

THE FACULTY OF SENSING = THINKING WITH, THROUGH, AND BY ANTON WILHELM AMO

A research and exhibition project by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, co-curated
by Jule Hillgärtner, Nele Kaczmarek

04.12.2020–31.01.2021

WITH Akinbode Akinbiyi Bernard Akoi-Jackson Andcompany&Co. Anna Dasović Jean-Ulrick Désert
Theo Eshetu Adama Delphine Fawundu Lungiswa Gqunta Olivier Guesselé-Garai Patricia Kaersenhout
Kitso Lynn Lelliott Antje Majewski Claudia Martínez Garay Adjani Okpu-Egbe Resolve Collective Konrad Wolf

SAVVY Contemporary respects the current measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. We wish everyone
good health and safety. You can connect with this project sonically and visually through our window showcase as
well as through a digital platform that will soon follow.

TEAM

ARTISTIC DIRECTION AND CONCEPT Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

CO-CURATORS Jule Hillgärtner Nele Kaczmarek

CURATORIAL SUPPORT Kelly Krugman

PRODUCTION Billy Fowo António Pedro Mendes

MANAGEMENT Lema Sikod Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock Jörg Peter Schulze

COMMUNICATION Anna Jäger

GRAPHIC DESIGN Juan Pablo García Sossa

HANDOUT Melina Sofia Tsiledaki

TECH Bert Günther

LIGHT Catalina Fernandez

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TRACING THE FACULTY OF SENSING

THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo is a research and exhibition project to honour the work and life of Anton Wilhelm Amo, an outstanding philosopher of the 18th century. On the basis of Amo's writings and their reception, politics of referencing, erasure, and canonization will be thematized.

From March-September 2020, the first leg of the exhibition was on view at Kunstverein Braunschweig – a city in which Anton Wilhelm Amo breathed, walked, and thought. The second iteration of the exhibition is now taking place at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin – the city in which in Summer 2020, after decades of struggling to abolish the racist name of M-street, history was made by naming it the first Anton Wilhelm Amo-Street in Germany. The media echo about this renaming process and the associated debates about colonial and racist monuments, honors, archives, and other traces in public spaces have re-centred Amo in contemporary discourses – in the quotidian, in activism, as well as academic circles.

Born in 1703 in what is today Ghana, Anton Wilhelm Amo was abducted as an infant, enslaved, and taken via Amsterdam to Wolfenbüttel at the court of Duke Anton Ulrich. Upon increased racism he fled ca. 1748 to West Africa, where he died ca. 1753.

With THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo, we are embarking on deliberations around the oeuvre of one of the most important and consequent intellectuals of the 18th century, whose work has been widely relegated to the extreme margins and actually into oblivion for what might be termed “obvious reasons”. In a 2013 essay “The Enlightenment's ‘Race’ Problem, and Ours” for the *New York Times*' philosophy page “The Stone”, Justin E. H. Smith wonders how and why philosophers like Immanuel Kant or David Hume could afford to be so explicitly racist, at a period when a contemporary of theirs Anton Wilhelm Amo was excelling as a philosopher. The explanation for this can be found in processes of erasure in relation to what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called “Silencing the Past”. The canon of philosophy, like other canons, is a manifestation of power. Intransparent as it seems, we do know the codes that allow certain people into the canon and leave others out. To be subjugated by gender or race and by geography and coloniality, all factor into canonization processes. Consequently, we

know how and why Anton Wilhelm Amo Afer Guinea never found a place in the canon of philosophy, despite making important contributions to eighteenth-century German and European philosophy. The project THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo is not an effort to insert Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea into any canon whatsoever. It is, on the contrary, an attempt to decanonize the philosophical canon by “thinking with, through, and by” Amo.

16 international artists and groups were invited to respond to the philosophical thought of Anton Wilhelm Amo in largely newly produced works. Curatorially, the project charts a trajectory primarily on and around his philosophical and legal proposals in relation to the thing-in-itself, the living body and soul discourse, the legal rights of people of African origin in the 18th century as much as today, the politics of naming, as well as engaging with more complex narrations of the history of the Enlightenment project. All these being issues that Prof. Amo tackled in his academic writings, like in his 1729 thesis disputation, with the title *De iure Maurorum in Europa* (On the Right of Moors in Europe) in University of Halle, his 1734 dissertation, *De Humanae mentis apatheia* (On the Apathy of the Human Mind) in University of Wittenberg, and his 1738 published *Tractatus de arte sobrie et accurate philosophandi* (Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Correctly Philosophizing).

THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo is not a philosophy thesis. It is an art project. It is a journey, an investigation into that which has been, that which once was, that which could have been – an approach to the work and life of Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea. In reality, in imagination, and in speculation.

By questioning the environment Anton Wilhelm Amo grew up in and spaces that we still share with him today, AKINBODE AKINBIYI embarked on a journey through the region to conduct a photographic search for vestigial remains.

ADAMA DELPHINE FAWUNDU shares this interest in trans-historical connections, working with water as the connecting element that flows through a spatial installation composed of photographs, videos, and an artist book. Following Anton Wilhelm Amo's theory that it is only the living organic body that

can feel and that the soul cannot, K I T S O L Y N N L E L L I O T T has created a videographic portrait of environments from Amo's life journey in Ghana and Germany. A second chapter tackles the shortcomings of re-enacting from a position of absence. Starting with targeted interrogations that flank the exhibition's spatial course, A N N A D A S O V I Ć focuses on the empty spaces and deliberate omissions that have shaped Amo's biography and perception of his work, questioning thereby the prevailing criteria of canonization.

In another form, R E S O L V E C O L L E C T I V E too have tackled the aporias, gaps, and contradictions that shaped Amo's life, philosophical oeuvre, and reception of his work. The resulting project *Programming Im/Passivity* (2020) attempts to translate Amo's theoretical positions into sensory and artistic processes, with the observers becoming involved as active participants in a workshop-library environment. B E R N A R D A K O I - J A C K S O N ' S contribution ...and we, seeking to remember the roads that lead us back home, get strayed into the essences that will emerge... (2020) is a song dedicated to Anton Wilhelm Amo, the lyrics of which were translated by Rahinatu Taiba Ibrahim into Nzema language. The work deals with the period of Amo's life after his return to Ghana in 1747 and his dedication to gardening herbs.

With a room plan made of barbed tape and treated fabrics, *Benisiya Ndawoni II* (2020) by L U N G I S W A G Q U N T A addresses structural violence, migration, and the forced movement of Black people. Questions of exclusion and everyday discrimination are likewise the starting point for the O L I V I E R G U E S S E L É - G A R A I S poem "Their Eyes Were Watching Cop", (2015/2020), here reinterpreted in the form of an installation. C L A U D I A M A R T Í N E Z Garay assembles drawings, prints, and paintings into a visual narrative that links back to heritage, displacement, and racism while also referring back to one-sided definitions of modernity and the problematic relationship of Black and Brown bodies to (cultural) institutions. These are issues that have also motivated P A T R I C I A K A E R S E N H O U T in her artistic and activist practice for many years. As part of the exhibition, Kaersenhout is showing the series *While we Were Kings and Queens* (2020), in which she examines the trauma of colonial oppression that stands in flagrant contradiction to the proclaimed ideals of the Enlightenment.

In his multimedia installation *Decolonizing Knowledge* (2020), A D J A N I O K P U - E G B E bridges the gap between Amo's work, person, and a proposed alternative canon developed in collaboration with renowned thinkers, academics, and artists. Direct connections to Anton Wilhelm Amo's philosophical writings are also found in new works by A N T J E M A J E W S K I and T H E O E S H E T U .

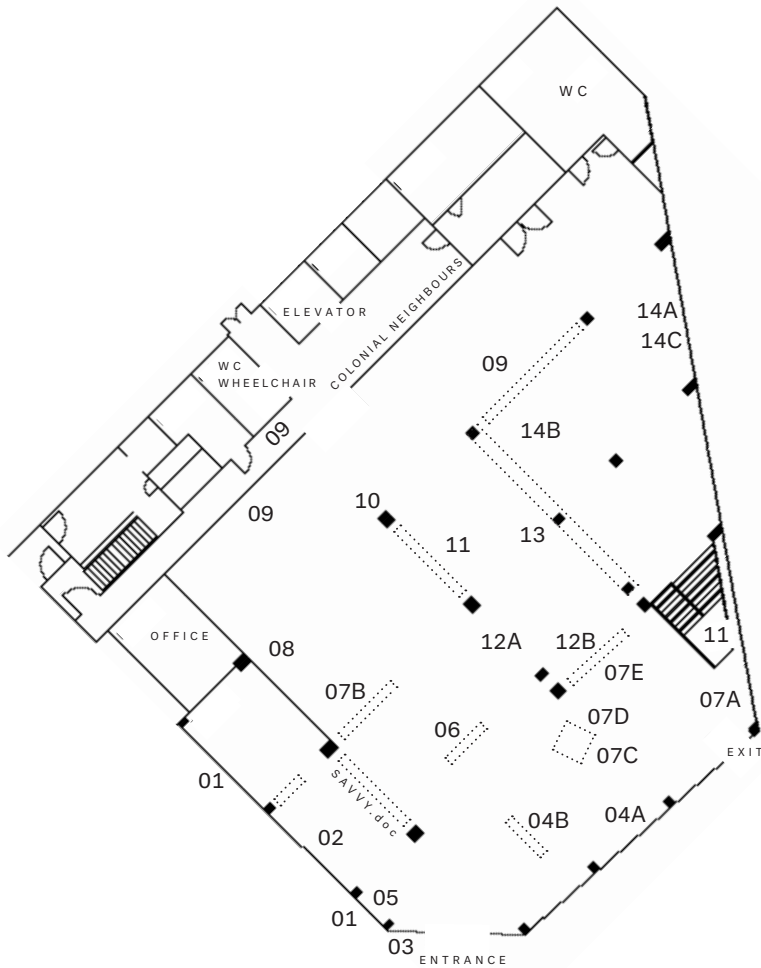
Majewski's *Die Apatheia der menschlichen Seele* (2020) takes individual imaginations of the soul and translates them into painting via Amo's ideas; Amo himself is able to "speak" via quotations in a video work by Eshetu. That Anton Wilhelm Amo's history is a special, but by no means an isolated case, is made clear in the 2009 cyanotype series *Good Morning Prussia* series by J E A N - U L R I C K D É S E R T , which recalls the fate of one of Amo's contemporaries.

On the initiative of architect K O N R A D W O L F , S A V V Y Contemporary will itself become the *Anton Wilhelm Amo Center* (2020) for the duration of the exhibition, reflecting on processes of strategic renaming.

The performance collective A N D C O M P A N Y & C O . presents a video readaptation of their lecture performance *Black Bismarck revisited (again)* that takes the Africa Conference as a starting point for tracing the consequences of colonialism. The work was produced in collaboration with Staatstheater Braunschweig.

The exhibition is accompanied by a public program, which will partly take place online due to current circumstances. A publication edited by Ndikung, Hillgärtner and Kaczmarek (Mousse Publishing, Kunstverein Braunschweig) entailing essays by Anton Wilhelm Amo, Seloua Luste Boulbina, Victor Uredo Emma-Adamah, Paulin J. Hountondji, Jule Hillgärtner & Nele Kaczmarek, Jota Mombaça, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Peggy Piesche, and Justin E.H. Smith will be launched at the finissage of the Berlin leg of THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo.

FLOORPLAN



01 ANNA DASOVIĆ

(Re)Producing 'Antonius Guilielmus Amo Guinea-Afer' as biography as body. An exercise in unlearning
Foil plot on window panes, variable dimensions, 2020

02 SAVVY. DOC

Amo-in-himself
Multimedia research installation

03 KONRAD WOLF

Anton Wilhelm Amo Center
Light box (luminous on both sides), 82 x 82 x 13,6 cm, 2020
Logo Design, 2020

04 JEAN - ULRICK DÉSSERT

04A *Guten Morgen Preußen*
6 cyanotypes on Büttens-Ingres paper, 2009
I, *Morgensglück*, 31 x 48 cm
II, *Vater Sohn vor Wasser Pyramiden*, 24 x 31 cm
III, *Preußisches Schicksal*, 24 x 31 cm
IV, *Reflexionsbecken*, 24 x 31 cm
V, *Mother Delta*, 31 x 48 cm
VI, *Guten Morgen Preußen*, 29,7 x 42 cm

04B *"Paradisum Calamitate" (Paradise Catastrophe) after C.D.F.*
Installation, Acrylic on parchment, easels, *Monstera deliciosa*, variable dimensions, 2020

05 RESOLVE COLLECTIVE PROGRAMMING IM/PASSIVITY

Multi media installation, variable dimensions, 2020

06 THEO ESHETU

Amo Speaks
Film, 4K Video, 5:38 min, 2020

07 ADJANI OKPU - EGBE

07A *Decolonising Knowledge (Anton Wilhelm Amo)*
Multimedia installation, wood, acrylic paint, glue, books, variable dimensions, 2020

07B *The Son of Man*

Painting, toilet paper, acrylic, varnish, glue and pebbles on canvas, 50 x 70 cm, 2008

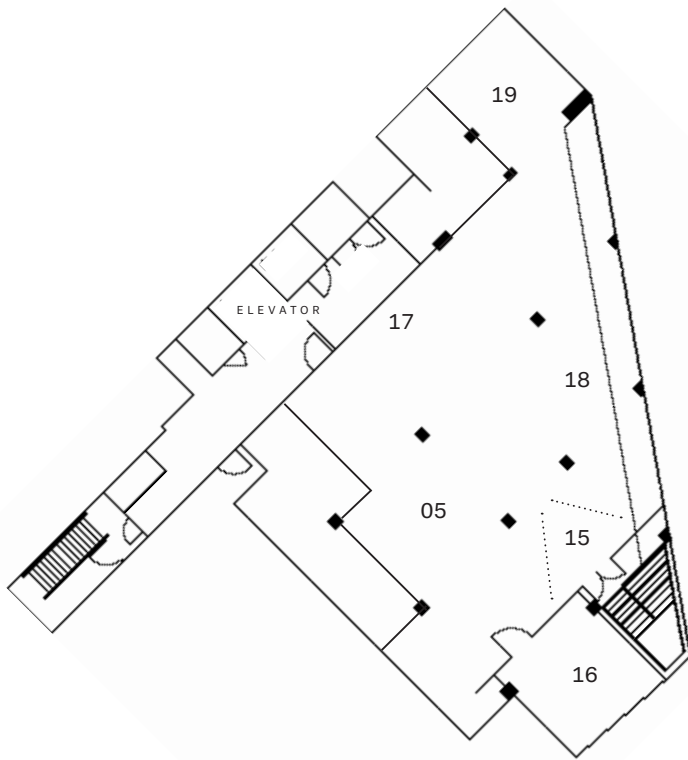
07C *The Foundation and Etymological Reinforcement of Erasure*

Multimedia installation, wood, acrylic paint, glue, linen, refrigerator, mixed media, variable dimensions, 2020

07D *A French Soldier's Trophy Head in Cameroon, 1950s/1960s*

Sculpture, clay, metal, wood, hair, 14 x 16 x 40 cm, 2019

07E *African Asbestos (Quadriptych)*,
Mixed media on wooden doors panels
200 x 304 x 4 cm, 2019



08 CLAUDIA MARTÍNEZ GARAY

Muy blanco para indio y muy poco para blanco / Too white for a cholo, not enough for a white man
Clay painting, clay on cotton canvas, 155 x 500 cm, 2020

09 PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT

While We Were Kings and Queens
Multimedia installation, 12-part series, digital print on Hahnemühle paper, wooden boards with text, hammer, 100 x 70 cm (prints), 42 x 29,7 cm (wooden plates), 2020

10 AND COMPANY & CO.

Black Bismarck Revisited (Again)
Video of a performance, approx. 40 min, 2020
A performance in cooperation with Staatstheater Braunschweig as part of Digitale Thementage 2020

11 BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON

...and we, seeking to remember the roads that lead us back home, get strayed into the essences that will emerge...
Song and Installation, wall writing with charcoal and herbs, 2020

12 OLIVIER GUESSELÉ - GARAI
& ANTJE MAJEWSKI

12A *Chainchainchain*
Installation, usb stick, textile cable, sound file, variable dimensions, 2012

12B *Wir schaffen das*

Head: oil on wood, 55,9 x 49 cm / Body: fabric, nitrile, metal, paper, wood, plastic, 178 x 83 x 29 cm, 2019

13 AKINBODE AKINBIYI

Attempts at Understanding
Series of 8 black-and-white photographs, inkjet Pigment Print, each 60 x 60 cm, 2020

14 ADAMA DELPHINE FAWUNDU

14A *Sunsum, in Spirit*
Film, HD Video, 09:53 min, 2020

14B *Sunsum, in Body*

Haptic Canvas, archival pigment, synthetic hair, yarn, paper, leather thread, acrylic medium on handmade mulberry paper – bound onto wooden frame, 21,5 x 33 x 26 cm, 2020

14C *Sunsum, in Mind #1 + Sunsum, in Mind #2, 2020*

Installation, HD Video, archival pigment, human hair, synthetic hair, sage, cowrie shells, acrylic medium on 100% Brazilian banana tree stem paper, each 50 x 140 cm

15 KITSO LYNN LELLIOTT

291 years condensed into the same number of seconds (or) one day out there our paths might cross
Three-channel video installation, 9:42 min, 2020

16 LISTENING ROOM

17 ANTJE MAJEWSKI

Die Apatheia der menschlichen Seele (I-IV)
I, Oil on wood, 40 x 80 cm, 2020
II, Oil on wood, 77,8 x 77,8 cm, 2020
III, Oil on wood, 50 x 50 cm, 2020
IV, Oil on wood, 73x 50,5 cm, 2020

18 OLIVIER GUESSELÉ - GARAI

Their eyes were watching cop
Installation, mixed media, wood, variable dimensions, 2015/2020

19 LUNGISWA GQUNTA

Benisya Ndawoni: Return to the Unfamiliar
Installation, razor-wires, sage, mpepho, variable dimensions, 2020

WORK DESCRIPTIONS

01 ANNA DASOVIĆ

(Re)Producing 'Antonius Guilielmus Amo Guinea-Afer' as biography as body. An exercise in unlearning
Foil plot on window panes, variable dimensions, 2020

Anna Dasović's practice aims to represent bodies of knowledge. She presents exhibition scenarios that are preceded by intensive research including interviews and archival/bibliographic research. By reorganizing, and recontextualizing knowledge, Dasović highlights rhetorical structures in which violence and power are inscribed. This reinterpretation of existing material addresses how the concealment of such conflicts is ideologically motivated.

In her response to the exhibition's invitation, Dasović has focused on the narrations of Anton Wilhelm Amo's life, checking their sources and comparing them against each other. What counts as reliable testimony? What counts as subjective interpretation or speculation? Dasović compares the patchiness of Amo's biography with those of other academic figures of his era. She reveals that history as a social construction is marked with processes of narrative erasure, and this erasure is most intense when the historical subject is non-white. Further, she proposes that the tacit and racist censorship of Amo's life and work undermines historical factuality.

By probing apparently credible sources that appear, on first inspection, to provide information about Amo, Dasović provokes further questions to arise. With *(Re)Producing 'Antonius Guilielmus Amo Guinea-Afer'*, Dasović highlights historical aporias into which she poses unanswered questions around Amo's biography and body that invite the visitor in a process of unlearning. As an artistic approach free of utopian wholeness, or, free of the expectation to undo the erasure Amo and others in his position have suffered, Dasović's work centers on revealing uncertainties about history produced by racism.

Dasović's gesture to render or to make these aporias visible takes shape as a multi-room intervention which does not only put Amo into focus – it also focuses the viewer's attention on architectural details designed to be invisible. Through text being installed on the window, Dasović brings attention to the invisible: the glass or the barrier between that which is inside (history) and that which is outside (everything and everyone else).

02 SAVVY.DOC

Amo-in-himself

Multimedia research installation

SAVVY.DOC challenges archival practices by exploring performative ways of connecting future, past and present. As usually inside exhibitions, SAVVY.doc articulates the context of the texts that continue to shape the long-term research of SAVVY Contemporary's projects. Inside this exhibition, we propose to bring into form the continuity of Anton Wilhelm Amo's works within the history of ideas and discourses. *Amo-in-himself* is a reflection on the pioneering and encompassing philosophical concepts of A.W.Amo, such as "the thing-in-itself", that induced further philosophers' ideas across epistemologies, and continues to be a tool of understanding the way beings perceive and understand the living and the existing.

03 KONRAD WOLF

Anton Wilhelm Amo Center

Light box (luminous on both sides), 82 x 82 x 13,6 cm, 2020
Logo Design, 2020

As part of his final thesis for his architectural studies, Konrad Wolf was in 2016 tasked with planning a redesign of the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel. Rather than taking the obvious option of an architectural sketch, he developed an idea for the Anton Wilhelm Amo Center – a place that could be located anywhere in the world, dedicated for a defined time to the critical examination of hegemonic knowledge.

The name of Amo, early philosopher of the German Enlightenment, was chosen for this planned temporary space for reflection and its program. His scholarly status within European philosophy has been and remains suppressed, ignored, and at best remembered as a curiosity. But buried as it may be, it may be his work that provides a key to better understanding of European Enlightenment philosophy, marked as it was by extreme contradiction and racism.

Given that Anton Wilhelm Amo grew up at court in Wolfenbüttel, certainly used the Herzog August Library located there and likely attended the knight academy, we must post the question of why Amo remains largely unknown in the Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel region. As an institution, why does Herzog August Bibliothek still fail to pay adequate tribute to him? And, as a more fundamental question, why are some people remembered and others not? And not least, how can an institution play an active role in our memorial culture?

For the duration of the exhibition at SAVVY Contemporary, Konrad Wolf has renamed our space the Anton Wilhelm Amo Center by means of an intervention on our website, echoing the same effort made during

the show at Kunstverein Braunschweig. The entrance of S A V V Y also hosts a light box reading “Anton Wilhem Amo Center”, to showcase the name and to underline. The exhibition's dedication to Anton Wilhelm Amo. At the same time, the act of temporarily renaming the institution to Anton Wilhelm Amo Center goes far beyond the exhibition and its title, calling fundamental institutional structures into question. This (minimal) uncertainty, even merely at the level of language, already touches at the question of the immense power of calling things by their name – or not doing so.

04 JEAN - ULRICK DÉSERT

04A *Guten Morgen Preußen*

6 cyanotypes on Bütten-Ingres paper, 2009

I, *Morgensglück*, 31 x 48 cm

II, *Vater Sohn vor Wasser Pyramiden*, 24 x 31 cm

III, *Preußisches Schicksal*, 24 x 31 cm

IV, *Reflexionsbecken*, 24 x 31 cm

V, *Mother Delta*, 31 x 48 cm

VI, *Guten Morgen Preußen*, 29,7 x 42 cm

04B “*Paradisum Calamitate*” (*Paradise Catastrophe*)
after C.D.F.

Installation, Acrylic on parchment, easels, *Monstera deliciosa*, variable dimensions, 2020

Jean-Ulrick Désert's installation “*Paradisum Calamitate*” (*Paradise Catastrophe*) after C.D.F., combines tropical plants with large parchment strips embellished with acrylic. It invokes *The Wreck of Hope (Das Eismeer, 1823/24)* by Caspar David Friedrich, a key work of German romanticism. The tragedy depicted by Friedrich is re-imagined as a metaphorical shipwreck of a lost saga.

Désert's implicit narrative is intentionally ambiguous, creating a broken image of a fictional history that points in several directions. Désert contextualizes the story hinted toward in the installation with recognizable symbols and motifs: patterns reminiscent of church windows, a book depicting Amo as the mythical Janus, coats of arms and title plates & bands with wilting black tulips considered and commodified as rarities, and a mystical looking shipwreck that, as an (art) historical metaphor, evokes both Germanic providence and Germany's colonial complicities.

Guten Morgen Preußen is a series of analog cyanotypes in Prussian blue generated with digitally collaged negatives. This series of works narrates the story of Sabac el Cher, a boy from Egypt who was “gifted” to Prince Albrecht of Prussia in the 19th century and lived at his court in Germany. The series comprises *Morgensglück*, a portrait of Gertrud (née Perlig) and Gustav Sabac el Cher at the Muskau Park in then-Prussia, *Vater Sohn vor Wasser Pyramiden*, a superimposed portrait of August Sabac el Cher and his son Gustav, *Preußisches Schicksal* showing Gustav Sabac el Cher and the German Emperor on horseback,

Reflexionsbecken, a portrait of August Sabac el Cher in Prince Pückler's gardens, and *Mother Delta*, a depiction of Anna and her future husband August Sabac el Cher. This project serves as an echo of the conspicuous presence of Africans among the German “Adel” class.

05 RESOLVE COLLECTIVE

PROGRAMMING IM/PASSIVITY

Multi media installation, variable dimensions, 2020

Aporias, blind spots, and contradictions are key stylistic traits of this retelling of Anton Wilhelm Amo's inspiring life and his philosophy to a modern audience. To fill the gaps in Amo's life and work, it is often necessary to take a position. The position chosen in the narrative can be shown via the power of fictional works, but also and more subtly in acts of reading and perception, themselves linked to Amo's philosophies. Our PROGRAMMING IM/PASSIVITY project is divided into three central strategies.

The Double: The curatorial aspect of the work follows Justin E. H. Smith's position that Amo's dualistic beliefs are based upon his fundamentally anti-racist stance. We wish to continue this approach with the help of auto-ethnographic and historical research that reflects both Amo's work and our own diasporic position. For this we have integrated two bodies of literature: publications by and about Anton Wilhelm Amo in the context of the early Enlightenment, and publications that deal with African-diasporic “doubleness” and “double consciousness” in a wider sense.

PROGRAMMING IM/PASSIVITY: Conceptually, the project revolves around Anton Wilhelm Amo's ideas of passivity and impassivity. The installation will be a space for quiet contemplation and research on Amo.

Mind-Body Commercio: Within our process-driven design approach, we use dual methods to process a range of recycled local materials that thus become “spatial currency.” Each method is inspired by one aspect of Anton Wilhelm Amo's theory and his thesis on body-soul dualism. The procedures were rehearsed in advance in a school workshop in Braunschweig.

06 THEO ESHETU

Amo Speaks

Film, 4K Video, 5:38 min, 2020

Filmmaker and video artist Theo Eshetu traces the collective unconscious, using symbols and signs to question cultural identities and media narratives. In *Amo Speaks*, he develops a fictive portrait of Anton Wilhelm Amo as a speculative and performative attempt to evoke a visual memory of him and thus also point both to the absence of any verified portrait and to the presence of many projections and faked representations of Amo that circulate online, in books, and writing.

In *Amo Speaks*, images of Amo are projected onto the face of a performer. Text fragments from Anton Wilhelm Amo's reflections on the body-mind problem and the faculty of sensing are read aloud in English, German, and Latin to create a sound texture that makes tangible the multi-perspective position from which Amo developed his thoughts.

"Through the combination of a real person and the popularly projected image of Amo I try to create a real image which is clearly not real, alluding to the mask we all wear in real life." (Theo Eshetu)

07 A D J A N I O K P U - E G B E

07A *Decolonising Knowledge (Anton Wilhelm Amo)*
Multimedia Installation, wood, acrylic paint, glue, books, mixed media, variable dimensions, 2020.

07B *The Son of Man*

Painting, toilet paper, acrylic, varnish, glue and pebbles on canvas, 50 x 70 cm, 2008

07C *The Foundation and Etymological Reinforcement of Erasure*

Multimedia Installation, wood, acrylic paint, glue, linen, refrigerator, mixed media, variable dimensions, 2020

07D *A French Soldier's Trophy Head in Cameroon, 1950s/1960s*

Sculpture, clay, metal, wood, hair, 14 x 16 x 40 cm, 2019

07E *African Asbestos (Quadriptych)*

Painting, Mixed media on wooden doors panels 200 x 304 x 4 cm, 2019

Adjani Okpu-Egbe's relief-like paintings use a self-developed technique in which acrylic paint is poured onto a uniform surface structure with the help of bubble wrap. It is this that the artist then uses as a starting point for his two-dimensional but still figurative paintings.

Adjani Okpu-Egbe has created a hybrid portrait of Anton Wilhelm Amo that incorporates a bookshelf and uses it as a canvas. A central depiction of Amo which resembles a *TIME Magazine* cover is surrounded by objects such as a globe, artificial plants, miniature sculpture of an owl representing the city of Braunschweig, a cup and measuring tape with the crest of Berlin, as well as a selection of Amo's writings and various historical and contemporary texts that contextualize Amo's work from a present-day perspective. To create the library included in the work, Okpu-Egbe asked a number of academics and other people, including Prof. Carol Becker (Columbia University, New York), Prof. Ulrike Bergermann (Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Braunschweig), peace researcher Prof. Matt Meyer, and curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung to suggest academic and literary titles.

Adjani Okpu-Egbe presents a series of works that critically examine the christianization of the African

continent and its role in the erasure of African civilizations. A wooden chapel stands in the center of the space with its ceiling draped in black fabric with painted words, and its exterior walls clad in nailed-on abstract paintings. The wood construction houses an installation in which a refrigerator serves as the presentation site for an anthropomorphic sculpture whose title identifies it as a colonial human "trophy", as well as several profane and ritualistic use objects.

African Asbestos, a large format painting on a wall adjacent to the hut, thinks through erasure: cogitating on European institutions' role in concealing Anton Wilhelm Amo's contributions to Philosophy. It calls for freedom of Black people in Europe (freedom being an integral part of sustainable economic development), in Africa, and questions the imposition of Western religion - especially Christianity, as it built the foundation (through church) for the erasure of African philosophy and civilisations that are foundational to economies. The size and the graphic style of the quadriptych contrasts sharply with the smaller format and religious subject matter of *The Son of Man*. Created in 2008, the abstracted depiction of Christ's crucifixion testifies to Okpu-Egbe's ongoing engagement with and critique of Christian iconographies and their (post-)colonial legacy.

08 C L A U D I A M A R T Í N E Z G A R A Y

Muy blanco para indio y muy poco para blanco / Too white for a cholo, not enough for a white man
Clay painting, clay on cotton canvas, 155 x 500 cm, 2020

"The prejudice of superficiality is: Nothing new is to be looked for nor to be adopted, but it is safest to follow the ancients. Note: You will overcome this prejudice 1) by comparing old things with newer ones, 2) by inquiring into everything until doubt is absent, 3) by not despairing of your own powers, but by doing as much as you can" (Anton Wilhelm Amo: "Treatise on the Art of Philosophizing Soberly and Accurately". In: Antonius Gvilielmus Amo Afer of Axim in Ghana. Translation of his works. Halle (Saale), 1968, 191f.).

In her artistic work, Claudia Martínez Garay explores symbolic translations of exoticization, resentment, and the schizophrenic perception of indigenous peoples of the Andes. While cultural artifacts from the Incas shape the region's ethnographic and visual memory, their descendants are still exposed to various forms of racism in the present. The starting point of the newly created work *Muy blanco para indio y muy poco para blanco/ Too white for a cholo, not enough for a white man* (2020) is this line from the film *Túpac Amaru*, in which Amaru – the last Inca monarch and fighter against the Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century – defines his own identity as mestizo.

"His body and soul was as brown as white, Amaru himself was the embodiment of the contradictions, and

the gathering of the two worlds that until this moment cannot recognize and reconcile themselves as Peruvian inhabitants.” (Claudia Martínez Garay)

Like Anton Wilhelm Amo, Amaru was affected by discrimination, christianization, and colonization; like Amo, Amaru spoke Latin fluently, among other languages, and so both sought to use their means to revolt against colonial oppression and a lack of acceptance.

The installation is based on historical and current representations from textbooks, museum catalogues, and archaeological journals. The illustrations have been reproduced in various shades of clay. Combined, they form a kind of mental map in which a variety of systems of symbols and images, ideas and ideologies enter into new relationships and address the prevalent mechanisms of exclusion and the representation of power. In doing so, Martínez Garay investigates how a canon of images influences cultural identity and which new compositions can be used to speculate about alternative historiographies and future utopias.

09 PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT

While We Were Kings and Queens

Multimedia installation, 12-part series, digital print on Hahnemühle paper, wooden boards with text, hammer, 100 x 70 cm (prints), 42 x 29,7 cm (wooden plates), 2020

The title *While We Were Kings and Queens* refers to the fact that highly developed cultures existed on the African continent long before Europeans established the transatlantic slave trade. Up until today, there is the notion that Black people's history started when Europeans set foot on African shores. In 1712 – the same year that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born – Willy Lynch gave an infamous speech to slave owners in the colony of Virginia, sharing his methods of oppressing Black slaves. The term “lynching” is derived from his name. A basic principle of the Enlightenment says that knowledge is more important than origin. Everyone is born as a “tabula rasa” (empty sheet) and gains knowledge and experience during their life. Everyone has the same start; accordingly, everyone deserves the same opportunities for emancipation and democratic living conditions.

For the exhibition pieces I have printed images of proud and beautiful Black and Brown people on pages of a book called *The European Enlightenment: Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, published in 1976. The book gives an overview of the European and German Enlightenment and provides insight as well as historical context to Amo's life and work. This particular book was part of my 2017 performance *Daughter of Diaspora* with students of the Decolonial Summerschool in Middelburg. Some of the pages contain angry texts and remarks by the Black and Brown students, whose ancestors were not considered here.

I am fascinated by Wilhelm Amo's ideas concerning the body and the mind, where he says that the mind cannot feel pain. It is only the body that can perceive pain. Willy Lynch's speech, excerpts of which accompany the prints in the exhibition, shows how the brain can invent immense cruelties because it is decoupled from the body.

With *While We Were Kings and Queens*, I also want to show the white psychoses in which Black and Brown bodies are trapped. A psychosis that on the one hand has promoted emancipation and equality, but on the other hand is responsible for terrible crimes. The sentences from Willy Lynch's speech thus stand in sharp contrast to the German Enlightenment texts and the philosophy of Anton Wilhelm Amo.

10 A N D C O M P A N Y & C O .

Black Bismarck Revisited (Again)

Video of a performance, approx. 40 min, 2020

A performance in cooperation with Staatstheater Braunschweig as part of Digitale Thementage 2020

With *Black Bismarck Revisited (Again)*, the andcompany&Co collective combats the preconception that Germany was not truly a colonial power. In their lecture-performance, Alexander Karschnia, Nicola Nord, and Sascha Sulima take to the stage with arguments based on historical facts alongside pop-cultural references, everyday experience, and theory. This all serves to illuminate the traces of colonialism that can still be found in Germany today – from Edeka to Sarotti, Brandenburg to Berlin.

It shows too the borders that were laid across the African continent 135 years ago by the “Africa Conference” and that have led to repeated conflict ever since. From 1884 to 1885, Bismarck invited the 14 leading colonial powers to his Imperial Chancellery to divide Africa along geometrical lines. Not far from this location, and thanks to the initiative of the African community, a plaque has been in place since 2005 to commemorate the fateful European appropriation of Africa. Also close by however is “~~Mohrenstraße~~” (~~Moor~~* Street) which activists have for years been campaigning to rename “Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße”. Spiked with such indications and connections, the format of the lecture-performance takes a look back at itself to a certain degree. Language – here the principal medium of expression – also achieves a prominence as an instrument of power.

Black Bismarck Revisited (Again) is a further iteration of a 2015 performance at HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin that took place as part of the dance and performance festival Return to Sender: Artistic Positions from Egypt, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco, Mozambique, and South Africa. The revised version for this exhibition is again concerned with making people aware of an “internalized colonialism” and the putatively “normal” perspectives of the “overprivileged and under-

pigmented” that are stubbornly present in literature, music, academia, and not least in historiography.

Black Bismarck Revisited (Again) confronts its audience with the historical conditions that have shaped our everyday language and experience. Meaning that “The Faculty of Sensing” is once again presented as an experience of a profoundly colonial nature. JH

* The strikethrough here indicates that we would prefer to not use this racist term. At the same time, we wish to show to people less familiar with issues of naming and renaming specifically what is involved in this case. Discussing and reflecting on language-inherent racism is for us not a finished process; it is work that remains permanently ongoing.

11 BERNARD AKOI - JACKSON

...and we, seeking to remember the roads that lead us back home, get strayed into the essences that will emerge...

Song and Installation, wall writing with charcoal and herbs, 2020

Ye menle

Ka mɔɔ wɔ wɔ adwenle nu la kile ye e

Me nee me diema ne

Nienwu a siane ne fi a?

Ɔvi adudulee anze adolee

Hmmm, mehɔye ezevole wɔ eke

Mengola mengile eleka mɔɔ ɔfi a

Ewia ne kola fi adolee

Ɔkola ɔfi adudulee

Ke wɔ adwenle se wɔ e?

Ɔfi adolee...?

Noko adolee a le eleka kɔɔnwɔ

Bie a enee ɔnle adolee anze adudulee

Na mom ye nyunlu e?

– These song lyrics were written by Bernard Akoi-Jackson as part of his piece and translated by Rahinatu Taiba Ibrahim into Nzema, a language of Ghana

... and we, seeking to remember the roads that lead us back home, get strayed into the essences that will emerge... is an enigmatic film/ installation/ performance script that initiates a search by the fictitious character Amo to retrace his steps to his origins. It is an experimental process (based on Anton Wilhem Amo, Afer). The search of this character becomes the ritual that guides the flow of the piece. As the public goes through the materials made available; as they go through the motions that point to an unearthing of facts and legend, and eventually engage in a conversation with the artist, it is possible to collectively inscribe a story of one who has been shrouded in a lot of silence.

12 OLIVIER GUESSELÉ - GARAI & ANTJE MAJEWSKI

12A *Chainchainchain*

Installation, usb stick, textile cable, sound file, variable dimensions, 2012

12B *Wir schaffen das*

Head: oil on wood, 55,9 x 49 cm / Body: fabric, nitrile, metal, paper, wood, plastic, 178 x 83 x 29 cm, 2019

Created in collaboration between Antje Majewski and Olivier Guesselé-Garai, the work *Chainchainchain* is exactly as its descriptive title states: a (word) chain, a self-referential loop, a circle. The sound work entices you to sing along. The music playing is an excerpt from the song “Chain of Fools” by Aretha Franklin, which was first released in 1967.

The constant repetition of the sample performs the content of the lyrics: Chainchainchain. Enchained by cables itself, the speaker transports the soundtrack through the exhibition on an aural level. This linkage can also be read as an expression of shared authorship.

In the historical context to which the exhibition refers, the motif of the chain has concrete implications: as a symbol of slavery, it represents the objectification of countless people, imprisoned and chained against their will. Originally sung by Franklin as the tale of a toxic relationship, this melodic sample and moment of joyful resonance makes the ideological potential of music both audible and tangible. The title of the second joint work also provides direction: *Wir schaffen das (We Can Do It)*. Visitors encounter a corporeal counterpart; its head and upper body with its arms and hands are recognizable, but its form dissolves from the hips downward. Lying on the floor at its feet is a T-shirt with the slogan “Refugees Welcome”, positioning the figure in a societal debate on refugees and seemingly guiding us into seeing this work as a representation of the other.

Its facial features are formed by supposedly native fruit and vegetables. Details such as nazars, pendants to warn off the “evil eye”, are additional references to what is projected onto the foreign. What is distinctive about this collaged body is its posture of resistance, which is mainly expressed through the hands. On one side is a clenched fist, which conveys self-protection as well as aggression. On the other side we see not a raised index finger, but the unmistakable gesture of a middle finger. A “fuck you” that stands in the space with the same self-confidence as a “Wir schaffen das.”

13 AKINBODE AKINBIYI

Attempts at Understanding

Series of 8 black-and-white photographs, inkjet Pigment Print, each 60 x 60 cm, 2020

Akinbode Akinbiyi thinks of photography in line with its original idea: writing with light. When wandering through towns and cities with his camera searching for subjects that – when viewed briefly – seem like trivialities, he thus becomes a storyteller.

But it is precisely this negligibility of our everyday life that here articulates itself, the details of the captured moment pointing to grander associations. While Akinbode Akinbiyi otherwise often roams large cities such as Bamako or Berlin, principally capturing scenes of public life, his gaze was directed via the viewfinder toward Braunschweig for this exhibition. It is fundamental to the photographic medium that it can make visible that which would otherwise be overlooked, and it is in keeping with this that the photographer commenced a search for Amo within this city. With the title of the series *Attempts at Understanding*, Akinbiyi describes this wandering, strolling, looking out that is fundamental to the photographic process as such.

Each individual recording is to be understood as an attempt to approach Anton Wilhelm Amo from today's perspective: Akinbiyi has set himself the task of retracing the paths that Amo himself could take in our present day in order to understand his stay in this region at that time. Where could he have gone? What could have caught his eye, attracted his attention? An imagined Amo walks in his own footsteps from back then. He perceives details. And presses the shutter.

For Akinbode Akinbiyi, raised in London and now resident in Berlin for more than 30 years, the movements with which we traverse urban space are important. "In movement, we are constantly in interaction with our environment, with what is immediately around us, and the environment reacts in turn." (Akinbode Akinbiyi) Because time stands still in every single photograph, photography can succeed in overcoming temporalities in order to follow in the footsteps of those who left their traces 300 years ago.

14 A D A M A D E L P H I N E F A W U N D U

14A *Sunsum, in Spirit*

Film, HD Video, 09:53 min, Samples: May Ayim "Blues in Black and White" in Maria Binder "Hope in My Heart – The May Ayim Story" Film Trailer; Louis Henderson "The Sea is History" Soundtrack; Michelle Parkerson "A Litany For Survival – the Life and Work of Audre Lorde" Film Trailer; Ella Andall "Yemaya (Great Divine Mother of the Orisas)"; Bessie Jones "Beggin' the Blues"; Humboldt Universität Berlin Lautarchiv "Duala (Kamerun), Gesang – LA 1334"; "Baule (Elfenbeinküste), Flöte – PK 1596/1", 2020

14B *Sunsum, in Body*

Haptic Canvas, archival pigment, synthetic hair, yarn, paper, leather thread, acrylic medium on handmade mulberry paper – bound onto wooden frame, 21,5 x 33 x 26 cm, 2020

14C *Sunsum, in Mind #1 + Sunsum, in Mind #2, 2020*

Installation, HD Video, archival pigment, human hair, synthetic hair, sage, cowrie shells, acrylic medium on 100% Brazilian banana tree stem paper, each 50 x 140 cm

Water is the connecting element that runs through

the works of Adama Delphine Fawundu. The artist is interested in the nexus of social movements and collective tendencies and how these are mirrored in the motif of water. With a view to and awareness of transhistorical connections, a range of temporalities are connected: past, present, and future all coincide within Fawundu's artistic vision. As a locus of memory, the sea narrates generations of its own stories – and it is here that Derek Walcott's well-known poem, "The Sea is History," a source of inspiration to Fawundu alongside texts by Anton Wilhelm Amo, offers many forms of explicit connection.

For her contribution to the exhibition, the artist pursued and filmed along Braunschweig's waterways. The resulting video work uses collage-like methods to bring together a range of images from various river points. References include poets and activists May Ayim and Audre Lorde, whose years in Berlin in turn inspired Ayim. In her expansive installation, Fawundu combines collages of moving image material together with photographs, with new image levels being added via superimposed projections. Here too, the sea is projected as a place that mediates sinking and (ritual) healing.

Finally, various (narrative) threads coalesce into a handmade book. Page by page, recurring symbols from the artist's work – such as the sea, natural and artificial hair, roots and routes – are closely interwoven. Collage as an artistic medium is also prominent in the room-filling soundtrack, overlaying the other works from the starting point of the large projection.

Samples such as Bessie Jones's "Beggin' the Blues" or Ella Andall's "Yemaya" are mixed with sonic artifacts from Humboldt University of Berlin's sound archives. As a practice of merging distinct sound recordings, sampling is also used skillfully by the artist in the context of the emergence of (new) language and thus deployed to develop her own:

"The 'new language' symbolizes life, a sense of freedom, living rather than just surviving within the complexities of systematic oppression. This is what the body does intuitively – the 'body' never truly dies, it transforms." (Adama Delphine Fawundu)

15 K I T S O L Y N N L E L L I O T T

291 years condensed into the same number of seconds (or) one day out there our paths might cross
Three-channel video installation, 9:42 min, 2020

K I T S O L Y N N L E L L I O T T ' s artistic practice includes video installations, filmmaking and writing. Lelliott's work explores the realities produced by contradictory forms of knowledge and concerns the narratives and forms that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic during colonialism, a constitutive element of the modern era. For T H E F A C U L T Y O F

S E N S I N G – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo, Kitso Lynn Lelliott has developed a new two-part video work. Both parts are 291 seconds long, representing the number of years that have passed since Anton Wilhelm Amo's disputation in 1729.

In the first part of the video work, two projections run in parallel on separate screens, juxtaposing landscape photographs from modern-day Ghana, the region where Amo was born, and Germany with historical images of each region. While exploring specific geographical reference points of Anton Wilhelm Amo's life, these landscape shots enable a more general consideration of the body's encounter with an environment, recalling Amo's notes on the faculty of sensing and the human body's relation to the mind.

The duality of screens and environments alludes to Amo's dualist thinking which the artist subverts by interrupting the landscape shot progressively with complex layers of history. In the second part, a large-format third channel self-critically raises the problems and issues that the artist encountered while searching for Anton Wilhelm Amo. Using accredited but historically questionable representations of Amo, Kitso Lynn Lelliott draws a deliberately blurred picture, challenging our interest in his unique fate in the context of the countless unknown names and lives whose individual existences, works, and oeuvres have not been passed down through history.

16 LISTENING ROOM

The AMO LISTENING ROOM comprises a series of conversations with the curators as well as the artists who contributed to this exhibition, covering Amo's legacy, inspiration and knowledge as transmitted and carried on through today's generation of artists, curators and thinkers.

These conversations are with the artists Akinbode Akinbiyi, Adama Delphine Fawundu, Jean-Ulrick Désert, Claudia Martínez Garay, Olivier Guesselé-Garai and Antje Majewski, Kitso Lynn Lelliott, Adjani Okpu-Egbe, Resolve Collective., and the curators Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Jule Hillgärtner and Nele Kaczmarek

17 ANTJE MAJEWSKI

Die Apatheia der menschlichen Seele (I-IV)

I, Oil on wood, 40 x 80 cm, 2020

II, Oil on wood, 77,8 x 77,8 cm, 2020

III, Oil on wood, 50 x 50 cm, 2020

IV, Oil on wood, 73x 50,5 cm, 2020

Antje Majewski's series of new paintings is based on Anton Wilhelm Amo's dissertation of the same name, written at the University of Wittenberg in 1734: *On the Apatheia of the Human Mind; or, the Absence of Sensation in the Human Mind and its Presence in our Organic and Living Body*. In his dissertation Amo explores the body-mind problem and posits the

following with regard to the debate at the time: "that the mind acts with the body with which it is in mutual union, we concede; but that it suffers with the body, we deny." Majewski also begins with this idea of the sanctity of the soul and examines the relationship between the internal and the external, our inner soul and our outer body. The final form of the series is painting, but each work has gone through a process of translation several times in the course of its creation. This is not only in the sense of Amo's original Latin text being translated into a contemporary language version, but more in terms of how Amo's writing conjured notions and individual ideas about the depiction of a soul, which were then shared in a dialogue using spoken language, and then finally translated into a visual language.

The paintings are inscribed with the artistic interpretation of previous discussions with the people involved in the exhibition about the visual representation of a soul, which rendered the challenges of speaking the unspeakable and painting the unpaintable visible. Translated into writing, transcriptions of these conversations – in the different languages in which the conversations took place – accompany the pictures as texts, thus establishing an additional layer to the image-text relationship.

The works also become portraits in terms of their presentation format; portraits of those who were involved in the dialogue around the creation of the exhibition project and Majewski's works. Ultimately, the paintings can also be interpreted as portraits of Anton Wilhelm Amo himself, whose philosophical vocabulary is the inspiration for the entire exhibition.

18 OLIVIER GUESSELÉ - GARAI

Their eyes were watching cop

Installation, mixed media, wood, variable dimensions, 2015/2020

Olivier Guesselé-Garai lends poetic expression to his FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo contribution. In a poem written in 2015, the artist deals with the cross-generational identity issues of a "race of doubt" (Olivier Guesselé-Garai). Here too, connecting social injustice in different times, Guesselé-Garai explicitly refers with the title of his poem to the literary work *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston, a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance in 1920s New York. With the orthographically close shift from "God" to "Cop", the artist transports the same old questions – with regard to Anton Wilhelm Amo even centuries-old questions – into the very present, allowing for references to movements like Black Lives Matter, which have been formed against systemic (police) violence against Black People of Color (BPoC).

For the exhibition, the artist translates what he has written into space. In the horizontal presentation,

different materials are combined and what is read is repeatedly linked with what is seen, thus generating a top view as the superordinate perspective on things. The wooden letters fixed to panels show traces of other floor coverings and can be read together with individual statements of the poem: “uptown or downtown tonic asphalt”. The first line, “A negro way of running”, opens up different connections yet again as a reference to Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s epilogue for Hurston’s novel, *A Negro Way of Saying*.

Guesselé-Garai develops an individual type-image with universal appeal. The typeface in the sense of typography is simply designed and thus bears signs of universality too. The letters have something educational about them, they are reminiscent of a basic learning tool for reading and writing. With their help, knowledge can be grasped, shared and stored over time – and ultimately, they also provide access to those writings by Amo which are existing today. Divided into four paragraphs, the flow of reading in Guesselé-Garai’s poem is marked as interrupted, thus also referring to historically recurring and continuing incisions: an ongoing fragile history.

19 LUNGISWA GQUNTA

Benisya Ndawoni: Return to the Unfamiliar

Installation, razor-wires, sage, mpepho, variable dimensions, 2020

Lungiswa Gqunta’s installation *Benisya Ndawoni: Return to the Unfamiliar* announces itself with the spicy-bitter scents of sage and dried mpepho, a liquorice strawflower cultivated in South Africa. In combination with the geometric barbed-wire room drawings – harshly opposing the visitors in one moment while creating almost intimate retreats in the next – an equal appeal is made to the senses of sight, touch, and smell. This multi-sensory approach establishes interesting links to the theses of Anton Wilhelm Amo, who noted in *The Apathia of the Human Mind*: “Man has sensation of material objects not as regards his mind but as regards his organic and living body.”

Important starting points of the installation are experiences of forced migration: the controlled or forced movement of (Black) people in the past and present. “Where were you going?”, asks the title in isiXhosa, posing questions about accessibility and structural violence. “*Benisya Ndawoni: Return to the Unfamiliar remembers* all the homeless and therefore invisible bodies trying to find a home, and the violence inflicted upon them during this navigation. It is a tribute to migration, to the many houses that have been built and destroyed and which in turn build ‘houses’ within ourselves.” (Lungiswa Gqunta)

By directly linking sage, mpepho and barbed wire, Gqunta evokes contradictory memories of private retreats, but also of exclusion and persecution.

Ambivalent desires for belonging meet the disoriented flow of bodies through different places and contexts – a phenomenon for which Georg Lukács coined the metaphor of “transcendental homelessness”. With the additional title – *Return to the Unfamiliar* – Gqunta also refers to the movement of Amo, who, in 1746/47, returned to the place from which he was forcibly abducted as a child and who knew how to draw the qualities of his multi-logical philosophy from integrating different frames of reference.

THE FACULTY OF SENSING = THINKING WITH, THROUGH, AND BY ANTON WILHELM AMO BY BONAVENTURE SOH BEJENG NDIKUNG

1. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea.

2. The canon of philosophy, like other canons, is a manifestation of power. Though it seems intransparent, we do actually know the codes that allow certain people into the canon and leave others out. Gender, race, geography, coloniality, and so on factor into canonization processes. Consequently, it is not very difficult to understand how and why Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea never found a place in the canon of philosophy, despite making important contributions to eighteenth-century German and European philosophy, notwithstanding his impact or the fact that his work was in the tradition of and referenced by philosophers that came after him.

3. Disclaimer: The project THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Wilhelm Anton Amo is not an effort to insert Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea into any canon whatsoever. It is, on the contrary, an attempt to decanonize the philosophical canon by “thinking with, through, and by” Amo. By decanonization, we mean “that possibility of unmasking and revealing the inner workings of the canon whether from the West, East, North, or South. Decanonization is the possibility of making the canon more elastic by bringing in works from indigenous people, PoC, LGBT people, and those from ‘other’ geographies, and not seeing these new additions only through the eyes of the works that already inhabit the canon. We must entertain the possibility of reviewing, rejecting, and declassifying some works that were thought to have been canonized. An ultimately flexible and elastic canon is akin to a non-canon.”¹ By decanonization, we mean “dismantling

the hierarchical structures that produce canons, and a striving to eliminate the emergence of parallel canons. Needless to say, ‘the canon’ as synonymous with ‘the Western canon’ is currently redundant.”²

In decanonizing, we intend to “put in question when the normalized modes of knowledge production and dissemination are challenged, when the usual ways of object and subject displays and modes of view are defied.”³ In the words of poet Tsitsi Jaji:

To decanonize is to shed muscle, to leave the body guards at home, to turn away from force and authoritarian behaviors.

To decanonize is to forswear the making wretched of our sistren and bredren, to have none of this canon fodder.

To decanonize is to become skeptical of a rule of law that has worked only to enrich the rich and strip the wretched.

To decanonize is to learn from the outlaw.

To decanonize is to stand down.

To decanonize is to assemble in the present, to stop waiting for the judgment of time to sort what matters from what does not.

To decanonize is to refuse the notion of not mattering, and to cease and desist from refusing to hear the expertise of the poor.

To decanonize is to jam together, to make method the point: meta—alongside, with, across,

1 Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, “The Globalized Museum? Decanonization as Method: A Reflection in Three Acts,” *Mousse* 58 (April–May 2017), <http://moussemagazine.it/the-globalized-museum-bonaventure-soh-bejeng-ndikung-documenta-14-2017/>.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

after...hodos—a way.

To decanonize as method is to walk alongside, with, behind, in encounter at the crossroads.

To decanonize is to release from the demand for proof, affirmation, mensuration, to lose count, to lose oneself in the joy, to become a soft reed swimming, floating, bending, soaking, water-logging.

To decanonize is to abandon ordering, to smooth the friction between spoken and written, live and recorded, to revel in the ungrammatical.

- Tsitsi Jaji⁴

4. There is an excitement that comes with any “discovery.” A high. A kind of petite mort. As with any high, it is most addictive. That might be why, for some five hundred years, every European who could, left Europe to “discover” something or somewhere out in the yonder. An almost perverse joy of having stumbled upon the unexpected or something one has been tediously looking for — and as the first, for that matter. And yet the notion of discovery is as flawed a concept as it is a con, for nothing under the sun can be discovered. Not America. Not India. Not Africa, and obviously not Amo. There is no discovering that which already exists. And yet the past thirty years of approaches to Amo’s work have been within that same space of everlasting discovery. It is interesting to see how one article after the other claims to have “discovered” a “new” eighteenth-century philosopher, and how philosophy faculties across Europe continue to register surprise at the “discovery” of this “continental” philosopher.

5. The narrative is predetermined, possibly preemptive or maybe even prejudiced. It is the narrative of wonderment at the “Black philosopher.” There is a slight friction and coarseness that becomes audible whenever these two notions are put together, as though it were Blackness versus Philosophy, as if both were at loggerheads, as though one would detract or deter from the other. But yes, that eighteenth-century philosopher Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea was unapologetically Black and unapologetically a philosopher. As important and spectacular as his biography might be, might there be a possibility of thinking about the man and his work without it being clouded and overshadowed by obvious details of his biography? As Justin E. H. Smith writes,⁵ “ironically, those who seek to honor Amo simply by invoking his

name end up treating him as a mere curiosity, as if philosophers and historians were still stuck in the moment in which racists such as David Hume issued public challenges to produce a single example of a ‘Negro of accomplishment,’ and anti-racists such as [Henri] Grégoire responded with well-meaning but still rather paternalistic lists of such examples. Far better to leave that historical moment behind, and to pay attention to what Amo in fact has to say, to who he was and to the social world he inhabited.” That is where we’re at.

6. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Anton. Historical records reveal that Amo, having been seized and enslaved as a small boy, was taken from his native West Africa to Amsterdam. From there he was passed on to the court of Duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, Lower Saxony, Germany in 1707. He was an estimated 4 years old at the time. Amo thus became Anton at his baptism, after Anton Ulrich, a member of the House of Welf famed for his patronage of scholarship and the arts. That is how the boy from West Africa came to bear a name that means “highly praiseworthy,” one associated with a Roman clan and derived from the Greek anthos, meaning flower. Baptismal records state that:

This twenty-ninth day of July has been baptized a little Moor in the Saltzthal Castle Chapel, and he has been christened Anton Wilhelm. His Godfathers are all of them very noble Lordships.⁶

7. Amo’s intellectual contributions to humanity include his 1729 dissertation *De jure Maurorum in Europa* [On the Right of Moors in Europe], defended at the University of Halle, and *De humanae mentis apatheia* [On the Apathy of the Human Mind], at the University of Wittenberg in 1734. In 1736, two years after completing the latter, Dr. Amo returned to Halle as a lecturer of psychology, “natural law” and the decimal system.⁷ There he published *Tractatus de arte sobrie et accurate philosophandi* [Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Correctly Philosophizing] (1738) before moving to Jena University, where he would give his inaugural lecture on “The Frontiers of Psychology” (1739). By all measures, it is a body of work that spans the fields of law, psychology to philosophy, and is very much situated within the first half of the 18th century and authored by a man who became a prominent philosopher at the time of his practice. By no means insignificant, the fact that Amo is still being “discovered” by some continental philosophers and faculties in this day and time is a testament to the cynicism and the efficacy, the potency and preposterousness of erasure. While people including Paulin J. Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Justin E.H. Smith, Yawovi Emmanuel Edeh, and Victor Uredo Emma-Adamah have crucially contributed to the de-erasure and reanimation of Amo’s philosophical work, it is not a responsibility that should be left entirely

4 Tsitsi Jaji, contribution to *Cracking the Surface: Decanonization as Method*, First Long Night Of Ideas at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, May 12, 2017.

5 Justin E. H. Smith, “Anton Wilhelm Amo: Basic Writings,” in: <https://www.jehsmith.com>

6 Baptismal records found at Wolfenbüttel Castle (Lower Saxony State Archive, Wolfenbüttel, KB 1, Abt. 1332, 84), quoted in William Abraham, “The Life and Times of Anton Wilhelm Amo,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 7 (1964): 64. See also Norbert Lochner, “Anton Wilhelm Amo: A Ghana Scholar in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3, no. 3 (1958): 170; Jacob Emmanuel Mabe, *Anton Wilhelm Amo: The Intercultural Background of His Philosophy*, trans. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2014); and Victor Uredo Emma-Adamah, “Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703–1756) the African-German Philosopher of Mind: An Eighteen-Century Intellectual History,” (PhD diss., University of the Free State, 2015).

7 Smith, “Anton Wilhelm Amo: Basic Writings”.

to scholars; indeed we cannot leave Amo in particular — or philosophy and the history thereof for that matter — in the hands of philosophers and historians alone. Artists, curators, art workers, scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and lay people must claim, must adopt Amo and especially his work: digging and rummaging in the surviving bits and pieces of his writing and interpretations thereof. They must engage in new and other ways of understanding his thinking, especially within the arts, and use it as a basis for projection and speculation. This, too, is part of the process of decanonization, if we understand decanonization to mean “de-erasure—that is, the ability to make reappear, rewrite, rearticulate, and rephrase what was erased, not in relation or reaction to an existing canon, but in relation to the relevance of the ‘thing itself.’”⁸

8. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Wilhelm Rudolph. The Dutch West India Company shipped Amo like a commodity from West Africa to Holland and then Germany, to the court of Duke Anton Ulrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1633-1714). The duke passed him on as a gift to sons August Wilhelm (1662-1731; Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and ruling Prince of Wolfenbüttel from his father’s passing in 1714 until his own death) and Ludwig Rudolf von Wolfenbüttel (1671-1735; Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and ruling Prince of Wolfenbüttel from his brother’s passing in 1731 until his death).⁹ Having both Wilhelm and Rudolph in his name, it was identifiable to whom Amo belonged.

9. Questions concerning the rights of Black and Brown people — along with those of many “othered” groups in Europe, the Americas and on other continents, for that matter — remain as crucial today as they were when Amo wrote “On the Right of Moors in Europe” in 1729. The tools and processes of dehumanization may be different; the violence against others is perhaps more refined. But a look at the refugee camps in Moria; refugee housing in Germany or along the Greece-Turkey border — a thought to the fragile bodies making their way collectively on foot from Honduras or Guatemala, Cameroon or Nigeria, Syria or Yemen or through the perils of the desert or the Mediterranean Sea, only to face demise or Fortress Europe or USA — one cannot help but think of the rights of Black and Brown people in Europe and all over the world. Amo’s “On the Right of Moors in Europe” is considered lost to the cracks of history. All we have are the accounts of eyewitnesses

or other chroniclers. Two such accounts, according to Smith, appear in *Zedler’s Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* [Great Complete Encyclopedia of all Sciences and Arts] (1739)¹⁰ and in Johann Peter von Ludewig’s contribution to the *Wöchentliche Hallische Frage- und Anzeigungs-Nachrichten* (November 28, 1729),¹¹ a weekly periodical. Amo’s dissertation defense, as Emma-Adamah points out,¹² was presided over by the very same Johann Peter von Ludewig, who was then university chancellor at Halle. Von Ludewig was also an eminent Prussian diplomat, historian, and scholar of international law who played a role in negotiating Brandenburg-Prussian settlement of the Gold Coast before its sale to the Dutch East India Company in 1720. All this to say Ludewig must have gained an insight and could relate to Amo “on multiple levels: jurisprudence, the German cultural setting, and Amo’s African origins.”¹³ Ludewig’s account states that:

So that the argument of the disputation should be appropriate to his situation, the topic *De iure Maurorum in Europa*, or the law of Moors, was chosen. Therein it was not only shown from books and from history, that the kings of the Moors were enfeoffed by the Roman Emperor, and that every one of them had to obtain a royal patent from him, which Justinian also issued, but it was also investigated how far the freedom or servitude of Moors bought by Christians in Europe extends, according to the usual laws.¹⁴

There is some debate as to whether this disputation was in fact imposed on Amo (as Ludewig’s account suggests) and if it ever existed. Whether or not it existed is a matter for historians to settle. For speculation-minded cultural workers like myself, a mere evocation of Amo as the author of this politico-legal argument devoid of moral imperatives suffices. As Emma-Adamah put it: “Amo argues on the basis of civil rights, anchored in political history, and thereby subtly undermines the place of the religious institution in anchoring the rights of Africans [...] He uses the political history of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (482–565 CE) to establish a common political and legal status between Africans and Europeans.”¹⁵

Let us assume that Justinian law and contracts are long outdated and situate ourselves in the contemporary, at a time when human dignity is enshrined in the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and in many national constitutions. Article 1 of the German

8 Ndikung, “The Globalized Museum? Decanonization as Method.”

9 Mike Loutzenhiser, *The Role of the Indigenous African Psyche in the Evolution of Human Consciousness* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008).

10 Johann Heinrich Zedler, “Amo (Anton Wilhelm),” in *Großes Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, trans. Justin E. H. Smith, unpublished (Leipzig, 1739-1750), 1369-1370. Zedler’s report on Amo’s *On the Right of Moors* dissertation is taken almost verbatim from Ludewig’s, and needs no quoting.

11 Johann Peter von Ludewig, *Wöchentliche Hallische Frage- und Anzeigungs-Nachrichten*, no. XVIII (November 28, 1729): 272-273; DAB 5-6.

12 Emma-Adamah, “Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1756) the African-German Philosopher of Mind,” 49.

13 Ibid.

14 Johann Peter von Ludewig, *Wöchentliche Hallische Frage- und Anzeigungs-Nachrichten*, trans. Justin E. H. Smith, unpublished, cited in Emma-Adamah, “Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1756) the African-German Philosopher of Mind,” 49. For entire original announcement: “Hieselbst

hat sich ein in Diensten Sr. Hochfürstl. Durchl. des regierenden Hertzogs von Wolfenbüttel stehender getaufter Mohr Namens Herr Antonius Wilhelmus Amo, einige Jahre Studirens halber aufgehalten. Und nachdem er vorherho die Lateinische Sprache zum Grund geleyet hat er hier die collegis iuris priuati und publici mit solchem Fleiß und succeß getrieben, daß er in solchem studio ziemlich geübet. Solchem nach er sich mit Vorbewußt seiner gnädigsten Herrschaft welche ihn bisher alhier unterhalten bey dem Herrn Cantzler von Ludewig angeben unter deßen praesidio sich mit einer disputation öffentlich hören zu lassen. Damit nun das argument der disputation seinem Stande gemäß seyn möchte; so ist das thema de iure mavorum in Europa oder vom Mohrenrecht beliebt worden. Darinnen daß nicht allein ex LL. und der Historie gezeuet; daß der Mohren ihr König bey dem Römischen Kayser ehemed zu Lehen gegangen und jeder von denselben ein Königs-Patent welches auch Justinianus augetheilt hohlen müssen; sondern auch vornehmlich dieses untersuchet wie weit den von Christen erkaufften Mohren in Europa ihre Freyheit oder Dienstbarkeit denen üblichen Rechten nach sich erstrecke.”

Basic Law, for example, states that “(1) Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority. (2) The German people therefore acknowledge inviolable and inalienable human rights as the basis of every community, of peace, and of justice in the world. (3) The following basic rights shall bind the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary as directly applicable law.”¹⁶

In light of this, how does one explain the National Socialist Underground’s (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund; abbreviated NSU) over decade-long executions of migrants in Germany, all under the watchful eyes of police who may have participated or enabled such acts? According to a website for NSU Watch, an independent watchdog group:

The so-called NSU case has been called one of the biggest “failures” of the German law enforcement and the secret services, by politicians and the mainstream media.¹⁷ These failures, were allegedly caused by individual “mistakes” and a lack of coordination and competition between the responsible authorities. From a progressive perspective, the NSU case is an unprecedented example of the close connection between the secret services and the neo-Nazi movement as well as the structural racism within the law enforcement authorities.¹⁸

In light of this, how can we explain the still-unresolved case of Oury Jalloh? A young, Black man from Sierra Leone burned to death in his police cell on January 7, 2005. That is a fact. Jalloh’s case may be the most revealing yet when it comes to showing institutional, systematic racism in German law enforcement: Despite pressure from civil society and from some politicians, police have yet to explain how a man who had been stripped of almost all of his belongings and chained to his bed could set himself on fire (as police initially claimed), and no one has been held responsible for what is openly known to be a murder. There is no accountability for the moral, political, or legal impact of this act. Numerous other incidents attest to racially-motivated police violence in Germany, including those that claimed the lives of Christy Schwundek, Achidi John, Yaya Jabbi, Laye Condé, and likely more.

In light of this, how do we explain the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA)’s assessment that Tobias Rathjen – attacker in city of Hanau who shot and killed nine people of migrant backgrounds on February 19, 2020, and who had previously published a multi-page

racist pamphlet on the Internet – is not a “supporter of a right-wing extremist ideology”? Instead, law enforcement claims that he chose his victims “to gain as much attention as possible for his conspiracy myths of surveillance by a secret service.”¹⁹ Police claim he couldn’t be a right-wing extremist because he had once helped his “dark-skinned neighbor” and been on a soccer team with migrants in the past.

In light of Amo’s “On the Right of Moors in Europe”: What are the rights of Black and Brown people in Europe and the world, notwithstanding the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and national human rights conventions?

10. borderless and brazen
i will be african
even if you want me to be german
and i will be german
even if my blackness does not suit you
- May Ayim[20]

11. Amo in conversation with...
In his aforementioned “Inaugural Philosophical Dissertation On the Apathy of the Human Mind Or the Absence of Sense and of the Faculty of Sensing in the Human Mind And the Presence of these in our Organic and Living Body,”²¹ Amo asks, “What of Spirit in General?” To which he responds:

The human mind in general is of the spirits. Thus we must declare what we understand by the term or denomination ‘spirit.’ For us, any substance, whatever is merely active, immaterial, always intelligent in itself, and operating spontaneously from its own intention, on account of an intended goal of which it is conscious.²² [...] Explanation I. I say that spirit is a merely active substance, which is to say that spirit does not admit any passion in itself.²³

For his 1978 album *Spirits Rejoice!* — Louis Moholo’s first under his own name — the artist and his octet recorded a very tender, profound and dolent version of “You Ain’t Gonna Know Me (‘Cos You Think You Know Me)”²⁴ in memory of trumpeter Mongezi Feza, a friend who had passed to the realm of the ancestors in 1975. Feza had composed this achingly beautiful and sublime rendition of the song a few years prior, and it joins other pieces on the album — including Moholo’s “Khanya Apho Ukhona (Shine Wherever You Are),” Johnny Dyani’s “Ithi-Gqi (Appear),” Majola Sehume’s “Amaxesha Osizi (Times Of Sorrow)” and Pat Matshikiza’s “Wedding

¹⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹⁶ “Basic Law,” German Federal Government, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/chancellor/basic-law-470510>.

¹⁷ Daniel Köhler, *Right-wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The “National Socialist Underground” and the History of Terror From the Far-right in Germany*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 5; and German Bundestag, “Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht, Drucksache 17/14600,” (August 22, 2013): 833ff, <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/146/1714600.pdf>, cited in Antonia von der Behrens, “The NSU Case in Germany – as at July 3rd, 2018,” NSU Watch, July 9, 2018, <https://www.nsu-watch.info/2018/07/the-nsu-case-in-germany-as-at-july-3rd-2018/>.

¹⁸ Antonia von der Behrens, “The NSU Case in Germany.”

¹⁹ “Attentäter von Hanau laut BKA kein ‘Rechtsextremist,’” *junge Welt*, March 27, 2020, https://www.jungewelt.de/artikel/375655.attent%C3%A4ter-von-hanau-laut-bka-kein-rechtsextremist.html?fbclid=IwAR2Lj9VlW0yRnRnNY_b0X2CWgxl1nSg9woP1ILtg5tL0Y13BbE2ybK6Mk70.

²⁰ Excerpt from May Ayim, “borderless and brazen: a poem against the German ‘un-not-y’” (1990), trans. May Ayim, in *Affilia* 23, no.1 (2008): 92–94.

²¹ Anton Wilhelm Amo, “Inaugural Philosophical Dissertation. On the Apathy of the Human Mind Or the Absence of Sense and of the Faculty of Sensing in the Human Mind And the Presence of these in our Organic and Living Body,.” unpublished trans. Justin E. H. Smith (PhD diss., University of Wittenberg, 1734).

²² Ibid.

Hymn” — in being indisputable and quintessential of both activating the substance that is the spirit and making the spirit rejoice, regardless of whether the spirit admits this passion or not. Moholo, Feza, Dyani, Chris McGregor, and Dudu Pukwana had all left South Africa at the height of apartheid, at a time and place where they were allowed no freedom for being Black and were not allowed to play in a mixed-race group known as the The Brotherhood of Breath. They sought refuge in England. Moholo was the only one of the five to see the end of apartheid and eventually return to his homeland.

“Explanation II. All spirit always knows through itself, i.e., it is conscious to itself of itself, and of its operations, not of other things.”²⁵

Kyrie eleison
Christos eleison
Kyrie eleison
Is it in the nature of God to forgive himself—
For his sin?

– M. NourbeSe Philip,
“The Book of unCommon Prayer”²⁶

“Explanation III. Every spirit operates spontaneously, i.e., intrinsically, determines its operations towards a goal that is to be pursued, and operates absolutely without any external influence.”²⁷

Perhaps Akinbode Akinbiyi’s task (or what was asked of him for THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Wilhelm Anton Amo project) was to capture traces of Amo — and maybe his spirit — in Braunschweig in the medium of photography. The result are vestiges of an erstwhile presence, and yet they say spaces are marked by our presences. Space has memory and architecture or other manifestations within spaces can become mnemonic tools, helping us delve deeper into memories engrained in the spaces we occupy, the ground upon which we tread. If any spirit can intrinsically determine its operations without any particular influence (that is, it has the agency to manifest or not, act or not) then the photographer has no choice but to dig deep, listen carefully, wait patiently for the spirits to show themselves. Meanwhile, the photographer listens to what the “mnemonic devices” in that particular space might reveal about this memory they have retained over the centuries. Titled *Attempts at Understanding* (2020), Akinbiyi’s series of eight black-and-white photographs could be understood as both intrinsic revelations of the spirit of Amo and traces of memories in space. As usual, Akinbiyi sets out for a walk. His practice is peripateticism — it is in and through

movement that the work finds form and that things, images, spirits reveal themselves. It is in movement that the body relates to itself, to the space it occupies and the structures therein, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Images reveal themselves in the process; they, too, have agency. And so the photographer succeeds in taking only the photographs that intend to be taken. That is how Braunschweig decides to reveal itself: as a place both full of humans and empty at the same time. Which is to say, one sees cars parked all along the street sides of a public housing area and a few rows of buildings, and yet we see no people on the sidewalk, no one looking out of the windows. Life has shifted from public to private spaces; streets were deserted even before the COVID19 pandemic. All we find are traces of the humans who drive these cars, live in these houses, trim these hedges. Another photograph shows a stop sign protruding from the grass. It is in that constellation nothing other than outstanding. As another space devoid of people, but full of serenity. It is a windy day; blades of grass bow to the left in a choreography. If void is the chorus of a city with some 250,000 inhabitants in 2020, what would have been the chorus in 1710 or 1720, when a young Amo walked the streets of Braunschweig as a ten or twenty-year-old. Akinbiyi continues his walks. It is an effort to find where Amo would have strolled in his day. To metaphorically retrace his steps as a process of coming closer, finding his bearing. So what do the spaces whisper about Amo, what do they tell of him, what does his spirit choose to reveal? A painting on a garage cover next to a family home shows a robed Black man holding a staff at chest level. There is some majesty that clouds this figure as he levitates. One is tempted to see in this image a portrait of Amo, of whom no real image exists. Another photograph calls us to a graveyard behind a church. Trees and crosses populate the space. The tombstone in the foreground suffers from the withering of time; the name of whoever was buried here has melted away. Another history erased. Another spirit might have intrinsically decided to set itself into operation and reveal itself. A word, in majuscule script, appears in that space of the erased archive: M O H R . The church in the background is just the shadow of itself; the next photograph shows the building coming closer to the camera. Graveyards, like churches, are layered spaces for ritualized practices. Spirits are said to inhabit such spaces as well. It is not unlikely that Amo would have taken a stroll here, or attended church services here. At least the stones of the church seem to remember him — not particularly difficult as he would have been one of the few Blacks in Braunschweig at the time. The tree seems to have a better memory though. The walk brings us back to the Kunstverein Braunschweig, where Adama Delphine Fawundu is photographed holding the shoreline high in the air. It is the point of both departure and return in her work, as it was for Amo as well.

“Explanation IV. Spirit operates from an intention, i.e., from a precognition of a thing that should arise, and of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Louis Moholo Octet, “You Ain’t Gonna Know Me (“Cos You Think You Know Me),” track 2 on *Spirits Rejoice!*, recorded January 24, 1978, Ogun, 1978.

²⁵ Amo, “On the Apathy of the Human Mind.”

²⁶ M. NourbeSe Philip, “The Book of unCommon Prayer” in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), 69.

²⁷ Amo, “On the Apathy of the Human Mind.”

an end that it intends to pursue through its operation.”²⁸

They sneaked into the limbo of time,
But could not muffle the gay jingling
Brass bells on the frothy necks
Of the sacrificial sheep that limped and nodded
after them;
They could not hide the moss on the bald pate
Of their reverent heads;
And the gnarled barks of the wawa trees;
Nor the rust on the ancient state-swords;
Nor the skulls studded with grinning covies;
They could not silent the drums,
The fiber of their soul and ours—
The drums that whisper to us behind black
sinewy hands.
They gazed,
and sweeping like white locusts through the
forests
Saw the same men, slightly wizened,
Shuffle their sandaled feet to the same rhythms,
They heard the same words of wisdom uttered
Between puffs of pale blue smoke:
They saw us,
And said: They have not changed!

– Kwesi Brew, “Ancestral Faces”²⁹

“Explanation V. Spirit is immaterial, i.e., it has nothing material in its essence and its properties.”³⁰

Sunsum, in Spirit (2020), a recent video by Adama Delphine Fawundu, was produced for THE FACULTY OF SENSING – Thinking With, Through, And By Anton Wilhelm Amo. It is a mesmerizing, non-narrative piece with a repeating, cyclical, off-kilter grid; a superimposed soundscape of songs that must be qualified as spiritual, whistlings that convoke the spirits, bells and gongs; the thunderous sound of waves hitting the shore and other chants. The piece begins with and is accompanied by songs of praise to Yemoja, the Yoruba orisha of the waters. The immaterial spirit of Yemoja has possessed the Virgin Mary of transatlantic, syncretic Afro-Christian religions just as it has possessed the artist, the maker of the piece. What is immaterial needs a vessel to give it form. It needs to inhabit a container. Yemoja also bore and still bears witness to the Amo(s) of these times: to the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers violently seized from their homes and families in Africa and taken across the Atlantic, where they were forced to till the soil and build the utopias of the New World. The fact that some survived the transatlantic trafficking at all — despite the most inhuman of conditions — also owes to the motherly prudence and protection of Yemoja. The video is of

water, and it is water. The transience of water. Its fluidity. Its cleansing. As Fela Kuti once sang, “Water no get enemy.” Yet as fluid and formless as water can be, it still serves as a container of light — the light of the sun flickering over the water, all across the video. It is still a container of the skies and it still contains all of those bodies that it carried, from one shore of the Atlantic to another, for over 400 years. Yemoja protected and guided, comforted and cured, but woe betide the world for that day will come when Yemoja will unleash the anger that she too has been containing, appalled by the horror that humans inflict upon one another.

The shores of the Atlantic mirror each other. Kaleidoscopically. Those shores from which Amo was seized and to which he returned after he was hunted and haunted out of Germany. That is when water flows upwards. Against gravity. Against the tides. Amo swims against tides. Just as May Ayim’s voice, pregnant with ambiguity and determination, insists in her poem “borderless and brazen”: “i will be african / even if you want me to be german / and i will be german / even if my blackness does not suit you.”³¹ This threshold, this limbo echoes throughout the video, resonating with Audre Lorde’s “A Litany for Survival”:

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children’s mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

–Audre Lorde³²

And that is the space of the immateriality of spirit. The space between the shores, between the doors, between the before and the after. That is the space of and in which the *Sunsum* dwells. Is alert. That *Sunsum*, as the spirit is known in Akan and Ashanti mythology, is one’s spirit. That which connects the body (honam) to the soul (kra).

12. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Amo. Humans, like plants, are rooted beings. With names and more they situate themselves in spaces, organize themselves in communities on the basis of gender and of being racialized; on the basis of creed, sexual orientation, and otherwise. That which we might call an identity. On what basis do we exist, what perspective do we speak from and in relation to what? What is our vantage point? Smith, in an effort to situate Amo both

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kwesi Brew, “Ancestral Faces” in *A Selection of African Poetry: A New Edition*, eds. Kojo E. Senanu and Theo Vincent, (Essex: Longman Group Ltd, 1988), page?.

³⁰ Amo, “On the Apathy of the Human Mind,” 5.

³¹ Ayim, “borderless and brazen: a poem against the German ‘un-not-y,’” 92.

³² Excerpt from Audre Lorde, “A Litany for Survival” (1978), in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 255.

geographically and nomenclaturally, has pointed to the existence of at least two prominent figures that bore the name “Amo”, or a variant thereof, in what is now known as Ghana in the early eighteenth-century or late seventeenth-century. Although we cannot be certain that Amo was related to those families, it still helps us understand and situate Amo within a social space and historical bearing. The two namesakes include:

Amo Takyi, who flourished at the end of the seventeenth century, [and] is identified in several European sources as a Commendian king, from the state known by Europeans at the time as “Little Comendo,” and, in local Akan languages, as “Ekki Tekki.”³³ [...] Tekki Ankan, known today as “Kuma Takyi” [...] Kuma Takyi played a major role in the Komenda Wars. [...] Kuma Takyi was named King of Eguafu in 1700, shifting regional power to the British, which then began to slip again at the time of Kuma Takyi’s death in 1704. Amo Takyi appears to have remained allied with the Dutch against his enemy Kuma Takyi, and to have lost his life.³⁴

Many scholars have of course speculated on the origins of the name Amo; needless to say Amo was and remains a common name in Ghana.

13. Disclaimer: History with a capital “H” has always sought to grant certain figures a more prominent place in the sun. The closer they get to that sun, the larger the shadow they cast. The bigger the shadow certain figures throw behind, the more others vanish in the darkness of the “chosen ones”. One important exercise in the “politics of referencing” is repetition, reiteration, reverberation — until it becomes impossible to think of particular fields, disciplines, faculties without certain people springing to mind. An important exercise for dismantling the “politics of referencing” is that of removing the “chosen ones” from the spotlight and allowing some sunlight to fall on those who had hitherto been relegated to the shadows. Our hope is that this newfound light might bring new life — causing things to germinate, grow, flourish, and blossom. Considering this, we choose not to reference all the prominent figures who have been standing in the light of and obscuring Amo and his achievements. Though he referenced some of the ones who preceded him, even though some who came after worked on his proposals (sometimes without referencing him) we opt, as an exercise in disobedience, to omit these large-looking figures from the story.

14. The faculty of sensing: Performativity attributes a great deal of importance to the body as the surface

and space of encounter with the world. Yet the way the body encounters the world is also highly contingent upon how it senses that world — both cognitively and physically. In “On the Apathy of the Human Mind,”³⁵ Amo explains that “Sense is, in general: of immediately present and material things, by means of sensible properties that are really conducted through the sensory organs.” He proceeds by noting that senses are either logical (mediate or immediate), or physical, with the logical being an “idea”³⁶ while the physical should be understood as either agreeable or disagreeable. Taking the logical and physical senses as premises, how can we think of the performative body as a body that retains knowledge through sensing; its way of encountering the world has a great deal to do with the baggage of knowledge it brings along and retains. Which brings us to what Amo calls “the faculty of sensing.” Amo describes it as “a disposition of our organic and living body, by which the animal is affected by material and sensible things that are immediately present to it.”³⁷ Which is to say, the ability, the tendency, and the inclination of the living, performative body to be affective. As Thomas Fuchs articulates in his article on “The Phenomenology of Affectivity”³⁸:

Phenomenology regards affects as encompassing phenomena that connect body, self, and world. They emerge on the basis of a pre-reflective attunement to the current situation, indicate the current state of our relations, interests, and conflicts, and manifest themselves as sensations, motions, and expressions of the body. [...] The body acts as a tacit or more explicitly felt medium of our affective relation to the world. [...] All feelings and affects open and direct us, specifically or rather unspecifically, toward the various possibilities, tendencies, or projects of our present life situation.³⁹

Amo’s argument can instead be understood as a proposal of affective phenomenology wherein the faculty of sensing is the measure of the body’s ability to be affected by that which can be sensed logically and physically. How can we understand the notion of “corpoliterary,”⁴⁰ and how can we understand it through the affectivity of the faculty of sensing?

15. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Guinea. In his congratulatory afterword to Amo’s “On the Apathy of the Human Mind,” university rector Johannes Gottfried Kraus writes of Amo and his intellectual prowess and origins that:

33 Smith, “Anton Wilhelm Amo: Basic Writings.” See also *The Modern Part of an Universal History, from the Earliest Account of Time*. Compiled from Original Writers, By the Authors of the Antient Part, vol. XVII, London: S. Richardson, T. Osborne, C. Hitch et al., 1760, Book XVII., Chap. VII, Sect. I, “Contains the Origin of the French, Portuguese, Dutch, and English Commerce, on the Coast of Guiney, and more particularly on the Gold Coast: Description of the Kingdom of Comendo,” 39. “As this country is divided into two distinct provinces, we shall begin by describing Little Comendo. This province, says Artus, is by the Portuguese called Aldea das Terras, and by the natives Ekki Tekki.”

34 Ibid., 7.

35 Amo, “On the Apathy of the Human Mind.”

36 Ibid., 7. Amo proposes another concept of the logical that he promises to discuss later.

37 Ibid., 8, emphasis mine.

38 Thomas Fuchs, “The Phenomenology of Affectivity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*, eds. K.W.M. Fulford et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 612-631.

This continent [Africa] nurtured the growth of a number of men of great value, whose genius and assiduousness have made an inestimable contribution to the knowledge of human affairs and, much more, to the knowledge of divine things. [...] We publicly declare that Africa, and Guinea, one of its countries, so far from us, are your homeland. This Guinea [...] was justly celebrated like a mother who bears natural goods and treasures in her womb, as also, still more, men of great genius and of very great inventiveness.⁴¹

What interests me at this juncture is less the professor's praise of Amo and of Africa than situating Amo within the space of Guinea, a geographical space that eighteenth-century maps show extending from present-day Senegal to cross half of Mali, encompassing Ghana to present-day Cameroon. The philosopher did indeed add the name "Amo" to his Christian names as a teenager; later, at the start of his career in academia, he self-identified and situated himself geographically with the patronym "Guinea." He signed his publications with the Latinized "Antonio Guilielmo Amo Guinea-Afer," or a German variation: "Anton Wilhelm Amo Von Guinea in Africa."⁴² This is a man who positions himself clearly with respect to his Africanness and African identity.

16. Apathea: It is worth spending a few moments considering the notion of apathy as Amo discusses it in his work. The section "Member III" of Amo's "On the Apathy of the Human Mind"⁴³ contains a description of apathy as it relates to the faculty of sensing, and to sense itself. "Apathy," Amo writes, "with respect to the faculty of sensing is the absence of such a disposition in a subject that is not suited to having it, so that the animal should be affected neither by sensible, immediately present things, nor by material things." He goes on to explain the inability of one subject to be affected by or to accept parts and properties of another such as spirits or matters (living and non-living bodies): "Apathy with respect to sense. It follows in order that apathy with respect to sense is the absence of the power of sense in a subject that is not suited to having it (that is non-sentient), e.g., spirit, stone, etc."⁴⁴ He proceeds to explain what apathy of the human mind is, calling it "the absence of the faculty of sensing and of sensation of immediate things by the human mind."⁴⁵

With respect to matter's inability to sense or possess a faculty of sensing, I remember a trip from Yogyakarta

to visit the temples of Borobudur a few years back. We left before the break of dawn so as to experience the incredible sunrise. We drove past Indonesia's Mount Merapi, an active volcano that frequently (as recently as March 27, 2020) spits ashes several kilometers into the air along with pyroclastic flow — a mixture of hot gas, lava, and other volcanic material — often killing hundreds. Driving past, our local guide told us the story of one of the most aggressive, lethal eruptions in the volcano's history that took too many lives. The only way by which the eruption could eventually be tamed was when the local chief climbed to the top of the volcano and leaped deep into the mouth of the eruption. Legend has it that the eruption stopped. Whether the story is true or not is rather irrelevant, as the people of that land believe Mount Merapi has the faculty of sensing and it was only through that capacity to sense that the volcano was able to stop erupting when the chief jumped in. The human mind may not have the capacity of sensing, but the question as to what constitutes living versus nonliving matter, things, and being is rather more complicated.

And what if the mind lacked the faculty of sensing because it was more attached to the body, more in commerce with the body? Emma-Adamah argues with Amo that "as such the human mind and its operations are irreducibly and exclusively psychological, yet are functionally inconceivable without the body it inheres. Amo's construct to describe this phenomenon is the mind's 'very tight bond and commerce' with the body (arctissimum cum corpore unicum et commercium uid)."⁴⁶ This tight bond and commerce, this loop between the body and mind — the way in which the mind knows things intrinsically from precognition, and how that which is sensed by the body informs the mind — is what becomes important to explore through the arts, the phenomenological, the performative.

17. Encrypted in every name are histories and fates. Thus, nomenclature is a form of cryptography: Afer. Meaning of Africa. Meaning Black. An African.

18. Disclaimer: This project, T H E F A C U L T Y O F S E N S I N G – Thinking With, Through, And By Wilhelm Anton Amo, is not a philosophy thesis. It is an art project. It is a journey, an investigation into that which has been, that which once was, that which could have been — an approach to the work and life of Anton Wilhelm Rudolph Amo Afer Guinea. In reality, in imagination, and in speculation.

39 Ibid.

40 For more on corpoliteracy, see: Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung. "Envisaging the Body as Slate, Sponge, Witness: On Corpoliteracy," in *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts, and Critiques*, ed. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, (Berlin: Archive Books, 2020), pages?: "I would like to explore the possibility of a corpoliteracy — an effort to contextualize the body as a platform and medium of learning, a structure or organ that acquires, stores and disseminates knowledge. This concept would imply that the body, in sync, but also independent of the brain, has the potential of memorizing and passing on/down acquired knowledge through performativity — through the prism of movement, dance, rhythm. [...] With the concepts of corpoliteracy and corpoeistemology, I propose the study of the nature and extent of bodily knowledge in dance performance, as well as how the body and dance performance produce, enact, inscribe, and propagate knowledges. Like every other epistemological study, it is important to analyze bodies employed in dances relative

to notions of truth or believe, as discussed earlier. Corpoeistemology preoccupies itself with questions like: What is bodily knowledge? How is bodily knowledge acquired? How is bodily knowledge expressed in dance performances? How can the observer of a performance decipher and relate to these bodily knowledges? If rhythm and dance is the structure of form of such bodily knowledge, then what could the limits be? Corpoeistemology also studies manifestations of the politicized body, the sexualized body, the genderized and racialized bodies in performativity."

41 See Amo, "On the Apathy of the Human Mind," 13.

42 Emma-Adamah, "Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1756) the African-German Philosopher of Mind," 33.

43 Amo, "On the Apathy of the Human Mind," 8.

44 Ibid., 8.

45 Ibid., 9.

46 Emma-Adamah, "Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703-1756) the African-German Philosopher of Mind," 156.

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