

# Animation, Fabrication, Photography

## Reflections upon the Intersecting Practices of Sub-Saharan Artists within the Moving Image

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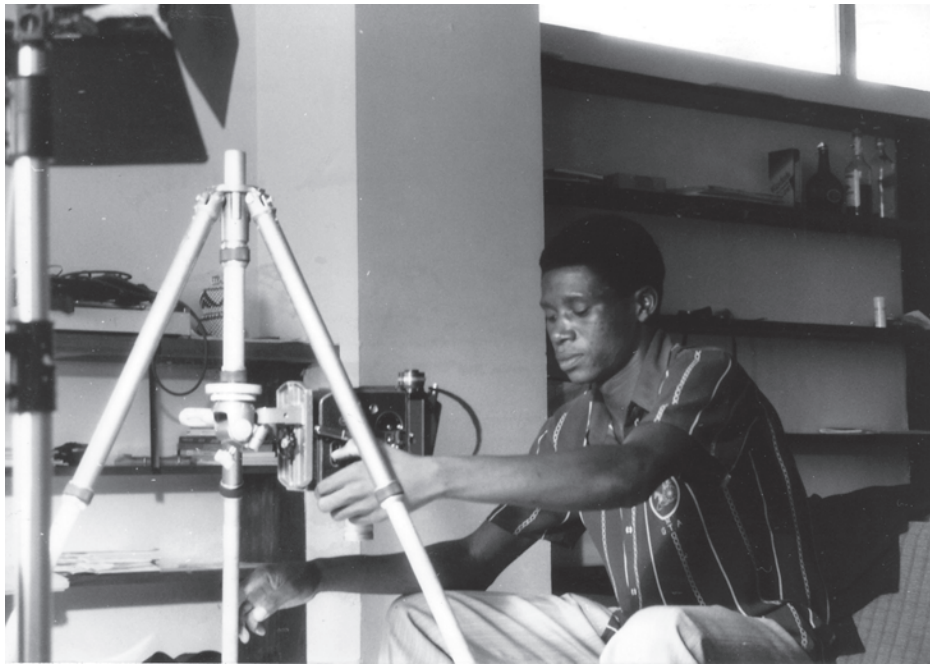
Animation draws upon a range of artistic practice: illustration, painting, sculpture, choreography, and photography. This assemblage of forms is bound by the photographic as it effectively captures the sequence of images. There are a number of different ways in which a range of African animation artists engage with or utilize photography within their practice, illustrating the range and scope of methods that are employed. By focusing upon Kenyan Ng'endo Mukii's explorations of animated documentary such as *Yellow Fever* (2012), Ethiopian Ezra Wube's portfolio of animated paintings, and South African artists Mocke Jansen van Veuren and Theresa Collins's time-lapse experiments, this article explores photographic practice within African animation. These artists have been selected to demonstrate the range of such ideas and practices explored within animation rather than to offer specific representations of African animation. Embedded within these animations one can identify the themes of migration, displacement, identity, interpersonal relationships, local narrative, and social and political commentary. They challenge the fixed conventions of still and moving image and create works that prompt the viewer to reconsider photography in light of fabrication and manipulation. This interplay between photographic "realism" and fabricated renditions of the image within animation generate an aesthetic diversity that cannot be easily placed within rigid categories of the moving image.

Animation as a medium incorporates a range of aesthetic devices including, in these cases, intervals of photographic pixelated<sup>1</sup> performances, montage sequences of archival images embedded as a projection, animated paintings as cathartic performance, collage, time-lapse, and moving puppets. Unlike typical discourses on the photographic image to capture a moment

fixed in time, in this instance the camera makes visible the passage of time and process integral to all animation by the juxtaposition of photographic images in succession. There is a paradoxical condition that animation reveals through the persistence of vision: the reliance upon renditions of still images in order to make visible movement (Hernandez 2007). It is somewhere within the interstices of these images that the artist's fabrication of animation becomes complexly intertwined with photography. Unlike live-action film, where it is possible to conceal this "dormant" contradiction through the automated recording of these images, in animation process artists are continuously faced with the interplay between stillness and the appearance of moving image as they capture and compose the sequential assembly of images.

### DISCONNECTIONS AND INTERSECTIONS IN DISCOURSE

Historically the relationship between animation and photography has involved many levels of intersection, whether at the moment of fabrication, manipulation, or rendition. These have had varying degrees of visibility, which may account for their conceptual separation and why they are often placed within different discourses. Furthermore, the hegemonic effect of Disney in a transnational context has had the unfortunate result of animation typically being associated with children's popular entertainment and the consequential association with European fairy tales and the fantastical. Discourse on animation from the African continent is scarce, with only a few key scholars directing their attention to sub-Saharan animation artists at large (Bazzoli 2003; Bendazzi 2004; Callus 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Convents 2003, 2014; Edera 1993, 1996).<sup>2</sup> Within Western animation discourse, it is possible to identify both a narrative that positioned a range of animation genres as particularly suited to the depiction of the unreal and a distinct



- 1 A photograph of the Congolese animator Jean Michel Kibushi taken in 1988 in Kinshasa, using a Bolex camera for under-the-camera animation.
- 2 A still image from Kenneth Coker's *Iwa* (2009) depicting the artisan removing his mask.

interest in the fabricated qualities that made up the animated moving image (Wells 1997, 1998; Moritz 1988; Furniss 1998). Its aesthetic form tends to overtly declare the image as a construct in contrast to the indexical qualities of the photograph.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, past discourses on photography and documentary film have positioned the technology and its aesthetic as evidence of the trace and of its fidelity to the real, whereby the artist's hand was rendered invisible (Barthes 1982, Bazin 1960). The indexical "nature" of the image was discussed as evidence of the pre-photographic referent, binding it to a fixed time, space, and subject in an a priori "reality" (Barthes 1982). However, animation does not preclude a relationship to the notional referent that may be present in a variety of

guises and is typically explored within "animation documentary." For example, in 2D animation a purposeful aesthetic resemblance and conceptual connection between the referent in a photograph and the drawn image is possible though rotoscoping,<sup>4</sup> as in the case of South African Jacque Trowell's *Beyond Freedom* (2005). Furthermore, even within photographic images the bond to a pre-existing referent is also much more complex.<sup>5</sup> As Tagg identifies,

every photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relations to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place (Tagg 1988:2).





3 A still image from the opening sequence to Ng'endo Mukii's *Yellow Fever* (2012) as the artist gives an account of her memory of the mkorogo woman braiding her hair.

In 2014, for example, the Lagos Photo Photography Festival in Nigeria alluded to the strategies of contemporary artists who sought to expand beyond with the dichotomy of fiction and documentary by theming the event under the title, “Staging Reality, Documenting Fiction.”

#### CONCEALING AND REVEALING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WITHIN ANIMATION

Perhaps the most overt use of the camera and photographic process within a genre of animation would be in 3D stop-motion, visible in the animations of Congolese Jean Michel Kibushi's *Prince Loseno* (2004), Malian Kadiatou Konate's *L'enfant Terrible* (1993), and Nigerois Moustapha Alassane's *Samba le Grande* (1977) and *Kokoa* (1985). Typically within this genre the animator uses puppets and miniature sets to stage the performance that is controlled through incremental movement and captured photographically frame by frame (Fig. 1). Alassane's *Kokoa* (1985), for example, uses a colorful cast of puppets as anthropomorphic frogs, chameleons, and leopard characters in a Kokowa “traditional” wrestling match. There are cases where artists can adopt a similar process but may choose to incorporate found objects, real actors, and sets in combination with puppets, as in the South African piece *And There in the Dust* (2001) by Lara Foot Newton and Gerhard Marx. The controlled and incremental change of three-dimensional objects in front of the lens is mirrored in “under-the-camera” animation that uses an assortment of materials usually layered on two-dimensional planes. Whether the artist uses sand on glass, paint on a canvas, or prepared cut-out pictorial elements such as photographs or drawings, the manipulation is recorded and renders visible both movement and, on occasion, artistic process. By utilizing this technique, the artist is also able to encompass painterly, drawn, and photographic elements within contemporaneous compositional spaces, as in the case of Ethiopian Ezra Wube's *Indamora* (2009) and Kibushi's *Le Crapaud chez ses Beaux Parents* (1992). At times the photograph is embedded within the animation image (as a visible insert or as a projection upon other elements in frame) to serve a specific function. In Wube's *Hold the Door* (2008) and *When We All*

*Met* (2009) the artist combines pictorial elements as “objects of memory” to call upon the discourses of representation in documentary photography as a record of personal and/or collective memory (Barthes 1982, Nora 1989).

It is also possible to talk of animation that appears entirely photographic in rendition, albeit spatially and temporally affected. In *Somehow* (2009), by the Kenyan multimedia art collective known as Just a Band and the journalist photographer Boniface Mwangi, the artists call for reflection upon the Kenyan post-election violence in 2008 by overtly drawing upon photographic tropes.<sup>6</sup> This limited animation presents movement on screen as a state of change between two still photographic images: the photojournalistic capture of people during the post-election violence and the same picture with a rupture consisting of cut-out “Hollywood smiles” that are seamlessly positioned to replace the mouths of the subjects depicted in these images. The use of combined photographic references is also visible in South African artists Theresa Collins and Mocke J. van Veuren's collaborative time-lapse piece *minutes 2010: time/bodies/rhythm/Johannesburg* (2010). This short sequence of affected digital moving images is discussed here alongside animation, as the film engages with discourses of animation to illustrate the control and interjection of the artists as they manipulate the sequence of still images through a juxtaposition of spaces achieved through digital compositing.<sup>7</sup> Although this type of semi-observational mode of still and moving image can readily be positioned as “essentially an act of non-intervention” (Sontag 1973:8), van Veuren's interest in empirical measurement is also tempered by an interest in the poetic (van Veuren 2012). Collins and van Veuren's film straddles the automated process of time-lapse with the fabrication of “dream like juxtapositions ... used to create merged imaginary landscapes” (van Veuren 2012:57).

Nigerian Kenneth Coker's computer animations *Iwa* (2009; Fig. 2) and *Oni Ise Owo* (2008) illustrate the interstices between photography and animation in the digital context. These animations present adaptations of Yoruba mythology that combine influences from “Dahomey art, North African architecture, Lotte Reiniger's films ... [and] Yoruba textile patterns.”<sup>8</sup> Both anima-



tions are inspired by a Yoruba creation myth “recounted by Wole Soyinka about a creator god *Olorun* and his rebellious servant,” albeit rendered differently as 2D and 3D computer animation.<sup>9</sup> Coker’s animations embedded a range of elements stemming from his experiences in Nigeria; these included Yoruba mythologies and narrative, with their deities and spirits such as Sango; culturally situated practices such as masquerade; Hausa pipe players; imagery like the patterns on Yoruba *adire eleko* textiles; and the forms of masks and specific motifs, such as the ram horns on the head of the exiled artisan. Computer animation offers the potential to create images that also move between extreme aesthetic poles. These may appear photographic in their entirety while being fabricated, or overtly synthetic yet relying upon the virtual camera to render visible the image. Similarly, Coker’s own animations have an aesthetic that appear on the one hand as a two-tone illustrative design, and on the other hand as 3D, sculptural, virtual polygon-forms. Digital technologies therefore cause a reframing of discourses in animation and photography. A mutable aesthetic is possible whereby the digital image can appear to be textual, photographic, painterly, drawn, or illustrative, while in essence being only a simulation of all or any of these (Baudrillard 2009, 1983; Wyatt 1999; Manovich 2001). These technologies enable a collapse of the artist’s range of tools within the computer (if not at the point of exposure, at the point of manipulation and rendition). However, the artist’s reliance upon the use of both a digital camera and a virtual camera is less obvious in the renditions of 3D computer animation. As in the case of Coker’s *Iwa*, a digital camera is typically used to collect, archive, and transfer a range of photographic resources that support the rendition of the animation.<sup>10</sup> The digital camera becomes, in effect, the vehicle that moves these parts on to a digital platform where the artist can manipulate and embed them within the animation. The virtual camera, on the other hand, is located within 3D animation software and enables the final rendition of the image.<sup>11</sup> Coker was able to manipulate this camera, its virtual lenses, position, and movement to render a more immersive cinematic execution of the scenes in *Iwa*.

Nevertheless, whether these sub-Saharan artists work predominantly using a computer and related digital technologies or

a combination of techniques, they all share a similar straddling of different types of image-making practices that engage with the photographic. This combination of techniques, in the form of digital cutout, stop-motion, 2D animated illustration, and photographic pixelated performance captured through in-camera animation is especially visible in the work of Kenyan Ng’endo Mukii’s *Hasidi* (2006) and *Yellow Fever* (2012).

#### INTERWEAVING AESTHETIC

Kenyan artist Ng’endo Mukii was born in Nairobi in 1982. She began her studies in the arts at Kent Institute of Art and Design, Maidstone,<sup>12</sup> undertaking a foundation in Art and Design. In 2006 she graduated with a BFA degree in film, animation, and video from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in the US, and in 2010 Mukii undertook a Masters of Arts in animation at the Royal College of Arts (RCA) in London, UK.<sup>13</sup> It was during her early studies at RISD that Mukii recognized the benefit of the aesthetic mutability that animation presented and worked with a range of animation techniques ranging from 2D drawn animation to puppet animation. By pursuing animation she was able to draw upon her background in painting and illustration and combine this with her interest in photography and film.<sup>14</sup> This was visible in her 4-minute graduation piece, *Hasidi* (2006), shot on 16mm film using a Bolex camera with a combination of live-action dancers, pixelation stop-motion, and hand-drawn animation. The convergence of disparate aesthetic forms made possible within animation recurs throughout Mukii’s subsequent animated moving images that also draw upon the painterly, the synthetic forms of computer generated imagery, and the photographic.

During this period as a student, she was able to explore an autobiographical approach and investigate the subjective voice within animation. Mukii was encouraged to explore methods that would lend themselves to animated documentary formats. This engagement with indexical and metonymic materials—in the form of primary material such as photographic imagery, personal documents, and archival content (text, image, or sound)—was embedded also in a project at the RCA in collaboration with the London Imperial War Museum that allowed students to use



4 A still image from the opening sequence to Ng’endo Mukii’s *Yellow Fever* (2012) as the artist gives an account of her memory of having her hair braided with her sister in Kenya.



5 A still image from Ng'endo Mukii's *Yellow Fever* (2012) showing the projection of photographs of a Kenyan landscape upon the female performer.

6 A still image from Ng'endo Mukii's *Yellow Fever* (2012) taken from the pixelated animation sequence of the performer with a projected image of a map part of a rapid montage of archival images.

and interpret archival sound clips of testimonies from World War II for their own animations.<sup>15</sup> In 2011 Mukii was awarded the RCA International Student Bursary, followed by the Blink Prize, in the form of a grant to support the production of her thesis film *Yellow Fever* (2012). This film follows on from previous explorations of memory and experience visible in *Untitled Dust* (2011), her short experimental animation also undertaken at the RCA. *Yellow Fever* was a development on her interest in memory that had found a more focused rendition in autobiographical “documentary animation.” This animation draws upon personal experience to meditate upon skin color and skin bleaching. The film subsequently won a variety of awards at different festivals in categories of documentary, animation, and short film format.<sup>16</sup>

### THE PROJECTED GAZE

*Yellow Fever* presents a temporal and visual collage of many different components. Aesthetically it moves between the drawn and illustrative image to the photographic, from the still to the moving, from the real to the surreal. Its structure consists of separate sections informed by each other; part poetic, part stream of consciousness, part accounts of memories, part interviews. Mukii interweaves these components and, through the use of the testimonial voice inciting solidarity, validates her film as “documentary.” Mukii’s exploration of the theme of skin color and skin bleaching is at all times framed by a personal experience and a subjective voice. The animation begins with Mukii describing her memory of being a child watching the woman who braided her

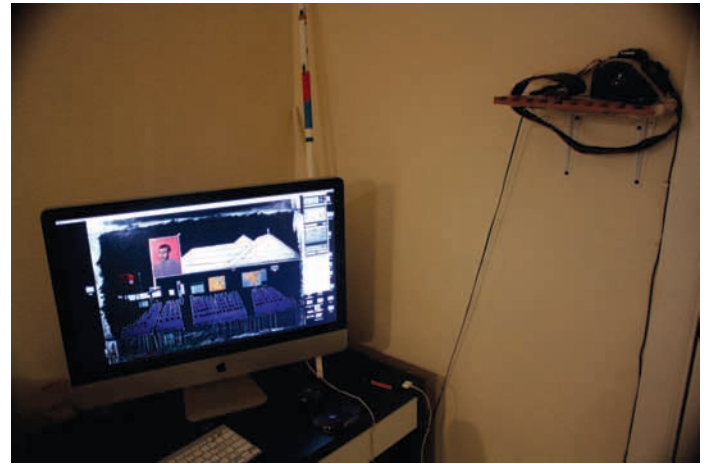






hair, who she refers to as *mkorogo*,<sup>17</sup> a woman who bleached her hands and her face in order to lighten her skin color (Figs. 3–4). Mukii’s voice (as narrator) speaks of her memory in the present tense, transporting the viewer to this particular moment in time. In so doing she is able to create a sense of immediacy with this opening sequence, as if she is reliving the moment that she is testifying to. She depicts herself sitting in the hair salon with her sister; surrounding them on the walls are posters of blonde, tanned women with text that reads “Fair and Beautiful” and “Soft and Straight for beautiful hair.” Her account immediately draws attention to her concern with skin color and appearances as she states, “She is chocolate . . . I am toffee.” Furthermore, Mukii uses framing devices such as the mirror and posters (and later the television) to draw attention to the “pervasive and subconscious media created ideals” that torment women (Mukii 2013).

The concerns that Mukii alludes to in her animation are likely to resonate with other black women in Africa and the Diaspora who may have shared similar experiences and who struggle with notions of beauty and self-image. The film also engages with wider political concerns regarding race and the history of the depiction of the “Other.” These preoccupations are contextualized and historicized through a series of montages of archival images of representations of race in different guises, collaged to sit on top of images of the map of Africa. The decision to utilize and embed “factual material” was informed by a research method strongly advocated at the RCA. This practice is evident here in the collected scanned images from the British Museum and the Royal College of Art Library.<sup>18</sup> The collection includes Western historical representations of African women, female genitalia, minstrels, illustrations of British soldiers gazing at the Hottentot Venus, illustrations and cartoons of colonizers and colonized, photographic images of slave traders hanging African men, and photographic images from eugenic literature, to name a few. These images are presented as a rapid sequence of flashing images, first at the start of the film, then again at interludes when projected onto the nude female body (Figs. 5–6). They are used as a temporally efficient device permitting Mukii to allude to the underpinning political discourses, without having to unpack them in narrative detail. In this way Mukii breaks from the drawn aesthetic of her animated opening sequence with intervals of photographic performances



**7** A digital photograph of Ezra Wube’s studio showing the single canvas he uses to iteratively change and capture with the digital camera setup opposite.

**8** A digital photograph of Ezra Wube’s studio showing his camera set-up and computer that he uses to capture his animated paintings.

that are part-filmed and part-pixelated,<sup>19</sup> and the subsequent montage sequences of archival images sit independently or embedded within the performance as a projection. These interludes are a marked visual break from the hair salon sequence, or later the “recorded” conversations with mother and niece. They offer an insight into Mukii’s private and personal contemplations of the Western gaze and her concern for “this woman [who] has worked hard to erase the element that marks her as truly African,” as Mukii narrates in the film.

Five separate individuals were involved in the photographed performances across the interludes between the drawn animation sequences. However, for the most part these are presented in a similar one- or two-person setup, echoing her earlier approach in *Hasidi* (2006). The central key character is framed in a black space with face and hands that appear to be digitally painted-over (in a similar vein to rotoscoping) to visibly whiten the image. At times a secondary character, an alter-ego, barely visible and darker in skin color, interacts with the main performer encircling her in a taunting manner. She is made to appear at the start as an annoyance and, like a fly, is swatted and pushed away. This interaction reaches a climatic point where both performers are superimposed (as a pixelated sequence) in rapid succession on the same screen space to create a visual schizophrenic representation of multiple identities.

On other occasions Mukii uses the performer’s body as a canvas. Whether the body is presented as a still nude lying horizontally, evoking a sense of landscape (Fig. 5), or actively performing, Mukii reuses her archival images to project upon the body. Mukii also projects photographic images of the Kenyan landscape upon the reclining nude. Her combination of Kenyan landscape with the feminine body is an intentional device used to “speak to a wider social issue” and alludes to a history of dis-



9 A still image from Ezra Wube's *Hold the Door* (2008) of a photograph of the artist with relatives as a montage including drawn silhouetted figures of nomads travelling within these frames.

courses on Orientalism and the feminization of the African continent (Said 1993, Mudimbe 1988). Mukii's accounts of these memories bear witness to practices that continue to be prolific in Kenya and sit within a history of discourses on beauty and whiteness that stem from the colonial project (Mukii 2013).

Mukii's approach to the structure of this animation raises questions about the "truth" and believability of the image that contribute to the veridiction that informs the genre of "animated documentary." The anti-indexical qualities of animation in general are particularly attractive to artists specifically concerned with representational strategies of subalterns. In *Yellow Fever* the photographic inserts are deployed to cause reflection upon a history of photography where the image was inscribed with relations of power and intimately linked to the gaze (Tagg 1988, Mulvey 1975). Some of the more dominant modes of documentary filmmaking can be implicated in a wider historical and political discussion of claims to "truths" embedded within the photographic image and for this reason may appear to be inadequate. Therefore it is worth reflecting upon Mukii's choice to represent her testimony of the feminine experience of race and skin color within the fabricated animated form as intentionally self-referential. By adopting a process that overtly demonstrates its fabrication, Mukii implicates documentary filmmaking as, in part, responsible for the condition she set out to critique.

#### SPACES AND PLACES WITHIN THE FRAME

A concern with identity is also present within the animations of Ethiopian artist Ezra Wube as he explores his own mobility and experience of different spaces between Ethiopia and the United States. The majority of Wube's animations foreground specific conceptions of change and transition in space and time as he reflects upon identity and migration.

Migrated individuals commonly realize there is no longer a singular home. Strung between two cultures we are not fully one or the other. The home is grounded in movement. The migrant needs to create his own sense of belonging to make a relationship with the surrounding environment.<sup>20</sup>

Ezra Wube emigrated from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to the United States when he was eighteen. This experience has shaped Wube's sensibilities about home, identity, and mobility, and these are key features of his body of work. Wube originally trained in

0 A still image from Ezra Wube's *Hold the Door* (2008) of a mirrored door way with the silhouette of the nomad.







11 A single digital photograph, one of a sequence, in *Indamora* (2009) where Ezra Wube painted Amharic words on the window of his studio in the US that he washed away and captured iteratively.

painting, gaining multiple painting awards before completing his graduate studies in Fine Arts in 2004 at the Massachusetts College of Art. In 2003, he was awarded the Massachusetts Annual Black Achievement Award and held his first one-person show at the Dreams of Freedom Museum in Boston. It was, however, his interest in photography, video, and performance that led him to discover their convergence within animation. Wube described this medium from the viewpoint that

Some work needs to be experienced in time based format. It needs to show how it is changing or unchanging. It needs a beginning and an ending.<sup>21</sup>

While conscious of his ties to Ethiopia, Wube's artistic career developed in the United States with fine art studies firmly positioned within Western artistic practice while also engaging with the work of some Ethiopian contemporary artists such as Elias Sime, Behailu Bezabih, Daniel Taye, and Henok Getachew, as well as groups such as the Netsa Village.<sup>22</sup>

In 2011 Wube's animations travelled to a range of countries in touring exhibitions,<sup>23</sup> and in 2012 the breadth of his work again extended from a host of video art festivals, such as ARTchSO Africa Video Art in Rennes, France, to film festivals such as The Festival of Migrant Film in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and the Annecy International Animation Festival in France.

12 A single digital photograph, one of a sequence, in Ezra Wube's *Indamora* (2009) of the ink Amharic word metamorphosing into silhouetted nomadic figures.



Wube's work demonstrates versatility in dissemination and contexts of viewership that echo the oscillation that Buchan (2012) identifies within animation and its position in the high/low art divide. Furthermore, its straddling of different aesthetic forms and materials encourage their inclusion within and across different contexts and genres. In November 2013, Wube was commissioned to create an animated piece for the Times Square public art project *Midnight Moment*. This project involved utilizing electronic billboards and signs in a synchronized manner to screen and display different artists' creative content. Wube's *At the Same Moment* (2013) consisted of animated paintings that illustrated Wube's





13 An under-the-camera still image from Ezra Wube's *Wenzu* (2011) of a time-lapsed sequence of beans sprouting and the animated forms made out of Ethiopian foods such as injera.

memories and observations of travelling across New York City on his daily journey to his studio.

#### STILL MOVING IMAGES

The oscillation of state between the still and moving (present/past) in the animated image is a necessary consequence of its being, and it is even more evident in the case of the animated painting than in other types of animation, due to the layering of strokes upon a singular image. This type of animated painting necessitates the erasure of one state to make visible another while at times leaving a trail of the preceding image as it moves onto the next through time. Typically Wube's canvas is hung on the wall in his studio; directly across from it sits a camera wired to a computer that captures these iterative changes in transition (Figs. 7–8).<sup>24</sup> In Wube's films the narrative content does not follow the typical Western linear model for storytelling, derivative of Disney's hyperrealist treatment of movement and form, nor is it underpinned by cinematographic convention. The process of painting in a continuous fashion on one canvas lends itself towards a metamorphic treatment of the story, with depiction of space and movement that fluidly changes from one form to another. This specific process goes beyond its rudimentary purpose as a vehicle to tell a story and holds a deeper significance for Wube through his own experience of moving forward.

My animation process is one-way, absolutely forward, imitating the flux or unpredictability of life. After each frame is constructed I take a still photo and construct the next frame on top of it. The entire animation is usually painted on a single surface [canvas]. If I make a mistake there is no way to go back but to redo the entire scene.<sup>25</sup>

This process is visible in the animations *I Came from the Sky* (2006), *Hisab* (2011), and *Yarawit Digis* (2102). Here, Wube utilizes metamorphic transitions to compress the experience of journeying through unlikely “fantastical” stories. The process offers an economical compression of the key components needed to tell the story.

In his other pieces *Hold the Door* [*Hulet*] (2008), *When We All Met* (2009), *Indamora* (2009), and *New Home* [*Addis Bet*] (2013), Wube illustrates the more hybrid nature of the animated form, visible through the spatial and temporal collages. Wube creates these moving images through a combination of seemingly disparate elements within one pictorial space. The visual collage serves to present the viewer with a direct confrontation of different visual locators, such as a photograph of a New York café and a painting of silhouetted Ethiopian nomadic figures that appear and reappear throughout the dislocated places of the work. These synchronous juxtapositions of images through time reinforce the impression of the multiple spaces that Wube calls upon within his animations. Like Naficy's accented cinema, Wube's *Hold the Door* can be “simultaneously global and local” and exist “in chaotic semiautonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas” (Naficy 2001:19). The aesthetic forms of these convergent elements are inflected with accents from different contexts, whereby the pictorial montage denotes this “transnational quality” or accent.

For example, in *Hold the Door* Wube represents and collapses different spaces and “realities” using collage and drawn animation. Here the film begins with a drawn graphite animation. The screen is split into two mirrored parts and a silhouetted “journeyer” divides into two people moving in opposite directions through the doors (Figs. 9–10). These nomads appear almost always to be displaced, removed from a place they would normally inhabit, in constant movement to or from somewhere, through New York skylines, and on maps, or through the windows in cafés. In *Hold the Door*, the sequence splits the figure as it alternates the black and white compositional elements in a montage between mirror images of the left and right of screen. These types of framing devices are used throughout the animation in the form of a mirror, doorway, or window or an embedded picture within a shot. The viewer is repeatedly confronted with photographic imagery of interior spaces such as cafés, studios, or shops in New York,

14 An under-the-camera still image from Ezra Wube's *Wenzu* (2011) of a time-lapsed sequence of beans sprouting and the animated forms made out of lentils, seeds, spices, and other food.



predominantly with cutout windows or doorways in frame. In these sequences Wube uses the collage to allow for the animated drawings of the nomadic figures to appear through the window or doorway travelling through an empty space.<sup>26</sup>

With *Indamora*, the camera served to capture the combination of fabricated image superimposed upon a photographic time-lapse of a view from a window with the trace of the artist's actions. It is within the intervals of each exposure by the camera that Wube makes and unmakes the animated image, as he paints and washes away the strokes. In *Indamora* Wube superimposes ink painting on acetate placed on top of a windowpane in his US studio looking out onto a view of a construction site. His images combine letters from Amharic Fidel that morph into silhouetted impressions of the figures that appear throughout his other work (Figs. 11–12). At the start he washes the ink away at different moments causing the disappearance of the previous image, but still leaving its traces on the next image in the form of the trails of ink and water that trickle down the frame. The process of “washing away” images can arguably be seen as having a cathartic function whereby the artist negotiates a tension between past and present and the personal locators associated with these different times.

[E]ach scene is washed away, the unconscious consumption of time is exposed. In this process the confinement to a singular authenticity is forever gone even though it has been documented. The documentation serves as an indexical vehicle that captures the past. The purpose of documentation is not to preserve, but to serve as a bridge, connecting the past with the present, the internal with the external.<sup>27</sup>

This provides scope to discuss the actions employed as having purpose beyond the aesthetic result that can be achieved, for example, when using these techniques within production of a singular image versus a sequence of moving images. Later the nomadic figures journey from left to right of screen across a horizon line made up of a cut-out map. The combination of

different materials and the specific process of rendition are intimately connected to Wube's interest in location and identity.

This mix of techniques and materials between the animated ink drawings, cutouts and timelapse is not unique to *Indamora*, but is also visible in his other films like *When We All Met*, *Wenzu* (2011), and *Hidar* (2012). In *When We All Met*, Wube's depiction of a family reunion is thick with layers of personal photographic elements, pencil drawings, textural objects such as textile and threads, cut-outs and ink, and direct references to his paintings. Wube returns to the familial and personal setting in the mixed media piece *Wenzu*, whose title means “The River” and was based upon a local narrative about the hyena that accuses the donkey for dirtying the water downstream. However, the sound was taken from a 2004 recording of the artist's grandmother recounting the story while cooking. This element immediately conveys a sense of intimate place. The sequence, like *Indamora*, involved a performative process where the artist used under-the-camera techniques, leaving traces of his actions in the trails of liquid and textures on the image.

Beans planted in the first scene grew in parallel with the story's development. In this piece I was experimenting with the idea of unexpected events intervening with my work. I built a greenhouse, planted beans and animated the story using grains, salt and dirt on a glass surface above the beans ... It was a meditative ritualistic process; watering the plants, and preparing Ethiopian food.<sup>28</sup>

The animation combined different sequences of the preparation of Ethiopian food, the chopping of tomatoes, onions, and spices, the mixing of lentils, the planting of seeds in dirt, and the time-lapse of the beans that grow (Figs. 13–14). These different parts were in turn used to compose the animated image, as impressions of the silhouette of the hyena and donkey were made visible drinking at a river's edge. The resulting images have a textural quality and appear to metamorphose between different states. In a similar vein to *Indamora*, the sequence also included



elements that the artist could not control, such as the time-lapse beans. These aspects of the moving image allude to the tensions between animation, automated processing of images, and the all-important interval between frames that denotes interjection. These concerns are foregrounded in van Veuren's *minutes 2010: time/bodies/rhythm/Johannesburg* (2010) short film.

### DISRUPTING THE INDEX

The *minutes 2010* film further explores the poetic potential of the material by allowing chance juxtapositions of composited spaces and temporalities to create a hybrid, dreamlike landscape, touching more on memory and desire than documentary or indexical concerns (van Veuren 2012:96).

While Mocke Jansen van Veuren described his collaborative project with Theresa Collins on the *minutes 2010* time-lapses as an examination of the index within the photographic image, his involvement with animation and the animated process would suggest a more considered interaction between the discourses on the animated form and the photographic. Van Veuren (b. 1976) is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. He studied Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand and during this time he started experimenting with animation, graduating in 1999 with a Bachelor of Fine Art. He has experience as a professional animator. In 2002 he also began lecturing in multimedia. The Minutes project ran between 2005 and 2011 in collaboration with artist Theresa Collins to study spaces and movement and consisted of a series of time-lapse experiments taken within the city.<sup>29</sup> The specific part of the project cited here moves beyond a single sequence of time-lapsed images and instead consists of a superimposed digital composite of different time-lapsed spaces; a panopticon view of the lower taxi rank at the Bree Street Metro Mall and a below-the-water view of a public swimming pool. Van Veuren's background in animation and interest in the "secret gap between frames" (van Veuren 2011), alongside the manual clicking of an old Bolex shutter release for the timelapse projects, cohered in *minutes 2010: time/bodies/rhythm/Johannesburg* (2010) which presented the tension between the causality and interruption of the photographic image.

[C]ontrast between these practices [animation and time-lapse] is marked, and laying them beside each other is revealing. Both deal with time, both involve meticulous labour that produces as an effect some kind of moving trace, a new temporality, the selection of moments from a continuous duration (at the same time discarding durations) and in a more complex way—a kind of erasure of the author (van Veuren 2011).

Van Veuren's intention was to capture the empirical trace that denoted movement using a mechanical process. However, there are moments in his process that are instigated by volition, altering and interjecting upon the recorded image. Furthermore,

his reflections on his blog *timerythmtrace* suggest that van Veuren's concerns with the sequence of images are a result of his engagement with animation practices and a concern for the in-between spaces, between still and moving, between recorded and fabricated. Van Veuren and Collin's edited short piece, *minutes 2010: time/bodies/rhythm/Johannesburg* stands apart from the other experiments in that, by his own admission, this piece leans towards a more poetic exploration of space, "moving away from documentary mode" (van Veuren 2012:67). It is within this digital superimposition of different spaces that a rendition of an impossible space appears. In a surreal moment, the ceiling of the rank seems to disappear below a veil of water; the whole taxi rank appears to be below water with people swimming above. Therefore, while this final example sets out to engage with notions of the index and photographic trace, these digital injections, albeit seamless, suggest that even within an image that is entirely photographic in aesthetic it is possible to locate the trace of the animator.

### ANALOG DIGITAL

Finally it must be noted that any discussion of the photograph in contemporary animation practice would not be complete without the recognition and impact of digital technologies upon these processes and the implied conceptual shift that occurs as a result of the mutability of the digital. Most of the examples cited in this paper, even when captured on 16mm film, have subsequently been moved into a digital platform, converted to a digital format, and distributed over a virtual digital network on the Internet. At its most extreme, computer-generated animation can find itself invisibly inserted within the photographic or presented entirely as a perfect simulation of the photographic, where the fabricated image is no longer distinguishable. The tendency for the digital animated image to pervade into other genres such as computer games, film, and popular media has also ensured that animation artists experiment with a range of aesthetics, including the photographic. This mutable quality is mirrored in the African animators and artists who are engaging with these technologies. As digital creatives they are able to interchangeably present themselves as "filmmakers," visual (digital) artists, graphic designers, animators, and even computer programmers. It is under these guises that it is possible to encounter a new generation of African artists who are exploring photographic process in the realm of interpolation.<sup>30</sup>

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### Notes

1 Here pixelation refers to the stop-motion animated technique where actor's poses are captured at incremental images (in a similar vein to stop-motion puppets).

2 There are some notable exceptions of artists whose animated moving images have garnered significant attention such as South African William Kentridge's *9 Drawings for Projection* (2005) and recently Kenyan Wangechi Mutu's digital animated moving images in *The End of Eating Everything* (2013).

3 While this may be no longer true with examples of computer-generated animations that represent a "photo-real" aesthetic and aim to be indistinguishable from the indexical equivalent, the historical trajectory of mainstream animation in Europe and America saw a predominance of representations of anthropomorphic

characters and fantastical narratives with a cartoon aesthetic (based upon cell animation techniques).

4 In rotoscoping, the artist traces over a sequence of photographed image frames in film (or digital images) to create a similar sequence of drawn images that retain aspects of the "realistic" qualities of movement found in the original reference. More recently is has been used in different 2D animation genres to explore aesthetic realism and notions of verisimilitude.

5 To add to this, in the context of digital photographic images the discussion of the visibility or invisibility of fabrication, alteration, or distortion brought about by computer-generated imagery has raised questionable concern on the "realism" of an image that while appearing to be photographic may in actual fact be for the most part fabricated. For a more detailed discussion on these ideas see Prince 1996, Manovich 2001, McClean 2007, Doane 2007, Gunning 2004.

6 The piece was included in the exhibition TRNS-MSSN that was held at the Goethe-Institut, Nairobi, May 5–16, 2009.

7 Digital compositing uses software to assemble different digital images seamlessly into a complete composition with the intention to create a believable photorealistic rendition of a scene, usually within the realm of special effects in film.

8 Interview, Kenneth Coker, November 5, 2012.

9 Interview, Kenneth Coker, November 5, 2012.

10 The range of photographs could include images of patterns, textures of objects, different environments, drawings, and paintings. They may appear within the moving image as 2D digital cut-outs or may be projected onto three-dimensional models as textures.

11 The resulting visible image made possible through the computational mathematical calculations of the relative position, angle, and lighting of a virtual environment in relation to the camera.

12 The college has since merged with Surrey Institute of Art and Design to form the University for the Creative Arts in 2008.

13 Since completing her studies, her animations have been screened at different festivals. These include winning Best Animated Short at the Chicago International Film Festival in 2013, Official Selection for the Pan-African Film Festival 2014, Official Selection for the Montreal International Black Film Festival 2013, Chagrin Documentary Film Festival, K. 2013 Internationale Kurtzfilmstage Winterhur.

14 Interview, Ng'endo Mukii, January 13, 2014.

15 Interview, Ng'endo Mukii, April 22, 2014.

16 Between 2012 and 2014, the short, seven-minute film won a range of awards including being voted third place in the documentary category for the Afrinolly Short Film Competition; the Silver Hugo for Best Animated Short at the 49th Chicago International Film Festival, US; Nominated in The Nahemi Student Film Awards at the Encounters Short Film Festival, Bristol, UK; Best Short Film Award at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards, in Lagos, Nigeria; Best Animation Award at the 7th Kenya International Film Festival, Nairobi, Kenya; Nominated for Best Short Film Award Colours of the Nile Film Festival Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

17 *Mkorogo* is a Swahili term also used to refer to a popular toxic skin bleaching concoction used in East Africa.

18 Interview, Ng'endo Mukii, April 23, 2014.

19 Here pixelation refers to the stop-motion animated technique where actor's poses are captured in incremental images (in a similar vein to stop-motion puppets).

20 Interview, Ezra Wube, August 25, 2012.

21 Interview, Ezra Wube, August 25, 2012.

22 Interview, Ezra Wube, August 25, 2012.

23 These include Cologne OFF 2011 video art festival "Art & the City", and a collection of short film festivals, international animation festivals and African film festivals. Of notable mention are the International Black Film Festival, Nashville, Tennessee; Afrika in Motion Film Festival, Edinburgh, UK; Silicon Valley African Film Festival, Mountain View, California; Ottawa International Animation Festival, Ottawa, Canada; Under African Skies, Tria Gallery, New York. Wube also accepted a placement as artist in resident at Château de la Napoule, France, the Contemporary Artists Center (CAC), Woodside, Troy, New York, and The Substation, Johannesburg, South Africa.

24 Interview, Ezra Wube, December 13, 2014.

25 Interview, Ezra Wube, August 25, 2012.

26 A similar premise is reused in *Zemed* (2012), a series of photographs with cutout inserted photographs that superimpose silhouetted shapes of things commonly encountered in Ethiopia, over Wube's environment in the US. In the image one can see Wube's hand in shot as it holds the cutout photograph on a paperclip in front of the camera.

27 Ezra Wube, personal website. [www.ezrawube.net](http://www.ezrawube.net); accessed September 10, 2012.

28 Interview, Ezra Wube, August 25, 2012.

29 Van Veuren talks about the Minutes Project on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zSfxCZYl98>

30 Interpolation occurs in computer animation when the computer calculates and fills in the frames between the key frames that are set by the animator, or the smooth transition from one position/form to another.

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