

***Nowhere // Now Here*¹**

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It is sometimes rewarding to take notes, draw, cut out or turn down the corner of a page in a notebook. One can also have the impression that an idea or a picture, once on paper, is potentially captured. It is like leaving little stones behind, dealing with emptiness and fullness, making one's notes available to those who will eventually take the time to consult them. A notebook can also be uncomfortable because it can give a feeling of incompleteness, which reminds us that this is a further space: an unutterable space toward which our desperate desire to leave a trace behind is directed.

Chang Hsia-Fei, René Francisco or **Audry Lizeron-Monfils** use their notebooks as a kind of daily ritual, for writing or drawing, as if they were some sorts of extension of themselves. As if for each idea there could be a notebook, for each gesture a page. All together, these notebooks take on another dimension. Aren't they suspended spaces, frozen in time? Is it possible that writing just the captions of the pictures of August 9, 1945, may have a stronger impact than the pictures themselves, as suggested by artist **James Webb**? Is it also a way to carve out a space, that of the notebook, able to provide more or less volume, as in the case of **Enzo Umbaca**'s notebook?

In that sense, notebooks are also a game of possible combinations, which reminds us of Marcel Duchamp's 'La Boîte-en-valise' (1935-41) and Georges Maciunas's Flux Year Boxes. These Fluxkits² were boxes containing all sorts of things – photographs, small objects, notebooks – and represented Fluxus' main activity up to the early 1970s. Notebooks have always been the object of a subversion of shape, meaning and function, as in the case of **Map Office, Malachi Farrell** or **Tere Recarens**. This last artist has chosen to write the word 'Toubab', which is the African word for 'White man', on the side of each page. She therefore plays with the aesthetics of notebooks by "letting all the black people enter the very white and fashionable space of Moleskine's world", as the artist says.

¹ The title comes from Goddy Leye's notebook.

² Under the Fluxus label, George Maciunas marketed through the mail a wide range of objects made by other artists. 'Fluxkit' is a representative selection of these objects, and encompasses the range of forms in which Fluxus editions were issued: graphical scores for events, interactive boxes and games, journals and films. A single box costed between one and five US dollars, the complete 'Fluxkit' initially a hundred dollars, whereby production costs alone accounted for sixty dollars, meaning the business-like trappings of the kit were counterfeit. Almost every 'Fluxkit' was somewhat different in content, and the number of components included rose over the years – from some twenty-five in 1965, for example, to forty in 1966. The 'Fluxkit', was conceived as a collective product rather than individual museum. <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/fluxkit/images/2/>

As a transitional object, or a sort of Pandora's box, a notebook sometimes corresponds to a particular phase of the artist's work, which can lead or not to the next one. It is a space without any other constraint than its own limited size and number of pages, where it is always possible to come back and recall a legend, a story, or some places, just like **Sue Williamson**, who turns her notebook into an account of her workshops in Havana, Johannesburg and Bern. Artist **Seamus Farrell** proposes an open atlas of the African continent: each country is considered separately from the others, in perfect symmetry like a Rorschach inkblot³. In his hand-bound notebook he thus provides an alternative way to represent the geography of this great continent. **Mohssin Harraki** has instead chosen to glue copies of 41 passport covers of different countries on each page. Is it a series of possible identities, without any of them being selected over the other?

Between 1968 and 1970, Pier Paolo Pasolini shot an extraordinary film in Africa and Rome, entitled *Notes for an African Orestes*, which consisted in a series of filmed notes on a film to be made. A hybrid, polyphonic work, it draws on collage techniques and turns the 'unfinished' into the structure of the film itself. *Notes for an African Orestes* is a wonderful unidentified object, a formal experimentation that paid a very high price for its modernity, entering the Pantheon of the 'cursed' films banned from theatrical and video release.

If *Notes for an African Orestes* was inspired by the Italian director's desire to go back to a legendary past in order to better understand the present and face contemporary reality, then it can be regarded as African. Pasolini's rage against Western societies grows with the awareness that neo-capitalism wipes off the past in the name of progress and consumerism, and makes the present inhuman and unliveable. *Notes for an African Orestes* is actually a self-reflective, meta-discursive work, where Pasolini, as a film director as well as an artist, never stops questioning his own project.

These artists' notebooks are unclassifiable works, which blur the boundaries between fiction and work of art, establishing a complex relationship between the idea and its impossible expression, as in the case of **Daniel Chust Peters** or **Goddy Leye**. The latter confided his thoughts to his notebook until his

³ The stylistic treatment of the elements acts as a movement from one side to the other, and allows the images to take on symmetrical forms, like the Rorschach images for our psyche. They imply a visual appropriation and a physical experience at the same time. The phenomenology of Rorschach explores the psychic effects of the image. Whether the reciprocal is true is still to be discovered: to what extent any relationship with the image involves a physical experience of the body. «This is what is clearly tested through the series of images proposed by Hermann Rorschach in 1921, in what he called a psychological diagnosis of apparently accidental images, with the ambiguity and fragility it implies. (see Didi-Huberman, Conference «Imaginer, disloquer, reconstruire», coedited by INHA/Musée du quai Branly, <http://actesbranly.revues.org/193>.)

sudden departure last February, writing down scripts and projects for the ArtBakery⁴, which he had founded, and reflections on his work.

Pier Paolo Pasolini apparently went to Tanzania, Uganda or Tanganyika to look for faces, bodies or places for his *Orestes* film project, but this was a mere pretext: *Notes for an African Orestes* is a film in itself, where the idea of a film on a film to be made is turned into its reason for being.

Real ‘works in progress’, these notebooks follow the rhythm of the artists’ reflections on their own works and are subject to the shock of their intuitions, their doubts and flashes of imagination. To be continued!

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⁴ Goddy Leye created a space called ArtBakery in 2003 in Douale, in the Bonendale district where he lived. There the artist was able to challenge himself, exchange views with others and experiment. This structure hosted artists from Cameroun, Congo, Togo, India, Morocco and Switzerland. Training activities included master-classes and seminars addressed to local artists and cultural operators in the field of visual arts.