something that could be reduced to the demands of a particular identity to obtain its rights in a generally accepted framework (which is pretty much the mechanism of multiculturalism). The emancipation of Africa was not and cannot be understood through the lenses of contemporary multicultural ideology. It required, as key Black Panthers activists knew, a revolutionary transformation:

"some people in the Congo speak Swahili but Swahili has not freed them. Africans in South-West Africa or in Mozambique wear African robes and have not lost their African cultural patterns but at the same time they're slaves to colonialism and neocolonialism, so that our teachings for both adults and young black people is the necessity to have a revolutionary culture" (Abu-Jamal, 2016, p. 108).

As such, Africa is not just a place in which Africans could recover and reclaim an authentic reality¹¹ that colonialism erased or simply impeded. Postcolonialism understood early this hybrid reality (and identity) of the postcolonial subject(s). It could be the reason why, according to Mudimbe:

"the conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and a consequence of the experience of European hegemony; that is, in Gramsci's terms, 'the dominance of one social bloc over another, not simply by means of force or wealth, but by a social authority whose ultimate sanction and expression is a profound cultural supremacy.' These signs of a major contradiction are manifest in the increasing gap between social classes, and within each class, of the conflict between those who are culturally Westernised Africans and the others" (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 198).

The incipient (but not-yet dominant or even conceptualised) globalisation that was later to justify the forms of American neoliberal imperialism could still at that point (the 1960s) be countered by a collectively subjective imagination of a world. To put it another way, what Africa meant at that point could be explained in the terms of a *worlding* of a potential experience with concrete spatio-temporal coordinations. Historians tend to neglect this imaginative horizon

¹⁰ I mainly follow here the demonstration of Chengxi Tang in Tang, 2008.

¹¹ See Abu-Jamal, 2004, p. 9: "As early as 1787, a group of 'free Africans' petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for leave to resettle in Africa, because of the 'disagreeable and disadvantageous circumstances' under which 'free Africans' lived in post-Revolutionary America. The petitioning delegation was led by Black Masonic leader, Prince Hall". Lincoln himself would entertain the idea of resettling the Black people in Central America. Then "After the war ended with Union victory, a Republican Reconstruction-era governor of Tennessee, William G. Brownlow, would urge the US Congress to set aside a separate US territory for Black settlement."

because evidently the continent ended by adapting to the Western frameworks just as everybody else did. It became a subject only by being *subjected* to the acceptable criteria of time and space. However, if globalisation *subjects* us (cf. Osborne, 2018, p. 19), could we consider that at that point the attempt to think and make possible the emergence of a new African geography already announced what was later to be called, by Spivak, planetarity?

The work of globalisation¹² has proven to have a twofold mechanism: on the one hand, it eliminates as many borders as possible for the circulation of goods and the freedom of the capital and, on the other hand, it reinforces those borders for non-economic reasons. In order to achieve this second objective, it needs the conservation and repetition of the key tropes of nationalism. In Peter Osborne's terms, it needs "the cultural-political repetition of the national and (at a greater distance) the regional, which increasingly functions as the compensatory correlate of its destruction as an economic form" (Osborne, 2018, p. 51). In regard to this move towards African nations, postcolonial Africa in the 1960s stood on a threshold. Globalisation tamed this tenseness afterwards, by allowing the compensatory repetition of the national/regional in order to cover the real economic uniformisation and destruction of everything specific and local that could not function – on the surface at least – as a commodity for capitalism. In a similar process, music itself has become such a commodity, both exotic and subsumed to the logic of the music scene directed by Western money. And true to its mechanism, the capitalist logic of retroactive appropriation was able to capture (almost) everything that appeared able to oppose it.

One key internal tension of the last decades has been that the new postcolonial space was also the framework for the emergence of anticolonial nationalisms. At a first level this is a recoding that assures an imaginary satisfaction. Does it go any further? The idea of Africa was indeed an assertion, a proclamation, and essentially an invention. A performative logic was in play (it was also in the music that partook in the event), one that attempted to invent a collective subject as a spatial and historical (new, modern) reality.¹³ Potential geography could thus name this horizontal, imaginative and anticipatory coming together of multiple collective forms of present in a living space which, although speculative, is lived as real. Just as the concept of contemporary is a utopian "*actual* conjunction of all present times" (Osborne, 2018, p. 37), the invention of Africa was an act of productive imagination and a political act. It explains why, although perceived as *new*, this Africa was (and is) simultaneously thought as *old*. The internal difference is that the *new* Africa fully perceives itself as historical, as an intervention in space and time, as a standpoint for and against, while the old Africa is the myth that retroactively turns upside down the colonial hierarchy: the civilised ones were and are the Africans, while the Europeans prove to be and to have been the real barbarians.¹⁴

In this context, the limits of older terms (community, society, nation, culture, etc.) to explain this invention of Africa become evident. If mapping – and ultimately geography – are (research) tools of the Master, colonial instruments of domination (even or especially when they are scientifically legitimised), then (*Uhuru*) Africa names not only an alternative geography (and history), but a

¹² To keep a little longer to the distinction globe-planet, we could say that the globe space is always precisely mapped (and therein geographers usually find their duty and legitimation) and worldless while for the planet the space is mapless but worlded.

¹³ To put this in Osborne's terms, "colonies, initially figured as sites of the past, appear anew as the sites of the future, antiquating their colonial masters" (Osborne, 2018, p. 32), a future that, as he borrows the phrase from Maurice Blanchot, obstinately holds itself in reserve.

¹⁴ This dialectic of *new* and *old* follows the ideas of Dipesh Chakrabarty (cf. Chakrabarty, 2004, pp. 458-462).

radically different perception of space and time. For Frantz Fanon, just as colonialism interrupted a historicity proper to Africa, liberation had to do the same, it involved the necessary demise of colonial temporality. Liberation is however not a *return* to some original or natural essence or to an already existing (as world) space. It is more of a “practice of freedom” to follow Michel Foucault’s expression that Tsenay Serequeberhan uses in order to define African liberation (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 88). As Marcien Towa puts it, the aim is to build/invent an “auto-centric Africa” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 114).

It is interesting here, in the context of the idea of a potential geography, to note that Mudimbe’s conclusion to his book is titled *The Geography of Discourse*. In 1988 he thus defines the spatial configuration as essential and epistemologically significant. In the footsteps of Foucault, but also of Bloch and Braudel, he observes that “history is a legend, an invention of the present. It is both a memory and a reflection of our present” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 208). It is a relation to an invented space that has to be followed:

“I believe that the geography of African gnosis also points out the passion of a subject-object who refuses to vanish. He or she has gone from the situation in which he or she was perceived as a simple functional object to the freedom of thinking of himself or herself as the starting point of an absolute discourse. It has also become obvious, even for this subject, that the space interrogated by the series of explorations in African indigenous systems of thought is not a void” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 213).

However, in order to articulate space with discourse, a (collective) consciousness is needed. It was something that activists were aware of early on. In his famous 1959 talk in Rome, at the Second Congress of Negro-African Writers and Artists, Leopold Senghor emphasised that:

“the most striking thing about the negro peoples who have been promoted to autonomy and independence is precisely *the lack of consciousness*” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 28).

This consciousness is what art (and especially jazz) builds. Indeed, for Senghor, what defines the ontological difference of the Negro is a different act of knowledge:

“he feels that he feels, he feels his *existence*, he feels himself; and because he feels the Other, he is drawn towards the Other, into the rhythm with the Other, to be reborn in knowledge of the world” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 29).

As the author questions, isn’t this identification of the Negro with feelings an internalisation of racism, a way of taking negative Eurocentric positions and turning them into positive manifestations? How are we supposed to read them after the work of Edward Said (1995) or V.Y. Mudimbe? Mudimbe’s answer to this can be read in the following fragment:

“even in the most explicitly ‘Afrocentric’ descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. Does this mean that African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality? My own claim is that thus far the ways in which they have been evaluated and the means used to explain them relate to theories and methods whose constraints, rules, and systems of operation suppose a non-African epistemological locus” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 10).

So, where are we then? Perhaps the answer relates to a worlding or event yet to come, an opening that is still accessible in spite of all the signs pointing to the contrary. In the end, everything depends on understanding that the *new* is neither another option in a series that stays the same, nor a return to a previous authentic *old*. The name that Malcolm Little took for himself in 1950 may give us, if we follow the thought of Slavoj Žižek, a clue:

“The point was not to mobilise the blacks to fight for a return to their primordial African roots, but precisely to seize the opportunity provided by the X – an unknown new (lack of) identity engendered by the very process of enslavement that has ensured those roots were forever lost (...) a unique chance to reinvent themselves, to form a new identity more universal than the professed universalism of the whites” (Žižek, 2014, p. 133).

The invention of Africa is an event through seizing the opportunity offered by a subtraction, as in the case, for the Slovenian philosopher, of radical emancipation:

“is not subtraction, by definition a subtraction from the hold of a Master-Signifier? Is not the politics of radical emancipation a politics which practices subtraction from the reign of a Master-Signifier?” (Žižek, 2014, p. 411).

It is not the aim of this text to investigate all the levels and openings of such an understanding of invention and event. We will limit ourselves, within the frames of a potential geography sketched above, to meditate on how musical geography was essential to the event of *Uhuru Africa* and to the ability to imagine, for a limited time, a geography of the commons.

MUSICAL GEOGRAPHY OR HOW TO READ MAPS (WITH THE HELP OF ART)

In January 1955, Randy Weston recorded the album *Trio* with bassist Sam Gill and drummer Art Blakey, which featured his composition *Zulu*, a first take on Africa in a career that will often keep the continent as the main political and aesthetic reference. This reference was shared by some of his friends, among which Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes, who was close to Nigerian musician Babatunde Olatunji.¹⁵ Weston sought to translate Hughes’ freedom poems into an African language with continental commonality and use them as part of a musical project that in itself would be an active part of an emergence of such a commonality. Wondering how this was possible in a continent of more than 900 different dialects, and even more so in a continent whose shape and geographical delineations were in constant and radical turmoil, Weston went first to the United Nations:

“I was anxious to use an African language because I was quite upset by the Tarzan movies and how they depicted Africans. I spent time at the United Nations and met several African ambassadors and asked them what language I should choose to represent the whole continent; they said Kiswahili”¹⁶ (Weston, 2015).

Uhuru Africa, his album from 1960, was the first attempt of its kind, a project concerned first of all with being representative of an entire continent and thus, in a way, with trying to define it. It wanted to be a cry for freedom done in a representative voice, a work of music that described the global African people, and thus a kind of map that would underline the common core of a worldview, and not the concrete individual differences. It was an attempt at a philosophical geography, done through music. The album was not popular at the time. Perhaps it was more a sign from the future. Even writers like Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Commoli, authors in 1972 of the essential *Free Jazz*, seemed to miss the point. For them, as long as the preoccupation for Africa remained cultural, it was “a phatasmal satisfaction”, “an exclusively African cultura” and

¹⁵ Randy Weston’s first trip to Africa was in 1961, when he was part of the U.S. propaganda delegation that included Hughes, Flowers, Olatunji, and others at a festival in Lagos, Nigeria.

¹⁶ Kiswahili, also known as Swahili, is a language used mostly in East Africa, where it functions as a lingua franca.

for that reason not a “revolutionary culture” (Carles & Comolli, 2000, pp. 60-63). However, we can ask here, is that necessarily so?

The authentic political revolutions are often to be found in subtle aesthetic shifts. The main idea of Jacques Rancière’s reading of Flaubert is to be found in such an area: the French author produced a revolution not through his political ideas or intentions (he was rather a conservative), but through his almost obsessive focus on style. An entire paradigm, the modernist one, found its roots in this stylistic shift: the democratisation of the visible, and the disappearance of the Romantic Heroes, replaced by ordinary characters who now had a right to be the focus of stories or even, as it happens for example in the first chapter of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, a right to tell the story from the perspective of a debile mind. The real revolutions are to be found in details like these, which necessitate a radical courage to view things differently.

In Rancière’s opinion, the real democratic literature or art is not the one that tries to mimic the language and views of the masses and especially not the one that tries to adapt to their (perceived as limited) horizon. On the contrary, it’s to be found in what at surface can appear as the most complex and elitist modernist art, as in the above-mentioned novel of Faulkner or in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*. What these works perform is a recalibration of perception under or inside the continuous deconstruction of inegalitarian axioms. It is not a matter of direct political message; rather, it is a reconfiguration of the style and forms of perception that is or could be radical. *Uhuru Africa* belongs in the same fold. Baritone Brock Peters, who sang *African Lady* on the album, observed that:

the song “wasn’t written in a high key where my voice would sound operatic. It was written in a medium key where my voice had a mellow quality that would lend itself to jazz or music that wasn’t considered classical music” (Weston, 2015, p. 71).

It was essential for the music not to be perceived as part of a Western tradition (say, an opera with an African theme, fully contained in the tradition of the European form), and yet not totally disconnected from that, because for Weston the key was not to remove a tradition in order to make place for another, but to find a different, new path. For that reason, jazz seemed to be the proper medium. Improvisation is key to inventing a new society, an act that cannot and should not be done by following a known (even scientific) method or plan. It is also for this reason that geography itself, as an academic science (based on evidence and measurements and striving to be objective), was in the 1960s fully questioned. The aim was not to find new stable borders and delineate individual, internally defined communities but – for a while, at least – to have the courage to imagine others. For Benedict Anderson, a community is always in fact the (temporary) result of an act of imagination. Such an act can be hijacked by the official powers, something that happened with maps in this nascent scientification of geography:

“like censuses, European-style maps worked on the basis of a totalizing classification (...) the entire planet’s curved surface had been subjected to a geometrical grid which squared off empty seas and unexplored regions in empty boxes. The task of filling in the boxes was to be accomplished by explorers. They were on the march to put space under the same surveillance which the census-makers were trying to impose on persons. Triangulation by triangulation, war by war, treaty by treaty, the alignment of map and power proceeded” (Anderson, 2016, p. 173).

Maps shape the collective imagination and that is why State Apparatuses rely on them to enforce ideology (and incidentally that is why geographers have a lot to think about when they meditate, as they should, on the political, social and ideological effects of their discipline). In Benedict Anderson’s view, museums themselves (and thus art) are profoundly political, part of a political distribution of the commons through the barely disguised academisation of disciplines

(experts are produced by academia, whose criteria and judgements are then protected by the system and in turn they protect the system). However, could art function as a different reference point? Can geography be re-imagined and thus allow for a different history? It is perhaps relevant that one of the mottos used by Anderson for his book returns to Benjamin's injunction to brush history against the grain. Up to an extent, what we call here musical geography¹⁷ could do just that. And in the case of the 1960s and the relation of jazz performers to Africa, it is mostly an active shaping of space,¹⁸ rather than a reflection of (or reaction to) it. It is for this reason that the issue of the commons (and the possibility of thinking a geography able to understand and define it) is essential here.

Perhaps the very word – *reflection* – should be questioned here. It could point out not only the physical (and even geographical) laws of reflection, but also a specular form, akin to theoretical questioning. In a 1986 text on Nelson Mandela (entitled *The Laws of Reflection*), on Freedom Charter and revolutionary democracy, Jacques Derrida pondered on the relation between inheritance, reflection, and invention in a way that seems relevant to our discussion here and the jazz performers who view themselves as heirs to an Africa still to be defined. What is such an heir? In Derrida's view:

“one can recognize an authentic heir in the one who conserves and reproduces, but also in the one who respects the *logic* of the legacy even to the point of turning it on occasion against those who claim to be its guardians to the point of revealing what has never been seen in the inheritance: to the point of giving birth, by the unheard-of *act* of a reflection, to what had never seen the light of day” (Derrida, 2008, p. 66).

Mandela's reflections in the Freedom Charter promulgated in 1955, but also in his support of revolutionary democracy, are all active forms of shaping a *commons* that has to be invented in the sense of the word, which is also evident to Derrida, that defines what remains-to-come (*in-venire*) and thus decides what we have to do to prepare for its coming: “once again his reflection exhibits what phenomenality still dissimulates. It does not re-produce, it produces the visible” (Derrida, 2008, p. 79). The words could apply to *Uhuru Africa*, as well as to other acts of the 1960s. Such jazz performances were not meant to be (or become, although they were later reduced to that¹⁹) cultural commodities with an exotic hue. As Amiri Baraka pointed in his *Digging*, “Jazz is the music of Americans who were not allowed to be Americans” (Baraka, 2009, p. 13). Or even, to repeat Malcom X's formulation, of those living in America without being Americans. Their production of the visible was, for a short time, effective. In Heidegger's terms, it produced a world in which people could effectively live, like in a dream or displaying an enthusiasm similar to the one produced by revolutions. And it had concrete effects and that is why at least another name and another story must be added here. It also unfolds a geography that is potential, political, and emancipatory.

¹⁷ The term is mostly used in the academic field to point out how music production or consumption relates to space (usually by reflecting rather than shaping it). However, there are studies that try to follow similar directions to the ones attempted in this text, for one Strait (2012), which offers a geography of blues culture across the Mississippi Delta.

¹⁸ *Original Faubus Fables* of Charles Mingus, an album recorded in 1960, although not directly connected to Africa, should also be considered as a part of this political phenomenon.

¹⁹ According to Peter Osborne, this is what has happened to many artworks of the 1960s and 1970s: “The transnationalization of postcolonial economies (...) refunctions national identities forged in the struggle for decolonization into cultural commodities for international consumption” (Osborne, 2018, p. 120).

The name is that of Fela Kuti, short for Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti, born in British Nigeria, son of famous women's rights activist, Frances Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas, militant for independence and organiser of marches and creator of institutions championing women's rights. Fela Kuti, who was arrested more than 200 times, became one of Africa's most prominent artists, inventor of what would later be called Afrobeat, and the first to combine traditional African music patterns (especially of Yoruba origin) with funk and jazz. His political activity was strongly intertwined with music. In the 1970s he became famous for organising the so-called Yabi sessions in a Lagos nightclub, during which he combined music with lyrics in various improvisations and experimentations, deconstructing and denouncing the Western ideology and affirming an Afrocentric vision of the world. Even more important – and very imaginative – was the foundation of the Kalakuta Republic commune in 1970. This was an area that included, along with his house and recording studio, a free-consultation health clinic. It lasted for seven years, eventually being burned to the ground in 1977 in a military raid during which Fela Kuti's mother was thrown from a window, fell into a coma and died six months later.

Names prove to be again suggestive. The Kalakuta commune was named after a prison in which Fela Kuti was held for a while, the prison itself named by prisoners as "kalakuta" which in Swahili means "rascal". The rascal's mischievousness was turned upside-down and became a positive nickname of those who resisted the State Apparatus and fought for freedom and justice. Kalakuta became a republic for the outcasts, a concrete space in which other laws would apply, which were more just, more inclusive. The commune attempted to keep truthful to its principles of building an authentic commons, a fabric of society that would give access to all to education, health, housing, and civic infrastructure. It also tried to shape the discourse on Africa through a continuous use of music as a privileged form of critique, and also as an exercise into imagining things differently.

The Kalakuta Records published a series of Kuti's albums who not only contained activist songs, but also liner notes and visual tools meant to enact a different perception. For example, the 1977 album *Sorrow Tears and Blood*, composed as a response to the destruction of Kalakuta, includes the *Music Written in Blood* manifesto. As Binda Ngazolo writes in 2019 in a revisit of the album and its ability to survive and endure:

"there is no doubt Fela frightened – and still does – most of Africa's governing politicians. They fear the influence he could have on young people in their respective countries. The destruction of the 'republic of the outcasts of Lagos' is therefore a blessing for some of them, but a real disaster for the rest of us" (Ngazolo, 2019).

Fela Kuti was of course not alone in his work of imagining a different paradigm for the future, a different space or even cosmos based on African points of reference. The work of Sun Ra, to name but one, belongs to the same universe. Born in Alabama as Herman Poole Blount, he would later change his name to Le Sony'r Ra, claiming that he had visited Saturn and met aliens and he would build a philosophical system (although he called it an *equation*) based on mysticism, Kabbalah, numerology, and, obviously, Black Nationalism. In music he was a key innovator, offering a singular form of combining avant-garde, free jazz, and continuous experimentation with his Arkestra. In 1971 Sun Ra taught a course in Afro-American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, entitled "Sun Ra 171",²⁰ which proved that the times were still, at least in part, open to such phenomena. Alas, the age was not to last, as the 1970s, in the

²⁰ "The '60s upsurge of Black writers on jazz was at the same time a reflection of the Black masses' cry for self-determination (at its most practical, beginning with self-definition)" (Baraka, 2009, p. 78).

wake of the many defeats suffered by the emancipatory projects, turned to a different geography: transcendental, psychological, even psychedelic, yet often still collective.

The Africa that the 1960s dared to invent and imagine was still far from reality:

“the political image of Africa after 1965 is indeed distressing. Political dictatorships have been imposed. Some charismatic leaders have vanished into obscurity. Touré was isolated in his dictatorship and Nkrumah, challenged and insulted, died in exile” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 105).

The cry for *Uhuru Africa* (the title of Randy Weston’s album roughly translates as “Freedom Africa”) was met with a harsh reality that Frantz Fanon had in fact predicted: by not managing to replace the Western paradigm with new ones, all the ills of (economic) colonialism exploded. It is symptomatic in this context to see what such a world or such an album like *Uhuru Africa* could tell us today.²¹

There is certainly a line to be traced from *Uhuru Africa* to Fela Kuti, and a history could be (and perhaps should be) told with such a guiding narrative, covering both the hopes and disillusionments of those two decades. If Kalakuta may be envisioned (at least symbolically) as the concrete implementation of the dream of *Uhuru Africa*, a case could be made that this manner of connecting aesthetic means with political effects was indeed revolutionary and functioned as a reference and model for other endeavours. Coming closer to our times, one could say that Jacques Coursil’s *Trails of Tears* is, in many ways, the contemporary equivalent of *Uhuru Africa*, and so another narrative line could be traced between the two: a potential history that has the courage to trace a potential geography, something still not realised, but spectral and effective. A narrative that could include phenomena like the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, a Black music ensemble founded in Los Angeles, in 1961, by pianist Horace Tapscott. Since the beginning, the Ark was dedicated to community, social consciousness, arts and Afrikan culture. A narrative that would also tell the story and consequences of, say, the meeting of Francis Bebey (who won in 1968 the Grand Literary Prize of Black Africa with *Le fils d’Agatha Moudio*), born in Cameroon in the village of Akwa, with sax player Manu Dibango, with whom he released in 1971 the song *Idiba* (the vocals were sung by Joseph Ekambi Tongo Mpondo, who had arrived in Paris in 1964 from Cameroon to study pharmacy). It would certainly rearticulate the essential connection between contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter and the Black Panther Party, as Mumia Abu Jamal points in the introduction to the revised edition of *We Want Freedom*:

“the drumbeats of protest; the calls to angry, seething masses to stand up against this profound indignity. It harkened back to the brief window of Occupy, reflected the Spanish indignados, yes. But its boldness gave breath to that which so many in power hoped - wished - had become moribund - the Black Panther Party” (Abu-Jamal, 2016, p. 20).

And – given that we invoked again Mumia Abu Jamal – we could retain his hope that present-day performances from famous artists like Beyoncé during Super Bowl 50 (2016) are a good sign:

“Beyoncé’s timing, coming as it did during the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, means something. It may be a sign that the spark of emergent consciousness has started a fire” (Abu-Jamal, 2016, p. 22).

And so, all these narratives are of course part of a geography to (re)invoke and (re)imagine and rekindle. In 1980, Daniel Humair, François Jeanneau and Henri Texier published an album called *Akagera* (the name of one of the Nile’s sources). It was another attempt to question the

²¹ Between 1958 and 1961, albums addressing the African-American social landscape included many other performances that deserve attention, like Art Blakey’s *Africaine*, John Coltrane’s *Africa Brass*, Oliver Nelson’s *Afro-American Sketches*, Dizzy Gillespie’s *Africana*, and Sonny Rollins’ *Freedom Suite*.

centering of the world and its understanding through geometric grids and borders so often meant to thwart freedom of movement and becoming. A river could of course function as a border keeping apart things and people, but it could also be seen as a source of bringing together, as fluid and as mobile as history is: never a straight line between cause and effect. Music is similar in its continuous resistance to rigid explanations, and that is probably what helps it to endure.

When Amiri Baraka started writing on jazz, he did so to answer the key question:

“What was so powerful and desperate in this music that guaranteed its existence? This is what pushed me. But as I began to get into the history of the music, I found that this was impossible without, at the same time, getting deeper into the history of the people” (Baraka, 2009, p. 30).

And thus to the moments in which this people (Americans who were not Americans, but also Africans in search of understanding what Africa is or could be) were capable of *acts* that concern us all, that speak hypothetically, with the radicality of an authentic opening, to all of us.

Deciding which are the events that concern us and what openings they enact should be part of a work of theory that articulates historical detours with rational constructions. The logic of such a perspective is not one of (exclusive) explanation, but of testing hypotheses and enacting openings. In this sense, academic disciplines are not understood as rational methods already constituted before they encounter and deal with facts, but are defined as the result of forms of interpretation engendered by such encounters. The hypothesis of potential geography could work, in this sense, as a mode of constructing an event by including the position of a commonality. It could also define the theoretical framework for understanding what a radical opening is and where it could lead us.

Perhaps the Idea of Africa is still with us, it is still open. Perhaps what was essential at the heart of *Uhuru Africa* (if this could be, for a moment, the name that names all of this musical potential geography of the commons) is that we could and should regain the ability to begin from the outset.

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