

ISSN 1560-6325 ISBN 978-3901989-52-0 € 20,-

polylog 53₂₀₂₅

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR INTERKULTURELLES PHILOSOPHIEREN



Murat Ates, Amalia Barboza, Christoph Hubatschke und Ruth Sonderegger (Hg.)

Dekolonisierung, Kunst, Wissen

Mit Beiträgen von Gaëlle Shrot, Ruben Hordijk, Luana Goulart de Castro Alves, Muhamad Abdelmageed, claudia* sandoval romero, Dominik Reisinger und anderen

SONDERDRUCK

Dekolonisierung, Kunst, Wissen

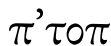
herausgegeben von Murat Ates, Amalia Barboza, Christoph Hubatschke und Ruth Sonderegger



- 3 MURAT ATEs
Dekolonisierung. Zwischen oberflächlichen Vermarktungen und politisch-epistemischen Ansprüchen
Einleitung
- 9 GAËLLE SHROT
A world »Made in Europe«: German-speaking museums in the decolonising process
- 21 RUBEN HORDIJK
Erzählung als feministische Epistemologie und Ethik der Ver-Antwort-lichkeit
- 33 LUANA GOULART DE CASTRO ALVES
Politics and art: the aesthetic regime of Jacques Rancière and the anti-colonialism of Zanele Muholi's photography
- 43 MUHAMAD ABDELMAGEED
Demaskierung einer »kolonialen Machtmatrix« in der zeitgenössischen Erforschung arabisch-islamischer Philosophien
- 55 CLAUDIA* SANDOVAL ROMERO
Strategien der Sichtbarkeit. Eine De(s)koloniale Herangehensweise an die Kontaktzonen zwischen Peripherie und Zentrum am Beispiel der mumok Ausstellungen von 1998 bis 2018



- 77 DOMINIK REISINGER
Die Architektur des Tees. Eine Fallstudie einer zeitgenössischen Interpretation japanischer Raumauffassung mit Ursprung in traditioneller Teehausarchitektur



- 90 BERICHTE, BÜCHER & MEDIEN
- 107 POLYTOP – STIMMEN, BLICKE, NETZWERKE
- 110 IMPRESSUM
- 111 BESTELLEN

LUANA GOULART DE CASTRO ALVES

Politics and art: the aesthetic regime of Jacques Rancière and the anti-colonialism of Zanele Muholi's photography

ABSTRACT

The article attempts to indicate the confluence between Zanele Muholi's photographic activism and some important aspects of Jacques Rancière's conception of the relationship between art and politics in terms of his notion of *partage du sensible*. First, an outline of how Rancière deals with the topic in *The intolerable image* one chapter of *The Emancipated Spectator* is given. This is followed by a brief discussion of Muholi's photographic series *Somnyama Ngonyama* and of how its manifold counter-hegemonic and anti-colonial aspects dialogue with Rancière's fundamental aesthetic ideas on sharing the world we inhabit.

KEYWORDS

art;
politics;
image;
photography;
partage du sensible;
Zanele Muholi

LUANA GOULART DE CASTRO ALVES

forscht an der Universidade Estadual do Ceará (Soziologie) und der Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Philosophie). Die vorliegende Arbeit wurde von der Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brasil (CAPES) finanziert.

in: polylog 53/2025:
Dekolonisierung, Kunst, Wissen
Seite 33 – 42



0. PROLOGUE

The following is a dialogue with two quite different works which provide relevant contributions for thinking the relation between aesthetics and politics, particularly inasmuch as anti-colonialism is concerned: the description of the “aesthetic regime” by Jacques Rancière, and the photography of Zanele Muholi. Rancière’s contribution is presented and discussed in section 1. This is done by addressing the questions of the intolerable image, the (im)possibility of aesthetic representation and in which way art can bring about new, counter-hegemonic political configurations. This is followed by an interpretive approach to Muholi’s work in section 2. There, we will see how Muholi’s photography addresses colonial prejudices at the basis of hegemonic practices and discursive interactions. Through this effort, we hope to offer a glimpse of how politics and art intertwine in the work of Zanele Muholi as in the aesthetic regime suggested by Rancière, enabling a new way of sharing what surrounds us.

I would like to stress that this textual structure was in no way thought of as an “application” of the “theory” described in section 1 to the “case” presented in section 2. In this sense, it should also be emphasized that this effort by no means comes as an attempt to satisfy some prescriptive demand or necessity the work of either of them imposes or suggests in any sense upon the other’s (e.g.: as if one demanded explanation, illustration etc. in the terms of the other). In this sense, this dialogue is something in which one may partake or not. We suggest that by partaking in it one may envisage possibilities of transformative experiences of the positionalities involved in the constitution of meaning and legitimacy of artistic manifestation, and with that of the socio-political cartography.

1. RANCIÈRE, THE AESTHETIC REGIME AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

Jacques Rancière’s text *The intolerable image*, one chapter of *The Emancipated Spectator*¹, begins with considerations on what would turn a mere image into

an »intolerable« one. First, the author argues that *intolerable* images would be so labeled not because of a property inherent to them or because of something that composed them in an intrinsic or inexorable way, but because of the function that they could perform. Rancière then identifies a question that, according to him, would be implicated in the first; one that concerns the creator of intolerable images or even those who exhibit them or propose that they be seen, namely: Would the creation or the purposeful exhibition of these images also be intolerable?

An example offered by the author is that of Oliviero Toscani’s photograph at the 2007 Milan fashion week showing an extremely thin young woman naked and wasting away. As it seems, critics were divided about its meaning: some argued for the necessity of exposing the true reality hidden under the appearance of beauty and luxury wrapped in Italian fashion; others understood that the exposure of the horror of reality underneath the clothes actually attested and corroborated that, despite the obscene reality, its exposure signified the hallmark of the primacy of fashion’s appearance-based beauty standards. This raw and exposed reality would therefore be all too real, to the point where its display *qua* image would become intolerable.

In this sense, the attempt to expose reality by contrasting it with appearances would become inadequate, since, when criticism of reality depends on and is part of this same reality, it does not appear as a counterpoint to it, but rather as part of the dynamic in which »the two sides of the coin« are exposed alternately, constituting a single spectacle. Rancière argues that this kind of attempt to reveal the sordid reality behind beautiful appearances by means of art – as also happened during the Vietnam War, for example – is one of the ways of thinking about the relationship between art and politics. However, according to the author, even though this type of effort may have commendable intentions, the intolerable image produced or exhibited in order to perform the political function of showing reality and thus being disruptive and transforming is doomed to fail. This is supposedly so because the attempt to shock is often indistinguish-

¹ Rancière: *The Emancipated Spectator*.

able from the practice carried out by »avant-garde« fashion, which also intends to shock. Thereby the intolerable image degenerates itself into just another aspect of the world of fashion, luxury consumption and consumerist advertising. Thus, the intolerable image would not succeed as political art, because the reality it purports to present would not really oppose appearances, and thus it would not present itself as effectively intolerable, since it would find itself, just as its supposed opposite, in the same flow of the universal regime of exposure. Therefore, this kind of image does not suffice to bring about the intended dialectic between reality and appearance, since it ultimately forces the intolerable into the same way of exposition and of dealing with »reality«.

With this, Rancière already points to his criticism of the relationship between art and politics. His point is not to deny the relationship that exists between the two elements, but rather to point to errors in certain ways of trying to think and characterise this relationship. According to the author, the intolerable images were thought to try to bring about or awaken the »awareness« of those who observe them. This »awareness« would be the first step towards understanding the need to oppose certain forms of life, and thus, it would be the door to the struggles for the political transformations necessary to change the reality that these images reveal. However, even if the exposure of such images is carried out with the best of intentions, they do not work for these political purposes due to the reasons just mentioned. The author claims that in order for the image to have the intended effect, it should be able to convince those who see it that what it displays is actually reality in its full concreteness. In other words, the image should convince that it reveals the reality of e.g. the people, situations, etc. that are specifically being displayed in it and by means of which observers are inevitably implicated – and not let itself be taken for, for example, a display of the creative daydreams of its creator or a criticism of humanity in general or of some of its general aspects. Those who observe should, on seeing themselves personally criticised by the reality exposed in the images,

convince themselves that they are guilty of conniving and contributing to the maintenance or realisation of the situation pointed out. However, the description of the effect of this encounter between »intolerable« images and people would be much more that of an inert conformity, in which one »watches« and »consumes« the spectacle of the images seen, as if they showed their lives passing away, alienated from themselves. If this is indeed the case, why then shouldn't we put an end to this dealing with art and give up the use of images once and for all, so that an effective political engagement would be at least possible?

The answer to this question unfolds throughout the other paragraphs of Rancière's text. In general, we can say that it is not simply because this particular way of relating art to politics does not work that there are no other ways that do work. The main error in the preceding approach pointed out by Rancière would be the assumption that the »intolerable image« could work in a way that would necessarily and sufficiently intertwine art with ethics and politics in a sort of chain relationship as follows: the »intolerable image« (art), by revealing the truth about reality in opposition to beautiful and pleasurable appearances, would provoke the feeling of guilt/responsibility (ethics) in the spectator, which, in turn, would lead to taking actions to try to »solve« the problems experienced in reality (politics). With the explanations offered by Rancière, these assumptions that sustain the contemporary aesthetic regime are shown to be unfounded. Therefore, political art based on Platonist/Hegelian dialectic between opposites such as »reality and appearance« or »comfortable reality and uncomfortable reality« (which would be the opposition between two sides of reality), already criticised by others besides Rancière, would prove untenable. Thus, Rancière points in his text at the need to rethink this relation in terms of some other aesthetic regime. According to the author, a way in which the relationship between art and politics has already been described by critics and artists is roughly this: art is thought of as in principle showing an apparent similarity between the image produced and the spectator's life and world, but in fact would



convey radical oppositions between the two. For example, images of some action with which a spectator could identify themselves actually point to the passivity of the spectator – who, *qua* spectator, by definition only looks at these images without sharing the actions that take place in them, thus differing from what is represented. In this case, this inversion should indicate that action is what is desirable, showing the apparent paradox by means of which the political dimension of aesthetics would be thought: The image, by showing life inverted, could trigger the power to be active in the spectator who passively watches, that is, the power opposite to the passivity that allows him to observe the spectacle that criticizes him. Action would thus follow from an artwork that places the spectator in the passive role of simply observing the images of action. However, Rancière argues that, by looking at the active images in a passive way, the spectator, even if they realize their passivity, is not necessarily stimulated to act. This type of relationship proposed between art and politics once again errs in its assumptions. There is no way to demonstrate causality between an image and guilt, that is, between what is in the field of art and what is in the field of ethics, nor between guilt, which is in the field of ethics, and the formulation of the desire for action, which is in the field of politics. It is precisely to these unfounded relations of necessity and causality that Rancière draws our attention. Neither can art necessarily cause guilt, nor can guilt necessarily lead to action. To assume such relations would be a mistake in thinking the relation between art and politics.

Rancière comments on yet another way in which the relationship between art and politics has already been described, namely in terms of the issue of the irrepresentability of the intolerable in images. The discussion here resembles in part some traditional theological and philosophical discussions concerning idolatry. Based on the perspective of this text, the discussion's central question is the following: Can an image *re-present*? Rancière argues that one way of thinking about the question is to attempt to radically oppose two possible types of representation: the visible image, on the one hand, and the verbal narrative, on the other.

Rancière talks about the criticism that can be made of those who believe that visible images can function as evidence of intolerable situations and deeds, for instance, photographs taken inside concentration camps during the holocaust. He claims that some argue that testimony is superior to the image in its representational capacity, precisely because testimony would not claim to represent the totality of the event, as would be the case with the image. As Rancière himself refutes this line of reasoning by saying that to suppose that images can represent in a unique or total way is something arbitrary, he himself will not be satisfied with this supposed opposition between the way images and testimonies represent. An example of images that bear witness – and which thus serves as a counterexample to the mentioned opposition – would be Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a film based on the testimony of people who survived the holocaust. The film's aim is not that of proving that the holocaust effectively existed, viz. the images and the speeches are not there to re-present, revealing a horrendous reality ignored or denied by many. The testimony functions not because of its content viz. because it is an account of what happened, but precisely because it reveals something unintentional, and what matters in it is precisely

»[...] the fact that his words are those of someone whom the intolerability of the event to be recounted deprives of the possibility of speaking; it is the fact that he speaks only because he is obliged to by the voice of another. [...] The speech of the witness is made sacred for three negative reasons: first, because it is the opposite of the image, which is idolatry; next, because it is the speech of a man incapable of speaking; finally, because it is of a man compelled to speak by a speech more powerful than his own. At the end of the day, the critique of images does not counter-pose to them either the exigencies of action or the restraint of speech. It counter-poses the authority of the voice that alternatively renders one silent and makes one speak.«²

2 Ibid., 91–92.

The image here would be thought of as an involuntary testimony, and the witness complies with both the authority of the other who forces one to speak, and the horrible reality. The apparent opposition between image and word can then appear in the form of that between the desired image and the unwanted image. However, the latter is also only apparently unwanted, because the artist who creates it desires it. This false opposition is then perceived as the foundation of the ideas of representation and image that sustain it.

»Representation is not the act of producing a visible form, but the act of offering an equivalent – something that speech does just as much as photography. The image is not the duplicate of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and the speech, the said and the unsaid.«³

Accordingly, the image does not reproduce an event, nor does it bring it back to presence (representation). It does not make the invisible visible, that is, it is not a translation between things of different natures. The image is not the visible part of something that is otherwise invisible, it is not the duplicate of a thing. The voice is not the manifestation of the invisible, it is not the opposite part of the visible. But then what is it? The image, like the word, offers us something equivalent, but still, it is a different thing. As Rancière states: the image is a game. It is itself a game between the visible and the invisible, between the said and the unsaid. The word and what is said are also part of the image, they are part of the process of its construction. In his words: »Classical rhetoric and poetics have taught us this: there are images in language as well. [...] There are figures of rhetoric and poetics in the visible.«⁴

Rancière thus proposes that we think of images beyond such common criticisms made of them as those based on the identification with the false Platonism of appearances and the passivity of the spectator, or on their supposed lack of ability to represent along the

lines of the religious discussion on idolatry⁵. Here, Rancière offers the installation made of black boxes by the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar about the Rwandan genocide that took place in 1994, entitled *Real Pictures* as an example. For the philosopher, Jaar's works do not reveal visual documents that prove the actual existence of what happened in Rwanda. In each box, a text that describes the content hidden in it is visible; this hidden content, in turn, is the image of a murdered Tutsi. The words are voiceless there, they are taken as visual elements. This would make it evident that art does not seek to oppose voice or words to the visible of the images. Quite the contrary, the image comes about as a link between the verbal and the visual. Rancière then indicates that the power of this image is to disorganize the ordinary regime of this connection, that is, the one practiced by the official and dominant system of information. This system would select and order the horrors of reality, reducing them to mere redundant illustrations of their significance, and would thus offer us these redundant and specific illustrations to determine the meaning of these images for us and in our stead. For Rancière, horror is trivialised not because of the sheer superabundance of horrifying images, but rather because these images are taken as mere objects of speech with no effective right to any speech of their own. The official information system is that which presents, on the one hand, the rational beings who are able to reveal the truths of the images and the truth about reality, and on the other, the mute images, the objects of the discourse of these rational beings.

The problem at stake would not be the opposition between words and images, nor the substitution of one for the other, but »overturning the dominant logic that makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of a few«. Words, like images, are forms of redistribution of the elements of representation, which, at the same time, also redistribute the relations between minorities and majorities. It is in this sense that they are political, for politics should be understood precisely as that which changes the

3 Ibid., 93.

4 Ibid., 94.

5 Concerning the role of idolatry in this context, see Mondzain: *Imagem, ícone, economia*.

places and the account of bodies. The author tells us that »The political figure par excellence is metonymy, which gives the effect for the cause or the part for the whole«⁶. He mentions Jaar's art as a good example of this⁷. The meaning of an image is determined by the visibility device in which it appears. Therefore, the political question at stake now is: Within what kind of sensible visibility device is the image seen?

The question of the intolerable image is thus embedded into the question regarding the devices of visibility. The image would create, according to Rancière, a sense of reality, a »common sense«. This common sense is thought of as modes of perception and meanings determined and conferred in a shareable way. He explains: »The system of information is a ›common sense‹ of this kind: a spatiotemporal system in which words and visible forms are assembled into shared data, shared ways of perceiving, being affected and imparting meaning.«⁸. In this sense, the question ceases to be the dialectic between reality and appearances and becomes the *construction of other realities*, other forms of common sense, other ways of understanding, relating and organizing communities, meanings, words and things. The question ceases to be about the possibility of the image re-presenting and becomes about what kind of common sense is created or maintained by the creation of the images. It is necessary to identify »what kind of human beings the image shows us and what kind of human beings it is addressed to; what kind of gaze and consideration are created by this fiction.«⁹. For Rancière, this change in the way we approach images is a form of displacement of the idea of politics of images, that is, it responds to a change in the way we relate art to politics. Thus, he claims that the images construct new configurations of the visible, of the real, of the thinkable, of the describable, that is, they construct new forms of being, new possibilities of configurations of the real.

The relationship between art and politics should not be based on unsubstantiated and indemonstrable assumptions. Notwithstanding, art is not thereby condemned to scepticism. Art makes room for the new, for that which cannot be pre-supposed, and therefore cannot depend exclusively on pre-conceptions. Its meaning is not determined beforehand, because it is the opening to new meanings. Art that challenges meanings already established, which does not allow the eye to know in advance what it sees or what thought should do with what it sees; such art points to a relationship with politics. In Rancière's words:

»Their tension also points towards a different politics of the sensible – a politics based on the variation of distance, the resistance of the visible, and the uncertainty of effects. Images change our gaze and the landscape of the possible if they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects. Such might be the suspensive conclusion of this brief inquiry into the intolerable in images.«¹⁰

Art may thus be understood as a counter-hegemonic manifestation, insofar as it cannot be reduced to the mere maintenance or preservation of the meanings previously determined by those who hold the power to speak, that is, by those who dominate and determine the meanings within the functioning of the current information device. It may be understood as an important step towards freedom, insofar as it allows us to think of new possibilities of sharing reality, of *distributing the sensible* (*partage du sensible*), presenting new ways of thinking and of reorganising of the social fabric. This was the path identified for the exercise of effective freedom: an aesthetic regime that allows artistic creation to point towards new forms of constructing and creating reality itself. On this point it is also possible to ask: who can create reality? Who can make the art that allows us to descry other organisations of socio-political powers?

When art breaks the hegemony of the prevailing speech and makes it possible for the »objectified«

6 Rancière: *The Emancipated Spectator*, 97.

7 Ibid., 97.

8 Ibid., 102.

9 Ibid., 102.

10 Ibid., 105.

and the »non-rational« to also speak and seek to build new realities in which their bodies occupy other positions in the cartography of reality, we can see an example of the relationship between art and politics alluded to by Rancière in his text. In this sense, the hypotheses behind the considerations in the sequel is that anticolonial art can be if seen through the lens offered by Rancière, be considered as a way of thinking about other forms of organising and *sharing* the sensible. In the next section, we will consider the work of South African queer photographer Zanele Muholi to suggest interesting convergences between it and the discussion presented so far. We'll try to show that Muholi's photographs' anti-colonial character stands in a fruitful dialogue with Rancière's anti-hegemonic notion of art.

2. THE COUNTER-HEGEMONIC IMAGE AND »ESTRANGEMENT«: THE ART OF ZANELE MUHOLI

In accordance with the thought of the anti-colonial philosopher Gayatri Spivak, we can say that the process of subalternisation is characterised by a kind of silencing of the subalternised about their own identity and history. In the case in question, the silencing of black and African people about their identities and histories has been and is constituted by means of discourses and images which, by their presence and endorsement in art galleries, museums and similar spaces of institutional construction and legitimization of hegemonic aesthetic-political standards and norms, inexorably subalternise them to the extent that they speak *about* and *for* them (where *for* means in their stead) about their ways of being in the world without the participation of their positionality. In this sense, the occupation of these art spaces by black and African artists, such as Muholi, means an opening for the influence of non-hegemonic imagetic and discursive elements on aesthetic-political standards and norms by means of, at least, their juxtaposed and intermingled presence with their hegemonic peers in the institutional spaces destined to constitute this normativity.

Born in 1972 in Durban, South Africa, Muholi is the author of the photographic series *Somnyama Ngonyama*¹¹, initiated in 2012, exhibited in 2018 at the

Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires under the title *¡Salve, oscura leona! and then still ongoing*. The series is composed of self-portraits that highlight and tension aspects linked to race, gender, tradition and their political relevance in South Africa. According to what the artist herself tells us in an interview given to Renée Mussai, Senior Curator and head of archive and research at Autograph ABP in London, *Somnyama Ngonyama* should not be reduced to just a series of beautiful photographs. Nor, however, should one rush into viewing her work as a type of political manifestation such that the notion of beauty results secondary or irrelevant to it. In fact, the aesthetic incursions of Muholi's work in the fields of pleasure and beauty play an important role in the appreciation of the fact that her art is characterized by tensing precisely the extent to which such notions condition and are conditioned by their socio-historical and political traits and circumstances.

In the same interview, Mussai also inquires about the fact that Muholi is herself the photographed party in *Somnyama*, and asks why Muholi chose, at that stage of her career, to become an active participant in her images. In addition to Muholi's own response to this questioning, it is worth noting, in the wake of the reflections on Spivak above, that the format of »self-portraits« in *Somnyama Ngonyama* gives Muholi a unique position to tension her role between being silent and speaking on the one hand, and subject and object on the other. Silent, without a word, the photographer, photographed, speaks; thus bringing speech to herself, she brings herself to speech.

We propose then to recall some important elements in the conceptual framework of the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is especially interested in the phenomenon of understanding, be it of images, speeches or other forms of language. In this sense, because of its linguistic – and, therefore, always shared

11 Some of the images from the series are available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2017/jul/14/zanele-muholim-y-somnyama-ngonyama-hail-the-dark-lioness-in-pictures>

and dialogical – nature, an important characteristic of the phenomenon of understanding according to hermeneutics is its intrinsic openness to Otherness. In short, we can say that understanding, when it happens in a situation belonging to the scope of the purposes at stake here – for example, in an art gallery or museum where works or performances like Muholi's are on display –, always occurs from a *clash* between, on the one hand, the collection of prejudices that condition our expectations and interpretations and, on the other hand, the artworks themselves (which, in this case, occupy the position of Otherness), which, both because of the positional displacement that their presence in these spaces implies and because of the very character of the determination of their contents, inevitably tension and question these prejudices. With this shock, the possibility of transformation opens up. The confrontation between our expectations – which inevitably mirror the hegemonic standards – and what is effectively perceived – Muholi's artwork in a space destined to the constitution of hegemonic normativities –, separates, in a certain way, what starts to appear as, on one hand, *our* prejudices that constitute the constituents of our conceptual apparatus of aesthetic appreciation and evaluation in effect; and, on the other hand, what does not meet the expectations that derive from them, and that, for this reason, generates estrangement and becomes difficult to understand.

The shock that occurs when these expectations are not met is precisely what constitutes the space for the »strange« to appear as Other. In an analogy, it can be said that this kind of exposure to the »strange« places the spectator before a crossroads, in which either

(a) The attempt to dialogue with what provokes estrangement is set aside and relegated to oblivion. This hypothesis, however, breaks the initial assumption of a disposition towards understanding; or

(b) The »stranger« is confined to the role of stranger (without inverted commas), that is, is understood only on the basis of his radical reduction to the role of deviation from the norm determined by the prejudices in practice prior to his appearance; or

(c) One seeks, in the stranger or in other sources, interpretive elements that allow an understanding of it in terms that exceed or even repel the norms established by the framework of prejudices that are incapable of giving it any other interpretation than that of a mere rupture with its norms.

Faced with this situation, taking the third path is the only option in which what we may call an *effective* understanding occurs, in the sense that it is an understanding that adds to the one who understands meanings, senses and interpretive possibilities hitherto absent from their horizon. Following the path of effective understanding, thus, constitutes a rupture with the monological continuity of the experience of the one who is in the museum. This causes not only the emergence of the prejudices at the base of the expectations that condition the aesthetic experience and, thus, its visibility, but also the opportunity for its critical scrutiny by the viewer themselves.¹² This critical process, necessary for the effective understanding of the work of art, then, provokes not only the recognition of prejudices and expectations (which instantiate hegemony), but also the visibility and recognition of Otherness (non-hegemonic) as that which is distinguished by its non-conformity to these prejudices. The distinct appearance of the non-conform-

12 Ruben Hordijk posed the following question concerning this claim: »Doesn't this reflect more the view that you with Ranciere criticized earlier: that the passive viewer is shocked into action?« The answer is: not really. The justification is twofold: first, the emergence of the prejudices is not related with shock in any important sense here. Prejudices appear by the sheer fact that the rupture with the monological continuity just mentioned happens – i.e. by contrast or »diaphonia« if you will; that is, out of semantical dissonance, not shock. Furthermore, this emergence of prejudices does not compel one to critical scrutiny or any other particular kind of (re)action. The step from the emergence of prejudices to critical scrutiny follows only under the hypothesis that the viewer is in a disposition – i.e. is *willing* – to effectively understand. I am indebted to Ruben Hordijk, who provided many very helpful remarks and suggestions on a review of a draft of this text.

ity configures a sufficient condition for the rupture, to some degree, of the endorsement of these patterns and meanings that sustain hegemony both as content and as form – that is, provided that the possibility of its effective understanding is granted.

The hermeneutics involved in the artistic manifestation can therefore be characterised just like the dynamics proposed by Jacques Rancière insofar as it implies a rupture with the inert continuity of the monological functioning of the hegemonic patterns in the determination of the senses and meanings of the practices constituting the identities and ways-of-being involved in the experience of the work of art. Thus, the understanding of the very notion of work of art promoted by the work of Muholi, for example, may be a transformative experience not only of the relative positionalities of the artists and spectators directly involved in its exhibition and appreciation in public institutional spaces, but also of the very socio-political cartography of the positionalities involved in the constitution of the concepts and practices that, in general, provide meaning and legitimacy to the happening of this type of artistic manifestation.

In the specific case of the *Somnyama Nkonyama photographic series*, the kind of experience of estrangement described above is engendered, in particular, by the connection, woven as a photographic patchwork, between elements of the history and cultures of the communities and social segments in which Muholi partakes and the material and visual elements that make up the syntax of the photographer's language. On the one hand, Muholi's photographs embody archetypes constructed by portraits and descriptions of African people and communities according to hegemonic narratives consolidated largely by white male and European academic ethnography. These narratives impose definitions on the meanings and values of African identity and history themselves, reducing and expressing them almost exclusively in terms of elements to whose description negative values are already inevitably associated by many layers of historical sedimentation, such as: the black body, exoticism, animality, precariousness, suffering. The conception

of black and African ways of being in terms of such elements constitutes, in this context, a crucial part of the hegemonic framework of prejudices from which the experience of Muholi's art will occur in the viewer's encounter with her photographs.

In this sense, Muholi's photography directly addresses the prejudices at the basis of hegemonic discourse, as it gives a prominent role to some of these elements – particularly those mentioned, but also to others. The role played by these elements in the imagetic and narrative constructions that are presented in the patchwork of the photographic series, however, is not the same one they play in the construction of hegemonic expectations brought along by viewers who go to museums to see her work. Precisely the opposite, their use in Muholi frays, tenses and perverts the ties and splices through which Eurocentric ethnography weaves, for itself and for all others, what it imposes as what it is to be black and African. It is precisely the presence in a prominent role of the hermeneutic construction bricks of the image of the black and African according to hegemonic ethnography in Muholi's photographs which allows their imagetic and discursive content to touch »in the right spot« the viewer whose understanding is, from the outset, conditioned by these prejudiced archetypes. More specifically, the identification of the key role of these elements in the construction of the images created by the artist makes inescapable the reference to the »about what« of each photograph in particular, and of the photographic series as a whole, namely: identities and ways of being of black and African people and communities.

The perception of these elements in unexpected places and in unexpected ways in Muholi's compositions provokes then a strong estrangement, coming from the difficulty of understanding the ways of being inevitably put into play by the signs chosen by the photographer arranged according to a new and deviant grammar. An interplay between the said and the unsaid, the images and the words that goes on by means of Muholi's work, and it has effects upon the categories, notions and ideas constitutive of the prejudiced archetypes – and thus, by force, also upon the



archetypes themselves. According to this new grammar, the latter turn out to be incorrect and insufficient for the effective understanding of the photographs and of what is photographed. Thus, Muholi's photography provokes the »estrangement« described a few paragraphs above as it gives rise to the experience of the insufficiency of the spectator's previous lexicon and grammar for the comprehension of what is experienced as art. In this experience, there is a transgression of the limits determined by hegemonic and (neo) colonial prejudices upon the themes, signs, meanings

and senses of her art, opening space for new meanings to be formulated. Muholi's anti-colonial art thus makes room for new ways of thinking about the meaning of the bodies, the concepts and the signs mobilised and criticised in her work. By exhibiting her work, the artist makes room for new possibilities of creating reality according to the new possibilities of meanings opened up by her art. Therefore, politics and art intertwine in the work of Zanele Muholi as in the aesthetic regime suggested by Rancière, offering a new way of sharing what surrounds us.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

- Mussai, Renée: *Zanele Muholi on resistance*. <https://aperture.org/editorial/muholi-interview>. 2018. [November 2022].
- Mondzain, Marie-José: *Imagem, ícone, economia: as fontes bizantinas do imaginário contemporâneo*, Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2013.
- Rancière, Jacques: *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso UK: London, 2009.
- Saner, Emine: »I'm scared. But this work needs to be shown«: *Zanele Muholi's 365 protest photographs*. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/14/zanele-muholi-365-protest-photographs>. 2017. [November 2022].
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty: *Pode o subalterno falar?*, Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010.
- Hussak, Pedro van Velthen Ramos: »Rancière: a política das imagens«. In: *Princípios* 32 (2015), 95–107.