

building beyond

SAVED
EVERY
ONE



Fonds



**creative
industries
fund NL**

about
the
pro-
gramme

ABOUT THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES FUND NL
The Creative Industries Fund NL is the Dutch cultural fund for design, architecture, digital culture and every imaginable crossover. We are one of the six national cultural funds and support special and innovative projects and activities of designers, makers and cultural institutions in the creative industry.

ABOUT THE PRINCE CLAUS FUND
Prince Claus Fund is an independent foundation dedicated to culture and development. With trust-based funding, connections and recognition, we serve engaged artists and cultural practitioners in places where culture is under pressure. By creating a global network of changemakers and amplifying the ground-breaking work they do, we contribute to a more equitable, peaceful, sustainable and inclusive future. Because culture is a basic need.

A WORD FROM THE DESIGNER: ANNA DIAGNE
The graphic design of the booklets makes visible the intertwining of the artists' voices as they respond to each other. How should these voices be represented? What shapes should be used? Each artist's letter was assigned one of the following typefaces to represent their individuality: Halyard display, Halyard Text, Tiffin, Corundum, Courier, Amieamie, Jubilat, Freight Text, Freight Micro, Ernst, BBB Poppins, Lora, Adelphe Floreal, Ibm Plex, Eliza. These are fonts chosen for their revolutionary and inclusive character. The themes of space, dialogue and community evoked in the letters are also expressed graphically. Using the page as playground, a thread traces a path between the different voices, sometimes linear, sometimes entangled. The thread takes roots in the imposed grid of the booklet and emancipates itself by connecting the letters to extracts from their correspondents.

About the programme

Across the globe, the pressure on cities is growing exponentially, with the most pronounced effects being felt across the African continent. With such growth comes the huge responsibility of ensuring that the development of big African cities lies in the hands of the people living in them and that they have agency over their own city's future.

Building Beyond Mentorship — created in collaboration with the Creative Industries Fund-NL — is a programme that looks at the built environment as an ongoing conversation between the critically engaged artists and activists. It invites designers, creatives, and artists situated in the African context to shape their own futures and dream new realities into being. The one-year interdisciplinary mentorship fosters locally-rooted design practices and cultural productions that challenge our ideas of space and citizenship, (re)affirm agency, and (re)state ownership. Cities are more than just spaces for living and working; they contain communities, expressions, knowledge systems, economies, beliefs, and they are crucial spaces for identity formation that shapes our lives. Building Beyond engages in critically assessing how we live, and what the future could hold. What are the processes that define shared spaces, what are the forms through which they should be pursued, and who will participate in shaping them?

The programme brings together 12 experienced designers, creatives, and artists over the course of a year to foster conversation, collaboration, and exchange within the cohort; to support each participant in their own individual practice; and to facilitate exchanges between the cohort and relevant external practitioners. Design and creative urban productions aren't «one size fits all» practices, and that's why we've programmed Building Beyond as an alternative educational structure where participants come together with four mentors and fellow peers to reflect on their practice, activate it within a local context, and gather ideas and universalities from different urban contexts.

A Reflection from the Prince Claus Fund and the Creative Industries Fund NL

Written by Mireille & Tessa

In 2021 we embarked on a collaboration between the Prince Claus Fund and the Creative Industries Fund NL based on the notion that the conversations on cities and urbanising spaces often take place in particular processes and transactions, usually about rather than with, and even less between, the people that live and move within and among them. The fact that our organisations work in different ways, animating connected yet different networks, added relevance to the idea of designing a joint programme to reflect on the various urban dynamics, spaces, and communities. We share the vision and conviction that artists, creatives, designers, and architects are essential to a dialogue about how we inhabit the world, so a main goal in our collaboration was to bring different perspectives, practices, and forms of expression together in an ongoing conversation about the built environment.

The Building Beyond programme was born out of the increased awareness that the cities we reside and move in and the spaces we occupy are being stretched beyond their current limits. In its essence, urban life is an intermingling of different people, politics, relations, rituals, infrastructures, and economies. This constant exchange necessitates the negotiation between, in, and amongst, the moving parts of a city — enfolding spaces of contention and possibility. It is in these gaps and openings that communities and individuals are finding alternative ways of coming together, of resisting and engaging, or sometimes disengaging, with the (infra) structures and processes that surround them. By centering on what is happening in this in-between, in spaces where individuals and groups are critically reflecting on what their relation to the built environment is or could be, and what their belonging in it is, we believe we can find powerful alternatives for negotiating and shaping urban life.

It is quite common in the discourse on the pressures of our increasingly urban condition to lay the focus on the African continent. This is most often done from an outsider perspective, mired in assumptions, clichés, and generalisations that grievously overlook the specificity of space and limit the plurality of identities, perspectives, and initiatives present within different geographies and cities on the continent. This was something we wanted to avoid at all costs in thinking this programme into being; so beyond defining the general theme and framework, the content of the programme — as you see it reflected in this publication — has been defined by the people participating in it, as mentors and as participants.

Mapping out the space that the programme could fill, our main aim was to bring together and amplify emerging voices. Voices of artists, designers, architects, spatial practitioners, and community organisers, who are shaping spaces for collaboration, and provocation, and who are engaging with a wider and alternative discourse on the past, present, and future of cities. In this, we wanted to nurture a space for experimentation, hybridity, and surprise. Space to unravel and reconfigure, to build beyond the structures and processes apparently visible to us. To this end, the main message in our first call was an invitation to dream — and through the act of dreaming reimagine the future of African cities and collectively imagine this programme into being.

The many individuals that the programme comprised of — from the participants, mentors, and guest speakers, to everyone who opened their spaces to us both in Senegal and the Netherlands — collectively assembled their ideas about what Building Beyond could mean. We extend our thanks to the mentors — Ola, Khensani, and Sénamé — for taking this step and weaving the threads of the first year together. The cohort, with their multiple perspectives, experiences, and creative practices willingly dove

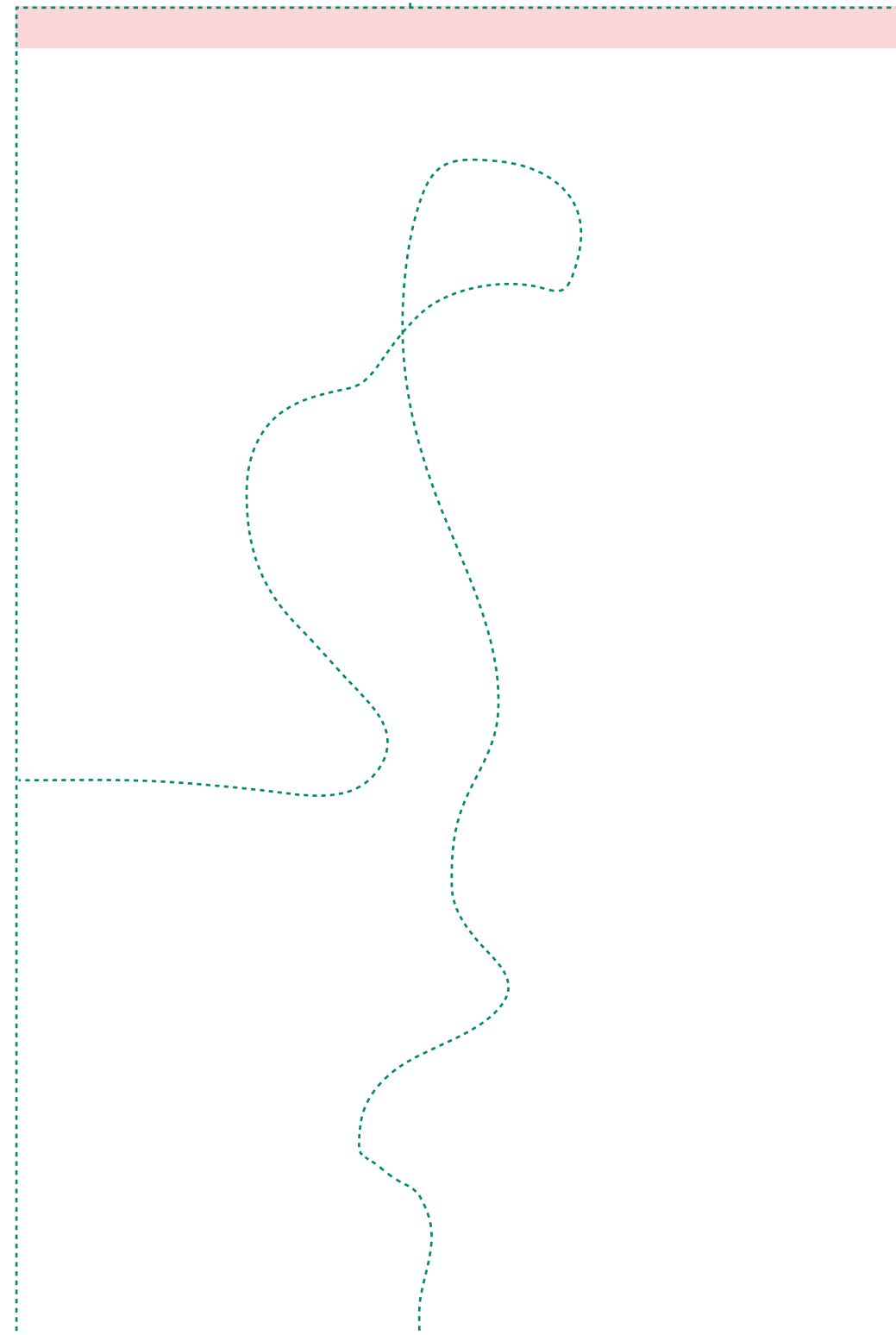
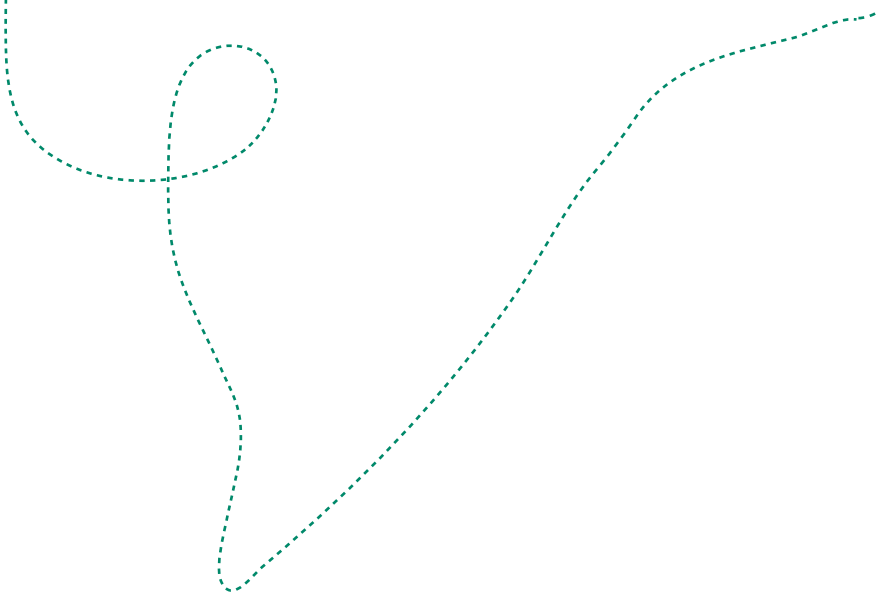
in the deep end, and even when things were strained, filled in the gaps and openings of Building Beyond and gave it shape. Collectively they configured this pilot.

What you now have before you is a collation of exchanges amongst a group that stepped into a programme without predefined form or focus, and in that developed relationships, shaped and shared ideas that not only connected, but also fed, their individual practices. The exchanges documented here take the form of letters. Near the outset of the programme, the participants experimented with the letter as a mode of interaction to reflect on diverse situations and to offer ideas, musings, and provocations. The letters were revisited at the end of the programme and shaped to their current form. Weaving these letters together are reflections and questions and prompts that resurfaced throughout the programme: How do we remember? How do we travel? How do we assemble? The publication gives the reader a window into Building Beyond. We hope that in reading these offerings that you, as reader, will be challenged and find inspiration as to what our futures could be.

On behalf of the Prince Claus Fund and the Creative Industries Fund NL

Mireille & Tessa

Programme Manager Internationalisation, Creative Industries Fund NL; Head of Programmes, Prince Claus Fund



Biographies

IKRAM HAMDI MANSOUR

is an eco-architect, independent researcher, and cultural practitioner based in Algiers, Algeria. She holds a master's degree in architecture and environmental design. Her work focuses on sensory awareness and nature connection practices to reconcile the sacred relationship between humans and the natural realm. She founded the organisation Climate Change Culture Change to raise awareness among Algerian citizens about the impacts of climate change through artistic projects around ecological justice, social justice, and inner justice.



KATESI JACQUELINE KALANGE

also known as «the Kalange,» is a female visual artist currently based in Kampala, Uganda. Her creative journey centres on a blend of sculpture, architecture, performance, and installation art. She holds a bachelor's degree in art and industrial design from Kyambogo University, Kampala.

At the heart of her inspiration lies Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which emphasises the importance of climate justice. The Kalange's artistic endeavours involve collaborations with local communities, primarily by employing weaving techniques using recycled non biodegradable materials like polythene bags, plastics, and second-hand clothing, to name a few.

Through her artistic practice, the Kalange creates space for contemplation, sparking inquiries into the ways in which human beings share the ecosystems with other entities. This exploration gains particular relevance in today's era, where modern lifestyles are leading to the erosion of Indigenous wisdom. Her work serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness that our

ancestors shared with both animate and inanimate beings. This harmonious coexistence starkly contrasts with the contemporary perspective that views these entities merely as exploitable resources for human gain.

Amidst the backdrop of the ongoing climate crisis, the Kalange's art prompts us to reconsider the bonds that once united all living things. Her work underscores the urgent need to move beyond perceiving the natural world as a mere commodity, which is a perspective that has significantly contributed to the environmental challenges we face today. By reflecting on the past, the Kalange's art invites us to restore a sense of equilibrium between humanity and the rest of the ecosystem, acknowledging that our well-being is intrinsically intertwined with that of all beings.



HANA TEFRATI

is a choreographer, performer, visual artist, and curator based in Marrakesh, Morocco. After graduating from the European Dance Development Center (EDDC)/ Dance Academy in Arnhem, the Netherlands (2006) she has moved on to work internationally with artists and choreographers. She was awarded the Dance Web Scholarship in 2011 and worked with Tino Sehgal during the Documenta13. In 2012 Tefrati founded the Queens Collective, and in 2014 she established a community art space and home of the Queens Collective. As artistic director she runs multiple projects, residencies, and events that allow the audience to connect to each other and build community. Though Tefrati is currently devoted to create new spaces for experimental movement research in Marrakesh, she continues to perform and dance internationally and teach improvisational dance.

**YISHAK TEKLEGIORGIS**

is an architect and a founder of Zorit Architects, a consultancy firm based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. His practice deals with socially engaged architecture with a focus on community participation, local knowledge, and sustainability. Teklegiorgis is an educator and researcher at the Chair of Architecture and Design II at EiABC, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa. Throughout his career, he has contributed to various local and international research projects.

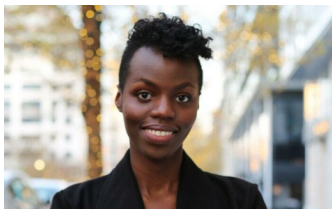
**KHENSANI JURCZOK-DE KLERK**

is an architectural researcher and designer from Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a mentor in the Building Beyond mentorship programme. She centres intersectional practice through research and design by questioning and imagining how narratives of the built environment can be more socially sustainable through embodied and embedded practices. She is founder of Matri-Archi(tecture), an association that hosts a network of spatial practitioners dedicated to the development of African spatial education, offering a site for artistic collaboration through design, art, and architectural research projects. She has taught at the Chair of Affective Architectures at ETH Zürich, Zürich, where she co-coordinated the Department of the Ongoing platform. Her independent research and practice focuses on the role that architecture plays in relation to safe space with the aim to reduce gender-based violence in cities and learning from everyday spatial practices. Through her multidisciplinary approach, Jurczok-de Klerk finds educational value in spatial, written, and auditory explorations. She is the host of the podcast KONTEXT, and she is currently completing a PhD as a fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zürich, Zürich.



FLAVIA GWIZA

is an architect and urbanist based in Kigali, Rwanda. She has a passion for creating resilient and liveable urban spaces as a fundamental aspect of human development and well-being. She holds a master's degree in urban design from Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, and a bachelor of architecture from the University of Rwanda, Rwanda. Her practice includes architectural and urban design projects, strategies, and the facilitation of participatory planning and design workshops. Gwiza has been the recipient of two prestigious international design awards, third prize in the Archigineer Africa competition for a project targeting the elaboration of a suitable, sustainable housing model for Kigali's wetlands (2012); and honourable mention at the Holcim Awards for Sustainable Construction, for a team project based on participatory upgrading strategies elaborated in Kora, Nyarugenge District.

**INAM KULA**

is a storyteller based in Cape Town, South Africa. She tells authentic stories of South Africans through architecture, urbanism, and activism. Kula's work as an architect and activist seeks to address the relationship between space and power, confronting the uses of architecture that create and reinforce systems of marginalisation and exclusion. She believes that architecture and urbanism have the responsibility to create better living environments for the disenfranchised in post-Apartheid South Africa. Kula holds a master's degree in architecture from the University of Cape Town, Cape Town, and an honours degree in planning from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

**NIFEMI MARCUS BELLO**

is a designer based in Lagos, Nigeria. Known for his community-led, ethnographic-conscious design approach, Nifemi's strengths lie in his adoption of materials to pursue new forms and typologies, which allows him to create truly unique products, forms, and experiences while leaning on a keen interest in manufacturing, production availability, habits, and history. Nifemi is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Wallpaper* Magazine "Life Enhancer of the Year" award, The Hublot Design Prize, and Monocle Magazine's "Emerging Designer of the Year" award. A research-driven practitioner, he is currently working on archiving and documenting contemporary, anonymously designed objects across West Africa with grants from the Graham Foundation, the Prince Claus Fund, and more. An alumni of the University of Leeds with a bachelor's and master's degree in product design, he graduated with the "Potential for Social Change" award for his empathy-driven approach towards various briefs.



RUSSEL HLONGWANE

is a cultural producer from Durban, South Africa. His work inquires into the effects of heritage, modernity, culture, and tradition on Black life, and works across the modes of creative research, cultural production, performance, design theory, writing, film, and curatorship. He is currently pursuing an MPhil in southern urbanism at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He is a member of working groups across the African continent and internationally. He has shown work extensively across Europe, as well as in Argentina, Japan, the UAE, and throughout South Africa.



KWASI DARKO

Kwasi Darko is a Ghanaian photographer and visual artist who lives and works in Accra. He is interested in the nuances between contemporary individual lives/identities and traditional communal obligations – especially looking at the non-normative expression of self and thought within African conditions. His work focus on personal and local stories which he shares using long term research, digital technologies and spatial design. Darko's practice has been awarded numerous times by various Artistic support Institutions including Pro Helvetia's "Breathing Space Grant", The Prince Claus Fund "Mobility Grant" and OR Foundation's "Untold Stories". Darko has exhibited globally and within Africa, including showing work at the 2022 Dakar Biennale exhibition "Ndaffa". He is currently setting up the creative work space "Ka-Ne Studios" in Accra to create visual productions and digital inventions at the intersection of art, technology and design.



Ola Hassanain

is an artist, architect, and mentor of the Prince Claus Fund Building Beyond mentorship programme. Her work focuses on the subtle politics of space, namely, how built spaces react to and reinforce violence from state entities, which, in turn, creates a built environment that reflects, responds to, and regulates the lives of those who inhabit it. Her most recent work explores an idea of "space as discourse," an expanded notion of space that encompasses political and environmental questions. Her work aims to develop a spatial vocabulary that follows how ruptures presented by "political events" make it possible to aspire to new kinds of ecologies. Ola's development of critical spatial practice is partly informed by her post-academic training which includes a residency at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (2021–2023), a fellowship at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (2017–2018), and teaching positions at HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, Utrecht, and Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam, amongst others.



SALMA BELAL

is an architect and urbanist from and based in Cairo, Egypt. Through her work, Belal seeks to explore different forms of engagement with urban activism, inspired by Cairo's complex and continuous flux. As a researcher and designer she works on multidisciplinary projects, tackling conservation and built heritage, advocacy for urban justice, and public-space upgrading. Salma is interested in spatial and cultural practices, particularly in how cities are shaped and mediated through politics, space, and time. Her experience in teaching Architecture and Urban Design at various academic institutions has also devised her curiosity in exploring alternative pedagogies through collective learning.



SENAME KOFFI AGBODJINOU

is a promoter of neo-vernacular thought which he defines as a designer, architect, entrepreneur at the different scales of the product, the building and the city. He is also a mentor in the Building Beyond mentorship programme. He is the creator of L'Africaine d'Architecture, a platform for experimentation on questions of African architecture and the city, and WoeLabs: a network of Togolese tech-hubs whose ambition is to "make everyone equal in front of technology". With his community, he contributes to prototype a digital collectivism which has made it possible to launch the half-dozen startups of the HubCity Group. Its prospective vision sheds light on several conferences, institutions, and large groups.

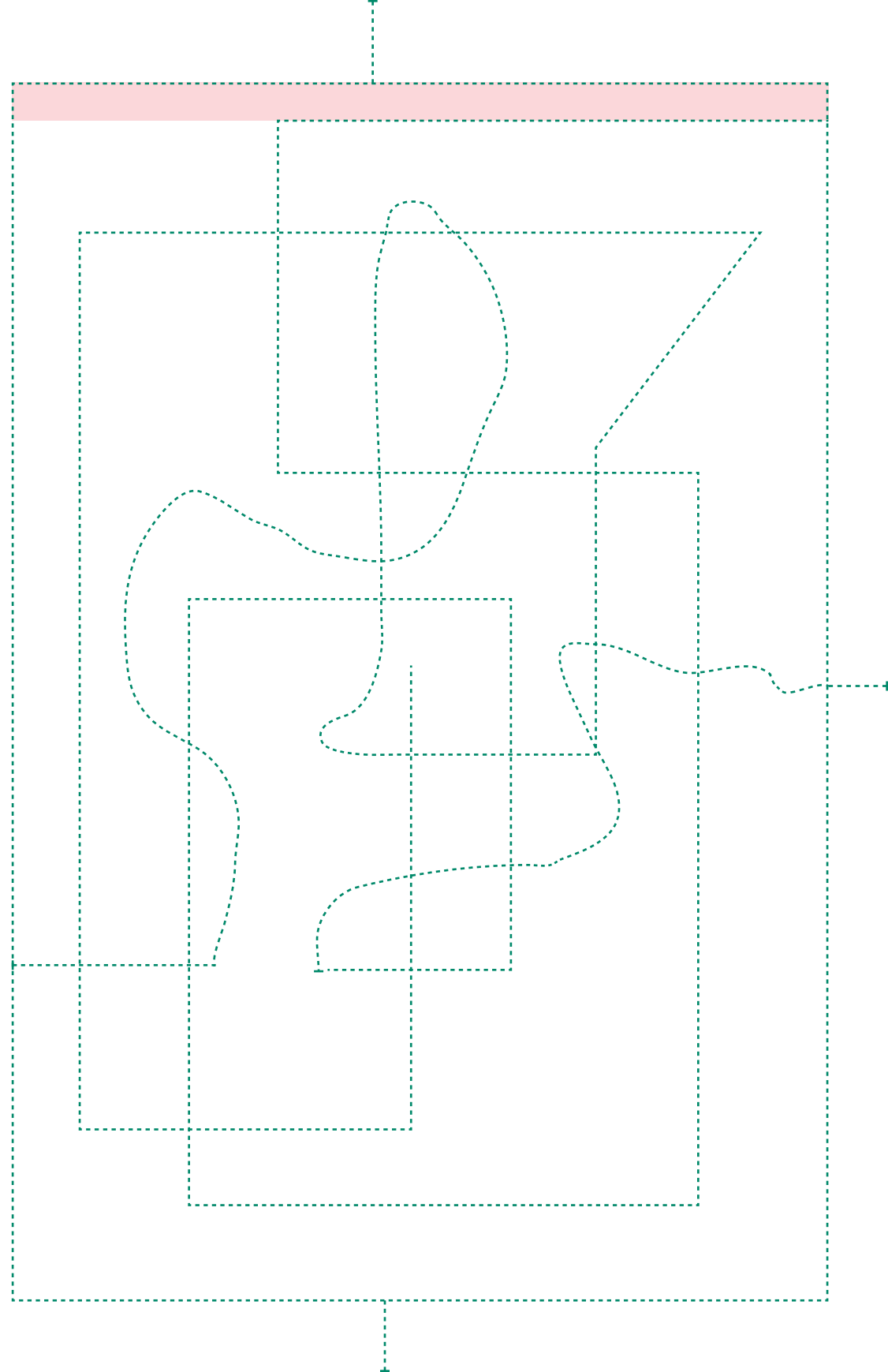
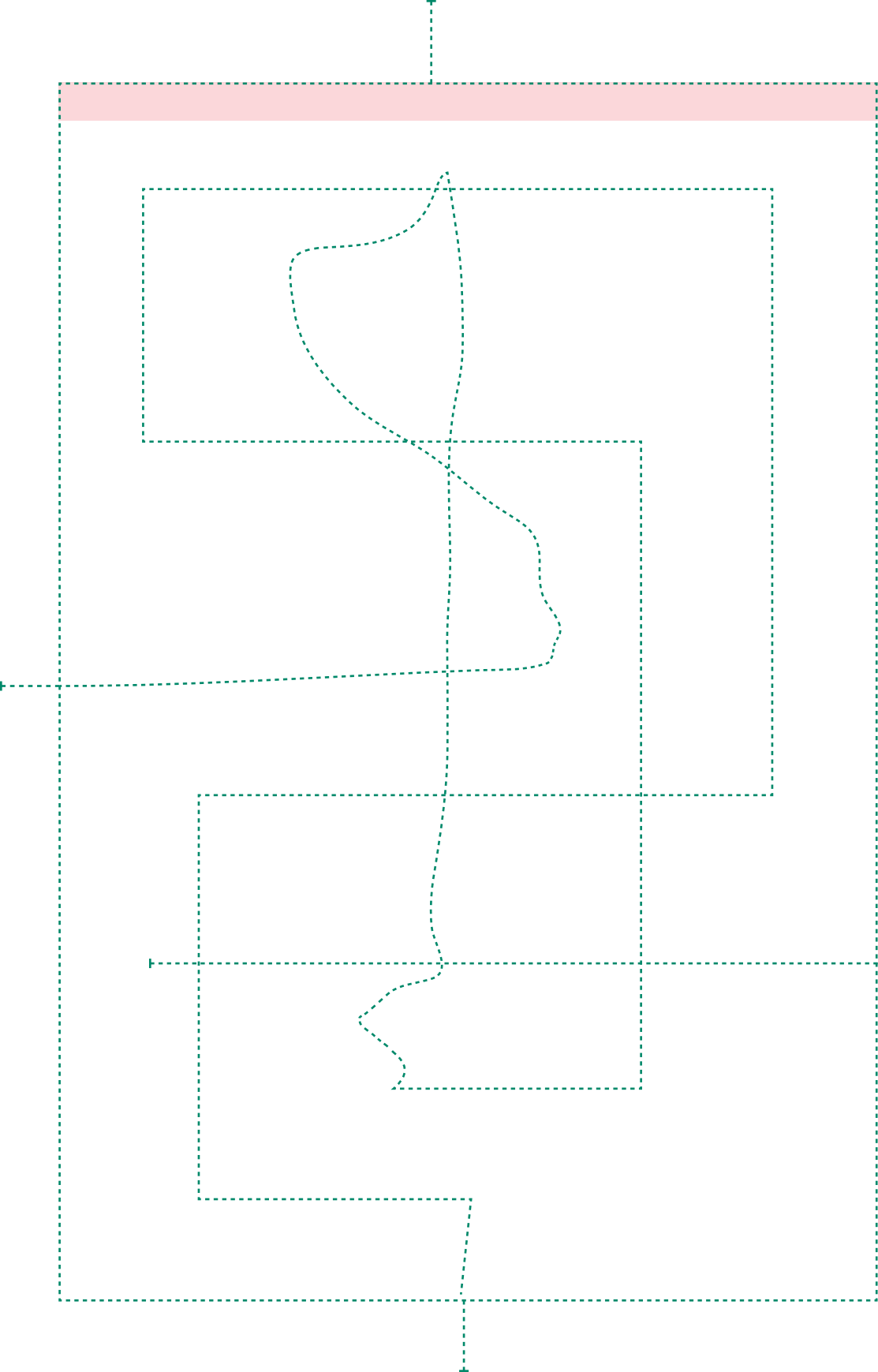


YOUSSEF EL IDRISSE

is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist, researcher, and cultural worker based in Casablanca, Morocco. He holds a bachelor's in philosophy of communications and public spaces and a master's degree in cultural & artistic engineering. In 2018, he founded the collective Kounaktif, which aims to democratise access to the arts and operates at the intersection of ecology, technology, and the arts.

El Idrissi's artistic practice takes the form of software, node-based coding, poetry, field recording, filming, analogue machines, and other materials used for video art installations, interactive workshops, and publishing. Within his practice, he focuses on the decolonisation of imaginaries, Indigenous mythologies, power relations, dynamics of the unconscious, interrelation between psyche and space, body and awareness, technology and living beings, errors (glitches), and symbiosis. Through his cultural and artistic work, El Idrissi aims to connect the aesthetical and the political by deconstructing (and re-imagining) the norms, socio-artistic barriers, and outdated methods using alternative pedagogies, formats, and interdisciplinary practice.







C

Fonds

creative
industries
fund NL

We're
forming
iZiNBIZO!
We're
assembling

we're forming
izimbizo, we're
assembling

Written by Khensani Jurczok-de Klerk
last edit : KJdK 11.05.2023

"In the world of settler colonialism, of plantation societies generally, one might instead define the state as a monopoly on gathering – on the conditions under which social beings can enact and partially realise their already-entangled existence through gathering. All the way from shopping to protest, the state has its ways to monopolise gathering. In this context, a way to think of the undercommons is as the ongoing practice of gathering not sanctioned by the state. Its location or its place is continuously made by that act of gathering – an act of gathering is repeatedly disallowed. Thus, gathering is always a revision, a rehearsal, or a practice, a repetition with difference. We are inevitably broken in our practice of gathering because we are forbidden from practicing it... The undercommons is that radically open place, the place where we insist on open access in the face of vicious abuse of that access. It's a place where we are rehearsing our own muscles, our own imagination around gathering, around being together – which sounds strange because we are already together. It is a question of whether we get to affirm that, or whether we are always going to be forced to operationalise it under the state's monopoly. The state, or state-capital, wants us to get together in all kinds of ways, but only under its terms."

Working, existing, and imagining across different African geographies, we are called through various themes to assemble. Every thread, held in the many different hands of the Building Beyond cohort, is different. In coming together, in assembling through

izimbizo – online and in person – we weave, tighten, and loosen threads of our entanglement. We thread together concerns, desires, and urgencies across our geographies to better understand the fibres of those threads. In gathering, we formed a space premised on presence, giving room for resonance (tightening), discontent (loosening), confusion (looping), and intimacy (weaving). Imbizo in isiZulu means gathering. If we are to think of izimbizo when we reflect on the character of our gathering, we do so not only as an attempt to bring modes of expression to the exchange(s) we encountered, but also to critically reflect, foreground, and highlight the significance of gathering and assembling outside of dominant systems and embedded in the work and practices of the cohort. In using izimbizo as a cue to reflect on the recurring and weighty themes present in the group and prompted by the programme, we echo the work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in recognising that we, as African creative and spatial practitioners, are in the process of designing the terms of own gathering.

The etymology of the word imbizo comes from biza, meaning to call or to summon; and this accurately conveys our own entry points to the programme: a gathering that we, in various ways, summoned, or manifested. Our unconditional commitment to our creative practices was one of the voices that called us to this space, catalysing a unique constellation of hands and threads. .

The Building Beyond programme, through the provision of space, resources, and care, allowed us to respond to this call, and continue to expand our creative practices.

Izimbizo tends to occur in an open environment, in a circular formation where everyone is given a chance to share their thoughts (but is not obliged to do so), and where everyone has the right to speak without interruption. The pace, speed, and duration of the imbizo is not defined. A resolution comes at the end, and the end defines itself.

Or perhaps we might think of Jack Halberstam's opening words in his preface to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, writing:

"It ends with love, exchange, fellowship. It ends as it begins, in motion, in between various modes of being and belonging, and on the way to new economies of giving, taking, being with and for and it ends with a ride on the way to another place altogether."

Within the Building Beyond programme, izimbizo unfolded differently, as a consequence of the people who formed it. "I'm I zo" is both a mechanism of engagement as well as a manifestation of it. In this sense, we propose to advance an understanding of imbizo, and suggest that its spatiality is malleable, and its outcome is always determined by those who occupy it. In this case, during the programme, izimbizo were consciously formed in public (open) environments, while at other times, it was only available to the cohort. It was astonishing and inspiring to see how frequent the notion of collectivity emerged in the practices of the participants and mentors.

Our existence – or what is often misconstrued as a linear path – as an indefinite place from where we are operating, has been a guiding

thread in our entanglement. We situate ourselves in a state of being alive and a state of refusal where we believe in our continued existence and venture to develop and fulfill our aspirations as creative practitioners, in hopes of designing conditions that are emotionally and materially stable and joyful. Joy is a survival mechanism in this sense. This joyful energy drives the urgency we have for action, for change, for evolution, for life!

In coming together, we're acknowledging that our contemporary practices are built upon generations of African knowledge systems that have operated and continue to operate outside of sovereign systems. We are a part of it.

In coming together, we're sharing resources and knowledge systems that have been carried in our mouths and not in books, to learn about our environments about ourselves, and that were previously disregarded in the designing of our environments.

In coming together, we're forming a space for discontent. (For us, this is a safe space where we can get on with it, without risking our lives, and follow a path towards that desired state of joyful existence.

In coming together, we're forming izimbizo, together, for one another, which is only possible by being present and affirming our gathering.

These are some terms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten, "The Common Wind of Worldlessness. In Conversation with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney," *Journal of Architectural Education* 76, 2 (2022): 43-50, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10464883.2022.2097524?journalCode=rjae20>

Hlongwane, Russel, 2022, *Beyonding Urbanity Symposium*.

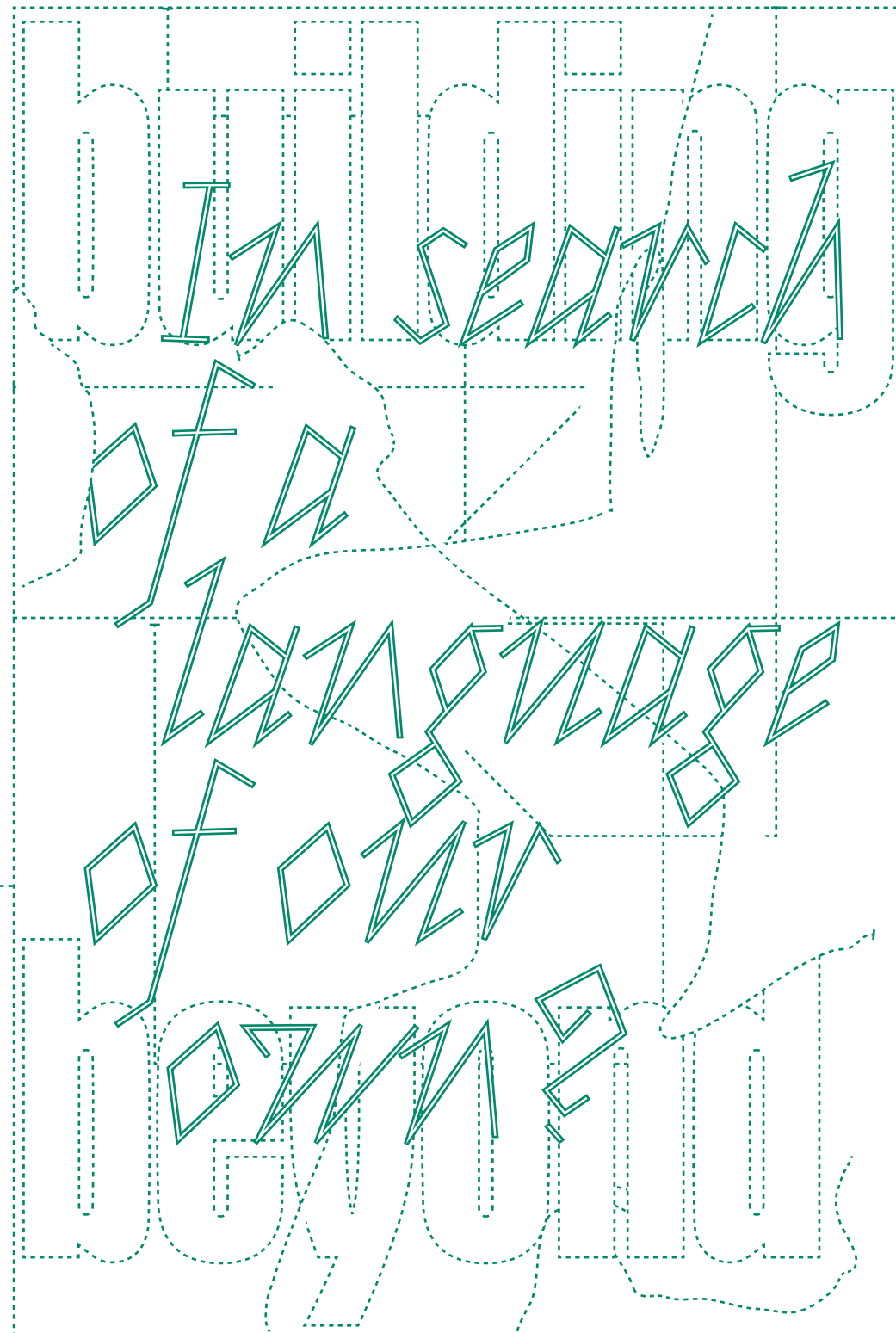
Rijksakademie Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Panel I: How do we remember? (event)



Fonds

C

creative
industries
fund NL



In search of a language of our own?

Written by Russel Hlongwane

“... [T]he physical world actually arises from the basic form... the most fundamental form of language.”

This striking proposition by professor Ashok Aklujkar provokes a range of questions on the relationship between worldmaking and language. More specifically, I am referring to language as a portal to the imaginative realm, where the imagination is at work in spite of and despite words. Otherwise stated, I am referring to a language that existed long before humans invented words.

Should we go with this proposition — is it fair to say that the responsibility of this generation is to make legible and tangible the worlds that Africa has generated for millennia? This legibility and tangibility has the ability to aggregate existing bodies of knowledge from diverse regions that have seldom been in dialogue before. Once these diverse bodies of knowledge sit in proximity, we might begin to speculate upon their old and new meanings. We draw from and build upon the propositions of others who have laboured in this regard, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who writes:

“[...] we African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages... indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the language for philosophy, science, technology, and all other areas of human creative endeavours.”

We are called to ask ourselves non-exhaustive questions across our geographies. On a practical level, we ask what the philosophies, sciences, and technologies of kiSwahili offer Yoruba, and vice versa? We ask what the Fula tongue offers the Nguni, and vice versa? Ultimately, we want to work with the repository that emerges from this participative exchange because we aspire for this repository to become a collective one; one that is not bordered or confined to regions.

This juncture of speculation may lead us to converse in tongues in which none of us are fluent.

Where do we go in search of languages that hold familiarity and coherence, simultaneously? And where do we find the time to aggregate and speculate upon such a language (of difference and coherence)? And who is to say if we will be satisfied with the results? In fact, do we accept to continue calling it “language” or rather, might we think of our connections with one another as modes of expression that invite various understandings, interpretations, and responses? When we use language, we use it as a surrogate term for a form of communication that connects us, and can connect us across differences.

Most practitioners can attest to the dissonance operating in many parts of the African continent, where the various actors are pulling in different directions. Even those pulling towards the same ends cannot cohere in the same direction. This tells us that the reality on the ground already suffers from the delirium of non-sense (not nonsense) making. This is an invitation for us to work with these tensions productively.

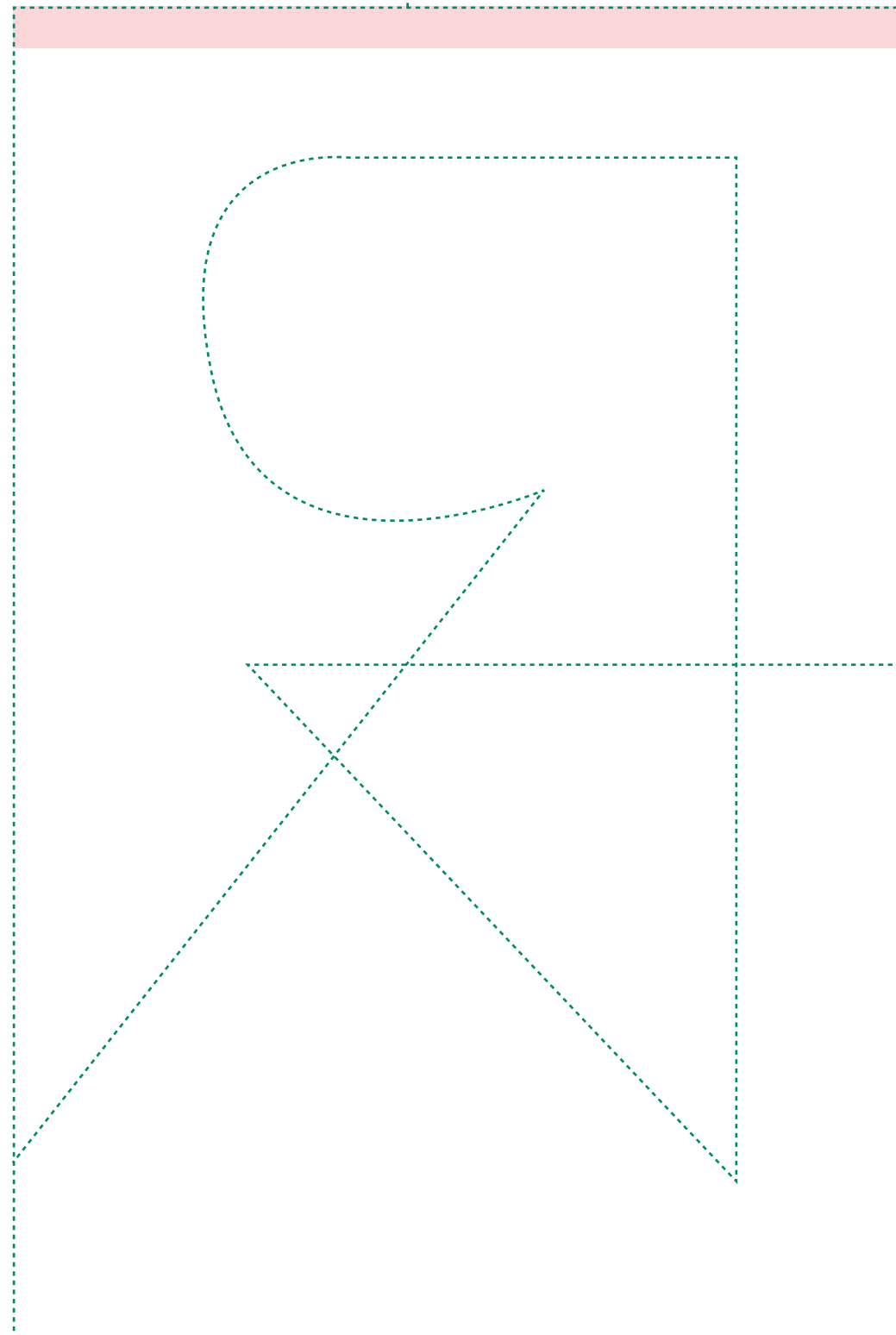
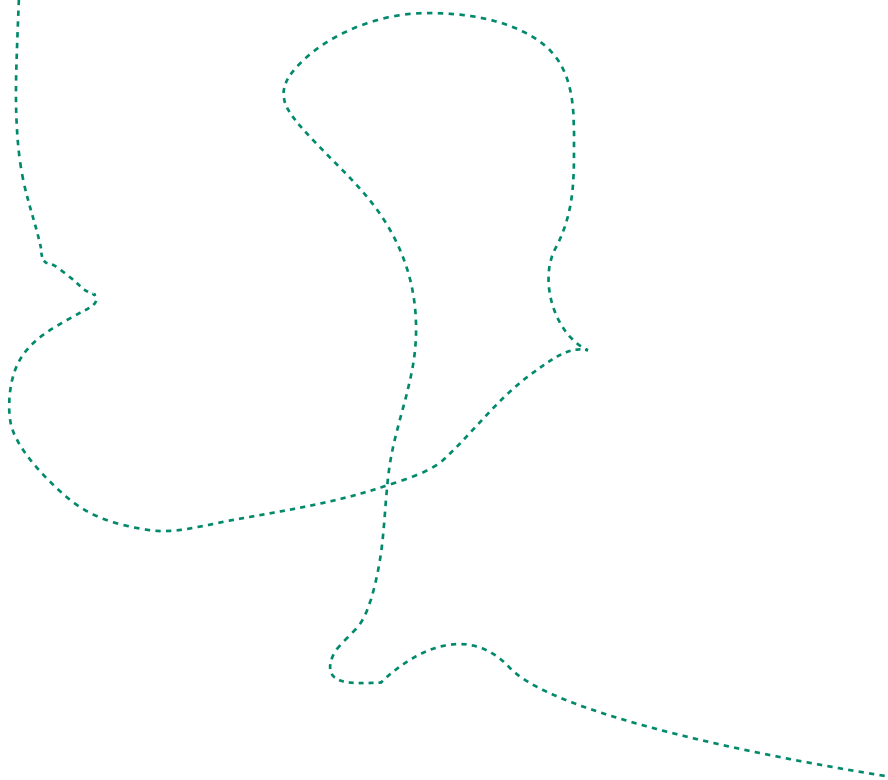
To position this more practically, aggregating and speculating upon such languages means finding the fertile ground where theory meets praxis, and where praxis meets the multiple realities of place.

The world faces an epistemic crisis, and the folly of a borrowed language implies that any search undertaken by Africans either points to Europe or the colonial past. Therefore, we ask, can this language or the process of aggregation lead us to new or other positions from which to speak? I am referring to positions that are not only new, temporally speaking. These positions are longstanding and ongoing in forms never before recognised or considered as language. To reach this calibration will ultimately place us at the coalface of the unfamiliar. It goes without saying that the unfamiliar also assumes that nothing is stable. Under this instability we may be liberated enough to collapse ideas (the sciences, philosophies, and technologies of languages from our repository), expand upon their incongruencies, and conjoin them as a navigational strategy to arrive at some “coherence” with our African ways of

being. However, it is important to state that the coherence is not the point but the process, and method is the treasure.

To work from the familiar into the unfamiliar, we take courage and echo two thinkers embracing and operating from the black and brown worlds. The first is Octavia Butler, who gave us the HistoFuturist saying, “*someone looking forward without turning his or her back on the past,*” and the second is Felwine Sarr, who urges us to produce our own metaphors for the future through the imagining of the Afrotopia, or perhaps even (multiple) Afrotopias.

That’s enough languaging for the time being; and off we go searching, developing, and building upon something of our own, something that we’ve all along owned.



on
exchange,
in
collectivity
beyond

On exchange, in collectivity

Written by Salma Belal
Last edit: SB 18.08.2023

The term “exchange” is widely known for its transactional connotations. By definition it is an act of giving one thing and receiving another. It is an everyday ritual that occurs both consciously and subconsciously. As notions of exchange manifest differently across multiple cultural scapes, might we stop to rethink what it can offer beyond the point of transaction? Might we think beyond the conditions that affect act, and question them as we do.

The Building Beyond programme serves as a space that holds many interactions. Multiple acts of giving and receiving occur simultaneously on multiple levels all at once, transcending fixed moments in time. During the programme, the multiplicity of exchanges takes shape within individual conversations through dialogue, and in collective discussions among wider groups of people, with both positively nurturing one another. The continuous referencing of personal conversations in collective discussions, which are later picked up and are carried on introspectively within individual reflections, is a testament to the success of this interference.

For us, exchange can no longer be mapped abstractly as a double-pointed arrow. Rather, it is a flow that passes through one person, takes from them and leaves an imprint, before moving to the another, being affected and transformed by what it is carrying. This flow — if we may call it so — continues to hold space for both the tangible and intangible encounters. It is tangible through acts of walking by rhythming in pace following a conversation,

or sitting by sharing the same space, or observing by searching for words to express certain thoughts on the same matter. This flow also paves the way for the intangible — experienced in ideas, memories, and even dreams; and ultimately, leaving a permanent effect on those engaging in and with it.

For us, exchange is assembled through different flows, and the format — which fluctuated between online and in-person points of engagement — influenced these flows. The configuration of the collective is intrinsically shaped by the interactive exchange between the members of the cohort, all from different geographies across the African continent. These exchanges expand the possibilities for reflecting and contributing across multiple degrees of intimacy. On an individual level, each member of the cohort brings their own experiences, practices, and thoughts. Offering a very special composition of being and places from their respective milieus. On a collective level, exchange draws a premise where shared values can be formed. On both levels combined, there is willingness to welcome difference, ultimately advancing the evolution of the individual and the whole.

For us, exchange challenges us to reflect on how we exist in the world as parts that belong to larger wholes. How do we create forms of coming together? How do we navigate contested sites and conditions both as individuals practising, and as collectives communing, simultaneously?

These contributions are a manifestation of how we shape exchange. In this configuration, collectivity and exchange are inseparable. They are formed interchangeably, intertwined in the process of birthing these conversational contributions. Through them, regardless of order, we design a way of gathering our ideas, thoughts, and selves. Perhaps through this flow between collectivity and exchange, such conversations will continue to prosper.



C
Fonds

creative
industries
fund NL

Time
and tem-
porality:
entangle-
ments
of writing

Time and Temporality: entanglements of waiting

Written by Ola Hassanain

In this publication, I would like to evoke a phrase I have used in this Building Beyond cycle several times, *"Spatial matters are inherently temporal matters"*. In our attempts as mentors to ground the conversations in the 'conditions' that produce the problems the participants want to address, we sometimes fail to recognise that these issues happen in space and time. Spatial matters are inherently temporal matters. The word space comes from the Latin word *spatium* meaning an interval of time. We might think of architecture as the spatialisation of time — a writing of time in space. I offer this writing as a reflection and clarification of the Building Beyond Symposium, where we suggested the futures of African cities are reliant on its young population. I offer this as a response to the letters to highlight that a future trajectory isn't what the young population brought forward but rather the importance of considering time itself when talking about African cities.

Considering spatial as always temporal implies that our perception of past, present, and future need to be all taken in at once, a collapse of the linear perspective we have on time. So instead of thinking about it sequentially it must be thought of all together.

However, much of the African continent's framing of booming and urbanisation has paid attention to a trajectory of futures. This has presented what is happening in the contemporary as suspended from what is on the ground and how the historical past affects have also ended. Basically our spatial literacy of framing urbanity supports a separation from time. In the book *New Urban Worlds*, Abdul Malique Simone states that:

"Urbanisation, as a process once embodied by the city form, now takes on varying shapes and sizes, expanding cities into megalopolises, shrinking them into shadows of former selves, or articulating a vast range of places and resources in tight relationships of interdependency."

What is presently going on in our respective geographies is space as closely intertwined with other state apparatuses, and if we situated the phrase, *"spatial matters are inherently temporal matters"*, there should a time frame reflecting these interdependencies.

Since we are discussing, in the program, ways of remembering and ways of recollection and reconstitution of meanings of the terms and language we have been using; we recognise the different raptures in which time is problematised. One very obvious one is the imposed waiting that is in African populations...

In our Symposium, we have situated the young age of the African populations as a marker to a future trajectory, we take relief in the thought that it will yet to come. However we miss the reality of suspension inherent in this condition. In a population averaging 15-18 years old, it will take time for this age group to have direct impact through participation in state sanctioned socio-political shifts and even direct impact of the increase of building rates. Especially when our agentic political power can only be harnessed through a centered presumption of access to social capital of civil society. Young populations are at a distance from the framework of being in the world such as possession, property, ownership, custodianship, and the power to vote. This is not to say that they do not have agency for change, we have witnessed uprisings and different powers of organization and sophisticated political consciousness e.g Sudan, Egypt, Senegal etc. What should interest us is this waiting period. What happens while we wait for the shifts and change? Many could use the term endure, make-do, exercise patience, or even just speculate. In any case, we are often asked to be hopeful and satisfied with the promise of a future yet to come. With these expectations, notions of endurance and waiting are not frameworks of survival, but rather a circuit of values that shore up endurance and ability/capacity as a moral category. They do not hold space and time for us.

But we can not afford to wait. Shahram Khosravi argues that *“prolonged waiting not only engenders new vulnerabilities but also aggravates vulnerabilities that are already present, revealing socio-political regulations that result in an unequal distribution of risk and hope.”*

Julius B. Fleming Jr. has theorized *“Black patience,”* that is *“an analytical framework for understanding those “entanglements” that congeal around the historical logic and practice of forcing Black people to wait. This violent, transhistorical experiment in duration has fostered an indeterminate sense of time — one that renders Black time in particular something “lived, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities.”*

We should always exercise by giving attention to the temporal fold of spatiality. The work we do now, has to analyse with past, present, and future in mind, and to allow for resonances of moments of urgency to connect with what has been brewing but never presents as spectacles of global anti-Black violences.

Alcinda Honwana, too, stresses the spatial and temporal arrangements of anti-Blackness. Honwana argues that *“young Africans are living in waithood, a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood.”* She describes waithood as a *“stale-mate,”* a type of temporal uncertainty that forces *“a growing number of young men and women [to] improvise livelihoods and conduct their personal relations outside of dominant economic and familial frameworks.”* Enforced waiting is one of the colonial tactics.

How do we then regard time in spatial matters? It may benefit our future conversation in the Building Beyond to not consider the past as justification for what a people have become, and that these beings now need to be changed. It is not about using the past as a source of continuity or ideas about the specifics of transformation. Nor is it a way of making whatever transpired in that past count for something different in the present. I suggest we follow a methodology which can hold praxis that brings to our attention the inseparability of spatial matters from temporal without occluding difference (racial, gendered, language, epistime) such as it has been maintained by colonial pasts in Africa. Holding praxis can offer an alternative way of governance, a governing that is increasingly reliant upon *“reading”* the desires of individuals and has regard for their philosophies of being in this world. The ways in which we have been reading space and, subverting its regulatory nature should make it into methods and actions that unfold while we wait.



Figure 1. The Building Beyond Symposium: Beyonding Urbanity, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2022. Image: courtesy of Tomek Dersu Aaron Whitfield.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

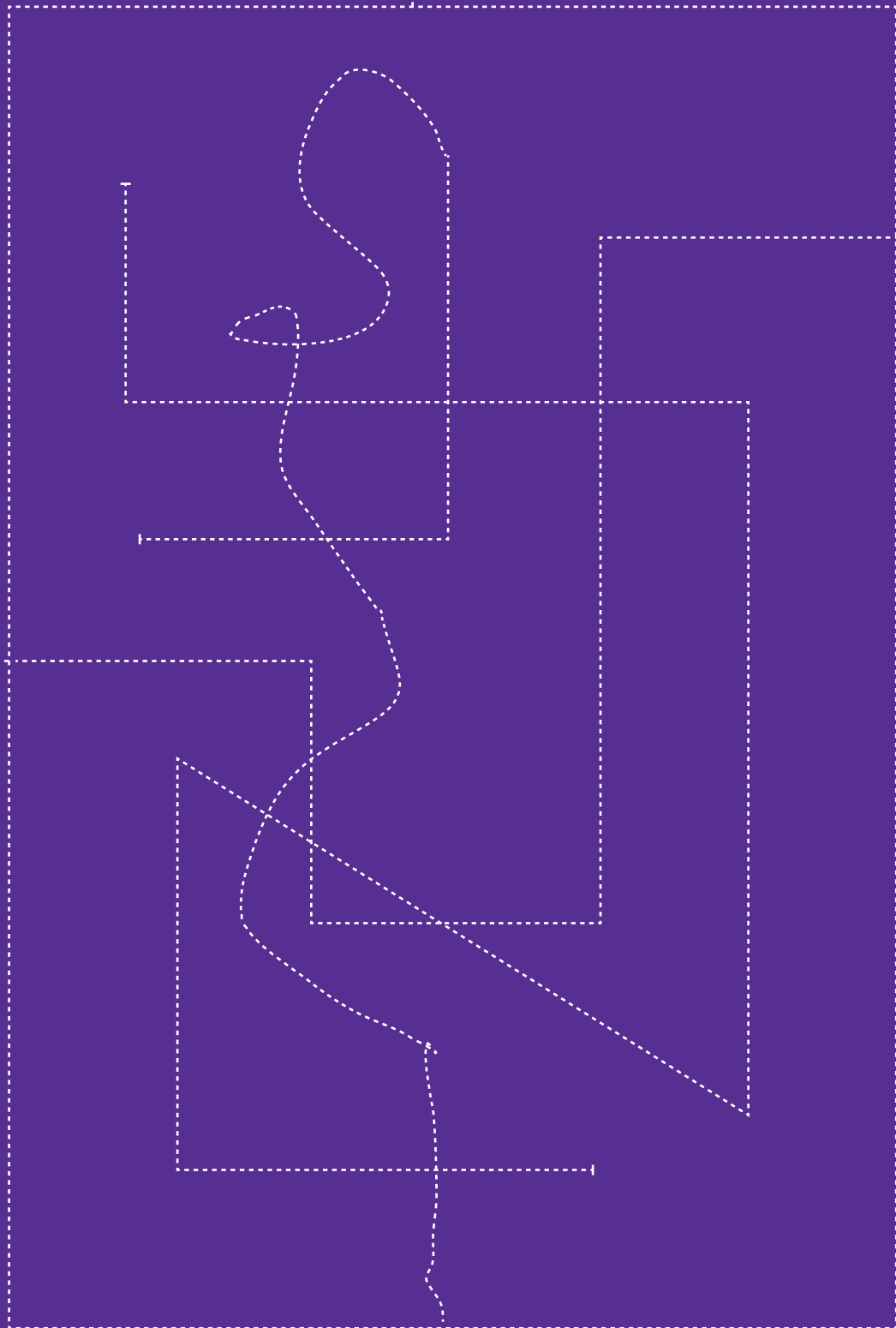
- Alcinda Honwana in *Collective, Enough is enough!: Youth Protests and Political Change in Africa*.
- Fleming Jr, Julius B., *Black Patience: Performance, Civil Rights, and the Unfinished Project of Emancipation*, (2022).
- Khosravi, Shahram, *Waiting - A Project in Conversation*, transcript Verlag, (2021, page 13).
- Simone, Abdoumalig, Pieterse, Edgar, *New Urban Worlds: Inhabiting Dissonant Times*, (2017).

building beyond

FROM: Russel
TO: Yishak

I think architectural imagination has also fallen victim to this hyper-inflated sense of doom. It seems that our brain power is not powerful enough to reach beyond the dramatisation and overstatement of the catastrophe, especially in a moment when we are in desperate need of some pragmatic imagination that is both aesthetic and critical.

FROM:
**Yishak
Teklegiorgis**



to: Inam

Yishak Teklegiorgis' LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Russel's LETTER

FROM: Yishak
02/01/2023
TO: Inam

Dear Inam,

My greetings to you and your loved ones. I have learnt a lot from you and all the Building Beyond 2022 mentorship programme participants. I am very much grateful for your openness in sharing your experiences as a practising architect and politician in a context where post-apartheid struggle is active. In this letter, I will try to tell you about my professional inspiration and practice under the rapidly transforming environments of urban Ethiopia.

The context in which I practise, Ethiopia, is under rapid urban transformation with an average growth rate of around 4.5 percent. The nation, however, is still the least urbanised with only 22 percent of the population residing in urban areas, and most of the urban centres are unplanned. Like most African countries, urbanisation in Ethiopia is also accompanied by slow structural transformation, leaving the urban centres battling with urban poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and highly active informal sectors. This necessitated new urban planning which unfortunately is resulting in the destruction and reconstruction of old urban settlements.

1. Idir and Ekub hold different levels of importance in the modern day. Idir still maintains its contributions but its support now is mainly financial. Meanwhile, Ekub has weakened, and people gravitate towards modern financial institutions instead.

I was born and grew up in one such neighbourhood in Addis Ababa, which had less infrastructure but a good social fabric. Growing up, I was inspired by the ways in which individuals and communities took ownership of their urban locales and actively engaged in social and economic interactions on a daily basis. Streets were not only conduits of mobility, but rather places of active socio-economic exchange. Residents managed to live, work, and recreate within a small radius of their neighbourhood. Social institutions like Idir and Ekub were created by and for the community and actively served their social and economic priorities, and Ekub/Iqub, an association of people with the aim of mobilising resources, especially finance, distributed resources on a rotating basis. Additionally, there is Idir/ Edir, a social institution in Ethiopia used for mutual aid, which grants on the basis of either kinship or neighbourhood¹. Most of the neighbourhoods I was familiar with while growing up in Addis Ababa have since been demolished or are under reconstruction. Urbanity has always been a class phenomenon where the "haves" continue to

invest in the destruction of the spaces of the “have-nots” in an attempt to expand their foothold in cities. Most urban developments in Ethiopia lead to the dispossession and destruction of the homes and workplaces of the urban poor. The residents were pushed out to the periphery of the city without consideration of their will and the socio-economic bonds they once had. David Harvey refers to such processes as “creative destruction,” where destruction results in the displacement of low-income communities to consolidate the control of capital and land to higher capitalist classes.

In my eight years of my practice as a young architect, urban designer, and educator, I have taken part in and witnessed the transformation of various urban areas labelled as “slums,” or that have been claimed by the city administration for different land uses (and are typically awarded to the highest bidders). During this period, stakeholder participation or citizen engagement was largely absent. There was a distinct lack of effort in identifying planning priorities, and the inclusion of residents as part of the recreated urban form was virtually non-existent. These experiences motivated me to explore ways we could promote urban development, where the planning emanates from the nature of the social fabric and where the stakeholders are engaged throughout the process of planning, construction, and administering of the new urban form.

However, there are so many factors that can hinder the effectiveness of a participatory planning process, making it difficult to plan sessions and give all stakeholders a voice in the planning process. The most commonly discussed factors include: the willingness of the planning authorities; the possibility of bringing stakeholders together at a certain time or place; organisational costs

and time; absence of representatives; limited ability to accommodate the number of participants; and lack of proper tools to document and analyse data.

The development of technologies, especially modern planning software and internet services, has brought forth new opportunities for planners and architects to develop participation tools and techniques and address the shortcomings of traditional planning processes. The internet, smartphones, and social media etc., provide everyone with the tools to share their opinions—whether asked or not. It is becoming much more common to witness government operations and citizen-based services utilising information technologies. However, there have been challenges in attempts to incorporate information technology into participatory planning processes, including a general lack of awareness by planners and stakeholders about appropriate technological tools, the digital divide (referring to those with limited or no access to smart technology and who, as a result, are excluded from participating in tech-based processes), as well as little effort to adapt the technologies to different contexts.

As a participant of the mentorship programme and now continuing with my PhD research, I am exploring the potential of digital tools in enhancing participatory planning processes. Currently, as part of my doctoral research, I am exploring place-based digital support tools in combination with planning software like ArcGIS to explore the possibility of enhancing the level of participation in planning for urban development in Ethiopian cities. Through this process, my aim is to empower citizens and improve civic-participation in order to achieve better decision-making processes and realise more sustainable outcomes. I hope my research will inform my process of developing tools and methods to

engage the community in identifying priorities and facilitating their responses. I would love to continue this conversation with you and hear about your research and practice.

All the best,

Yishak Teklegiorgis
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Figure 1. A neighborhood street on Sunday, where residents are seen washing the clothes of daily laborers who work in the nearby market.

Image: courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2. An aerial view of the neighborhoods in Addis Ababa that are marked for demolition and redevelopment. *Image: courtesy of the artist.*

AMHARIC VERSION

FROM: Yishak
02/01/2023
TO: Inam

ሰኞ, ታኅሣሥ 24 2015

ይድረስ ለ ኢናም:

በቅድሚያ ለአንተ/አንቺ እና ውድ ቤተሰቦችህ/ሽ ሰላምታዬን እያደረሰኩ ከአንተ/አንቺ እና ከሌሎች የ'ቢውልዲንግ ቢዮንድ 2022' ዝግጅት ተሳታፊዎች ብዙ ቁም ነገር እንደተማርኩ ልገልፅልሽ/ህ እፈልጋለሁ። የድህረ-አገርታይድ ትግል በሚካሄድበት እውድ ውስጥ እንደ ኪነ ሕንፃ ባለሙያ እና ፖለቲከኛ ያለህን/ያለሽን ልምድ በግልጽ ስላካፈልክኝ/ሽኝ በጣም አመሰግናለሁ። በዚህ ደብዳቤ በፍጥነት እየተለወጡ ባሉት የኢትዮጵያ ከተሞች ውስጥ ያለኝን የሙያ ተሞክሮ እና መነሳሳት ለማጋራት እወዳለሁ።

ኢትዮጵያ በፍጥነት እየከተሙ ካሉ ሀገራት የምትመደብ ሲሆን በአማካኝ 4.5 በመቶ የሚሆን እድገት አስመዝግባለች። ነገር ግን እሁንም ቢሆን ዝቅተኛ የከተማ ነዋሪ ያላት ሀገር ስትሆን 22 በመቶ ብቻ የሚሆነው የሀገሪቷ ነዋሪ በከተማዎች ይኖራል። እነዚህም ከተሞች በአብዛኛው ታቅደው በሰርዓት የተዋቀሩ አይደሉም። እንደ አብዛኞቹ የአፍሪካ ሀገራት የከተሞች መሰላፋት በኢትዮጵያም እንዲሁ ከኢኮኖሚ እድገት ጋር የታጀበ ባለመሆኑ ከተሞች በድህነት፣ በሰራ አጥነት፣ ደካማ መሠረተ ልማት እና ከፍተኛ ቁጥር ባላቸው ኢ-መደበኛ ሰራዎች እንዲጨናነቁ አድርጓቸዋል። ይህንንም ለመቋቋም ታቅዶ በሚወሰዱ እርምጃዎች በሚያሳዝን ሁኔታ የቆዩ ሰፈሮች ወድመዋል ወይ ደግሞ እንደ አዲስ አበባ ወጥቶላቸው እንዲለወጡ ተደርጓል።

እኔም ያደኩበት ሰፈር እንደዚህ ካሉ የቆዩ ሰፈሮች አንዱ ሲሆን ከፍተኛ የመሰረተ ልማት አጥረት ቢኖርበትም ጠንካራ ማህበራዊ ግንኙነት የሰፈነበት ሰፈር ነበር። በልጅነቴ ያየሁት የሰዎች ትብብር እና ለሰፈራቸው ያላቸው ተቆርቋሪነት ስሜት ምን ጊዜም ቢሆን ቀልጤን ይገዛል። የሰፈራችን መንገዶች መተላለፊያ ጥርጊያ ብቻ ሳይሆኑ መሰረታዊ የሆኑ የማህበራዊ እና የንግድ ልውውጦች የሚደረጉባቸው መዳረሻዎችም ጭምር ነበሩ። ሰፈርተኞች እዛው ከሰፈራቸው ሳይሮቁ መሰራት፣ መዝናናት፣ መገበያየት ይችሉ ነበር።

Yishak to Inam	11
	እንደ እድር እና እቁብ የመሳሰሉ ማህበራት ደግሞ ሰፈርተኞች በራሳቸው ተነሳሽነት ለራሳቸው ያቋቋሟቸው በኑሮ ለመደጋገፍ የሚሞክሩባቸው ተቋማት ናቸው። እቁብ አባላት በተወሰነ የጊዜ ገደብ የገንዘብ መዋጮ እያደረጉ በእጣ ጠርቀም/ዳህሰ ያለ ገንዘብ የሚያገኙበት ማህበር ሲሆን እድር ደግሞ አባላት በችግር ወይም አስፈላጊ በሆነ ጊዜ እርስ በእርስ በገንዘብ እና ቁሳቁስ የሚደጋገፉበት ማህበር ነው። ማህበራቱ በዝምድና እንዲሁም በጉርብትና ትስስር ይመሰረታሉ። ነገር ግን አሁን በሚያሳዝን ሁኔታ ብዙዎቹ እኔ ያደኩባቸው አይነት ሰፈሮች ወይ ፈርስዋል አለበለዚያ ደግሞ ሙሉ ለሙሉ ተለውጠዋል። የከተማ መስፋፋት ምን ጊዜም ቢሆን የሀብታም እና የድሀ ፍጥጫ ሲሆን ሀብት 'ያላቸው' ሀብታቸውን ለማስፋፋት ሲሉ 'የሌላቸውን' ድሀዎች ከከተማ እያፈናቀሉ ቦታቸውን ይወስዳሉ። ይሄም ሀብታሞች በከተማው ያላቸውንም ግዛት ለማስፋፋት ሲሉ ከ'ድሀዎች' ጋር የሚያደርጉት ትንቅንቅ ነው። በዚህም አስራር ብዙዎቹ በኢትዮጵያ የሚሰተዋሉት የከተማ ልማት ፕሮጀክቶች የከተማ ድሀው መኖሪያ እና መሰሪያ ቦታውን እንዲያጣ፣ እንዲፈናቀል ምክንያት ሆነዋል። ለከተማ ልማት በሚል ሰበብ ነዋሪዎች ማህበራዊ እና ኢኮኖሚያዊ ትስስራቸውን ባላገናዘበ መልኩ ከመሀል ከተማ ሰፈራቸው ወደ ራቅ ያለ ቦታ እንዲፈናቀሉ ተገደዋል። ዴቪድ ሀርቪ ይህን አስራር 'ክሪኤቲቭ ዲስትሪክሽን' ብሎ የሰየመው ሲሆን አስራሩም ዝቅተኛ የኑሮ ደረጃ ያላቸው ነዋሪዎችን ከቦታቸው እያፈናቀለ ባለሀብት የሆኑ ግለሰቦች የበለጠ ሀብት እና መሬት እንዲያካብቱ የሚያደርግ ነው ሲል ይኮንነዋል። የኪነ ሕንጻ እና የከተማ ዲዛይን ባለሙያ እንዲሁም አስተማሪ ሆኜ በሰራሁባቸው ባለፉት ሰዎንት ዓመታት ብዙ ሰፈሮች ዝቅተኛ ወይም ለከተማው የማይመጥን የኑሮ ደረጃ አላቸው ተብለው ለባለሀብት ልማትን ምክንያት ተደርገው በጨረታ ሲሸጡ እንዲሁም ሙሉ ለሙሉ ወዛቸው ሲቀየር አይቻለሁ። በአብዛኛው እንደዚህ አይነት የለውጥ ሂደቶች ሲተገበሩ የህብረተሰቡን ተሳትፎ እንዲሁም ሌሎች ድርሻ ያላቸው ተቋማት ስለጉዳዩ ያላቸውን አመለካከት፣ ሀሳብ፣ ምልከታ ለመቀበል የሚደረጉ ጥረቶች እምብዛም አልነበሩም። የልማት እቅድ እንዲደፋ ላይ መሰረታዊ የሆነ ግድፈት የሚታይበት ምንም አይነት የነዋሪዎችን ሀሳብ የማስተናገድ ፍላጎት እና እድል ስላልነበረም ነው። እነዚህን ጉድለቶች ማየቱ ጥልቅ የመነሳሳት ስሜት የፈጠረብኝ ሲሆን የከተማ ልማት እንዴት የህብረተሰቡን ማህበራዊ መስተጋብር ሳያፈርስ፣ ይልቁንም ማህበራዊ መስተጋብሩን መሰረት አድርጎ መከናወን እንደሚችል ለማጥናት ወሰንኩ። በጥናቴም ነዋሪዎች እና ሌሎች ድርሻ ያላቸው አካላት ከመጀመሪያው የእቅድ አካደራዊ ጀምሮ እስከ ግንባታ ፈቃድ፣ ከዚያም አልፎ አዲሱን የከተማ ገፅታ እስከመገንባት ሂደት ድረስ እንዴት ከከተማ አስተዳደር አባላት ጋር በአንድነት ለመሰራት የሚያስችሏቸውን መንገዶች መፈተሽ ጀመርኩ። ነገር ግን ብዙሀኑን አሳታፊ የሆነ የከተማ ልማት አስራር ውጤታማ እንዳይሆን የሚያደርጉት ብዙ መሰናክሎች አሉ። የተለያዩ ባለጉዳዮችን አመቻችቶ በአንድ ቦታ እና ጊዜ ማግኘት እንዲሁም የሁሉንም ሀሳብ አስተባብሮ መሰራት በአራሱ አንድ በጣም ፈታኝ

02/01/2023	Yishak to Inam 12
	የሆነ ሰራ ነው። በአብዛኛው ከሚጠቀሱት መሰናክሎች መካከል የከተማ አስተዳደር ባለስልጣናት ፈቃደኛ አለመሆን፣ የገንዘብ ወጪ፣ የተሳታፊዎች ውስን ቁጥር እና የተሳታፊዎች በቀጠሮ አለመገኘት ዋነኞቹ ሲሆኑ መረጃን ለመሰብሰብ እና ለማቀናጀት ያለውም ውስንነት ቀላል አይደለም። የቴክኖሎጂ ሰልጣኔ በከተማ ንድፍ ሰራ ላይ ለተሰማሩ ባለሙያዎች ከፍተኛ አበርክቶ ያደረገ ሲሆን የከተማ ቀያሾች እና የኪነ-ሕንፃ ባለሙያዎች አዳዲስ ቴክኖሎጂዎችን እና በይነ መረብን ተጠቅመው በበፊቱ አስራር መተግበር ያልቻሏቸውን አሳታፊ ሂደቶች በተቀላጠፈ መልኩ እንዲያከናውኑ እድል ከፍቷል። በእነዚህ አዳዲስ መሳሪያዎች ተጠቅመው ባለሙያዎች ነዋሪዎችን እና ሌሎች ባለጉዳይ አካላትን በከተማ ልማት ዙሪያ ያላቸውን አበርክቶ ማሰባሰብ ችለዋል። ኢንተርኔት፣ ስልክ እና ማህበራዊ ድህረ-ገፅ የመሳሰሉት ፈጠራዎች ሰዎች ሀሳባቸውን በነፃነት ያለማንም ከልካይነት ማጋራት እንዲችሉ ምቹ እድል ፈጥረዋል። በአሁኑ ጊዜ የመንግስት አስተዳደር ቢሮዎች እንዲሁም የተለያዩ አገልግሎት ሰጪ ተቋማት እነዚህን የመረጃ ቴክኖሎጂዎች ሲጠቀሙ ማየት የተለመደ ነው። ነገር ግን አሁንም ቢሆን እነዚህን መሳሪያዎች በብቃት ሰራ ላይ አውሎ ነዋሪዎችን ያሳተፈ የከተማ ልማት መዘርጋት አስቸጋሪ ሆኖ ቀጥሏል። ለዚህም ምክንያቶቹ የባለሙያዎች የቴክኖሎጂ ብቃት ውስንነት፣ የስልክ እና ሌሎች ዘመናዊ ቴክኖሎጂዎች ተደራሽ አለመሆን፣ የነዋሪዎች የዘመናዊ ቴክኖሎጂ አውቀት ውስንነት እንዲሁም እነዚህን አዳዲስ ቴክኖሎጂዎች እንደአስፈላጊነቱ ለአስራር ቀርጾ/አመቻችቶ መጠቀም አለመቻል ተጠቃሽ ናቸው። በ'ቢውልዲንግ ቢዮንድ 2022' ውስጥ በነበረኝ ተሳትፎ እንዲሁም በድህረ ምረቃ የምርምር ስራዬ ዘመናዊ ቴክኖሎጂን እንዴት ለተሻለ የከተማ ልማት አስራር መጠቀም እንደሚቻል እንዲሁም ነዋሪዎችን የበለጠ በሂደቱ ተሳታፊ ማድረግ እንደሚቻል ጥናት እያደረኩ አገኛለሁ። በምረቃ ፅሁፌ ቦታን መሰረት አድርገው የሚሰሩ ዘመናዊ ቴክኖሎጂዎች እንዴት ከ'ፕላኒንግ ቴክኖሎጂዎች' እንደ 'አርክ ጂኦሎጂ' ከመሳሰሉ መሳሪያዎች ጋር ተቀናጅተው በኢትዮጵያ ከተሞች የተሻለ የነዋሪዎችን ተሳትፎ በከተማ ልማት ማረጋገጥ እንደሚቻል እያጠናሁ ነው። በዚህ ጥናት አላማዬ በከተማ ልማት የዜጎችን ተሳትፎ እንዴት ማሳደግ እንደምንችል እና ይህንንም በማድረግ የተሻለ የከተማ አስተዳደር በመገንባት የከተማን ዘላቂ እድገት ማጠናከር ነው። ጥናቴ የዜጎችን ተሳትፎ የሚያዳብሩ የተለያዩ ዘዴዎችን እንድቀርፅ መነሻ ይሆነኛል ብዬ ተስፋ አደርጋለሁ። በመጨረሻም የዚህን ውይይት ቀጣይነት በማሰብ ስለአንተ/ስለአንቺ የምርምር ስራ እና ጥናት ለማወቅ ያለኝን ጥልቅ ጉጉት ለመግለፅ አወዳለሁ። መልካሙን ሁሉ ተመኘሁ ይስሀቅ ተክለጊዮርጊስ አዲስ አበባ ፣ ኢትዮጵያ

building beyond

FROM: Yishak
TO: Ikram

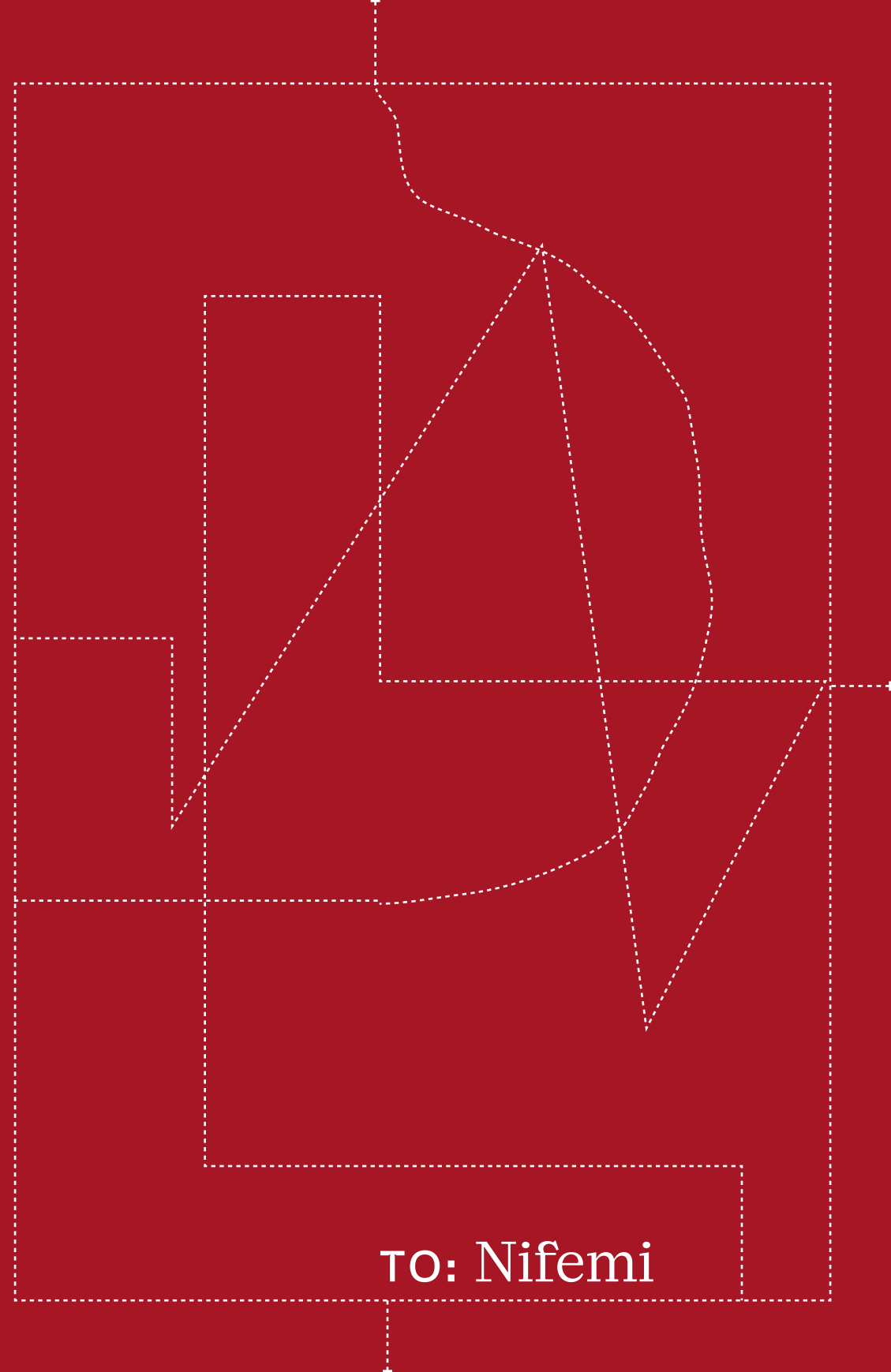
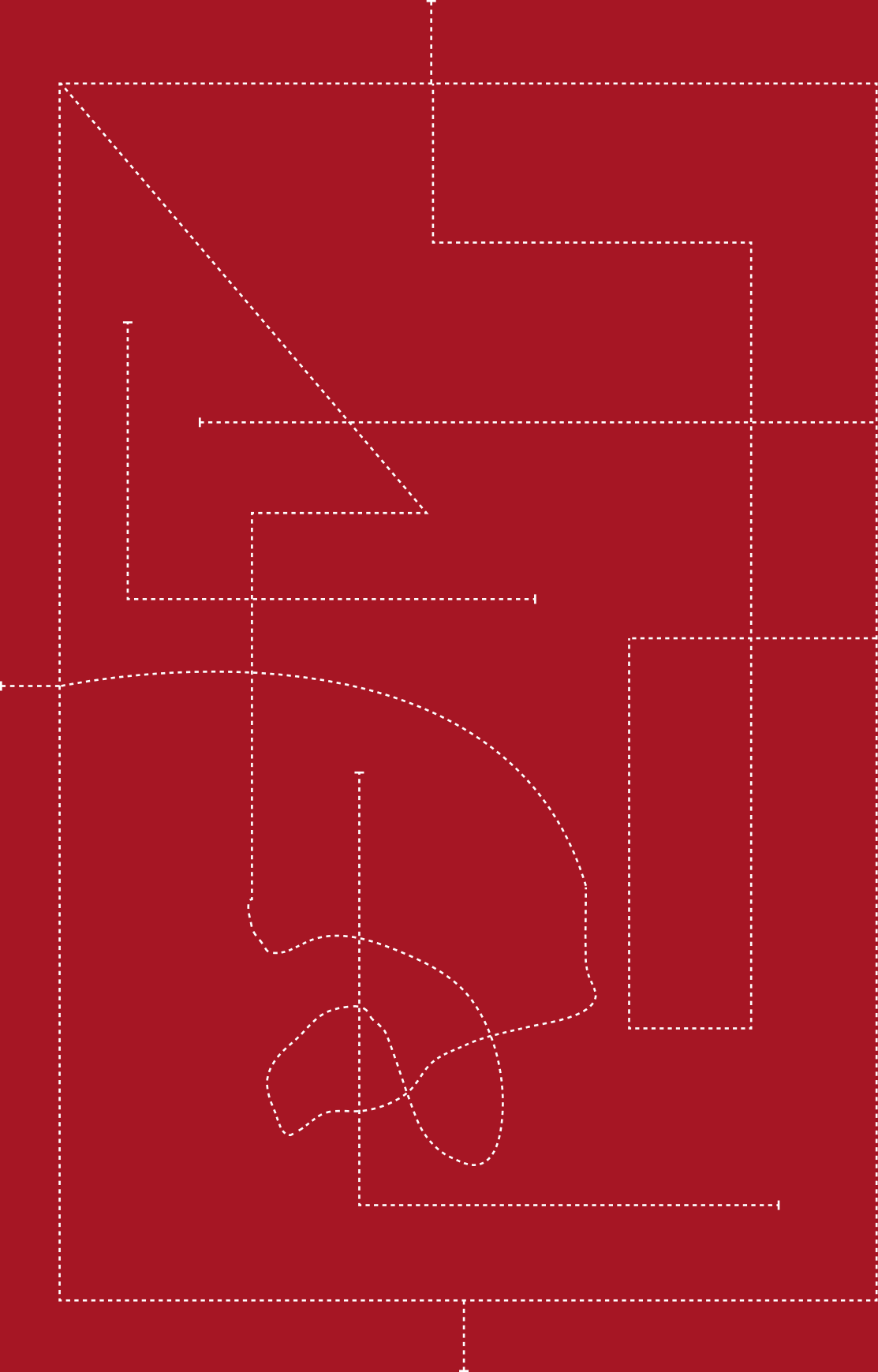
I resonate deeply with the notion that excellent design is not merely seen or heard, but felt. My interactions with local artisans and the broader community now assume greater intentionality, as I channel my energy into stretching artisanal techniques to their limits and nurturing conversations that foster novel art forms through age-old practices.



F o n d s

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
**Inam
Kula**



Inam Kula's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Yishak's LETTER

FROM: Inam
TO: Nifemi

Nifemi,
I write to you in Exile.

No, I have not crossed the Zambezi river and I am not in a military camp in Angola or Zambia. However, sometimes I feel as though I am in exile in my own country, as though I am waiting to return home to the land that Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) promised our people in 1994.

There are many similarities between Nigeria and South Africa, but the one that stands out for me is how, in both our countries the arts have been used as a form of activism; artivism, if you may. The great Fela Kuti was an uncompromising critic of the post-colonial order. In one of his songs, he says "Coffin for Head of State." One might think that this statement is radical but Fela was inviting us to ask ourselves what we should do with a political elite that has no solutions to the problems that the people face, yet year after year insists on being elected for leadership. What do we do about a Black political elite that is constantly evading responsibility and shifting blame, yet is always implicated in corruption? The coffin is figurative; it is a call for the death of an endless cycle of suffering imposed on innocent people. It is a direct critique of those who promised a better country but who betrayed that promise without remorse.

Similarly today, Burna Boy invites us, through his song *Another Story*, to critically think about the legacy of colonialism in Nigeria, and by extension the African continent at large. He suggests that the history we have been told is inaccurate and that, in



Figure 1. Fela Kuti and Burna Boy performing.
Figure 2. Imagined Letters Between Fela Kuti and Burna Boy.

fact, as young Africans, we possess little to no knowledge about our histories and ways of being. As you have been to Cape Town, you will have experienced first hand how grossly it is affected by segregation as a result of apartheid-era spatial planning. Growing up, this had a huge impact on the way I perceived the world. It was only upon learning about my family's history that I discovered that this violent relationship hadn't originated with

me but had directly impacted generations before mine. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents were born into multiracial communities, but through apartheid's forced removals, their families were dispossessed and uprooted to areas classified as "Blacks only". And just like that, our land was gone, our dignity stripped, our future taken away, and our potential capped.

Fast forward to 1994; the democratic birth of the "Rainbow Nation" and the world's most celebrated tale of independence. Here, just like many African states that gained Independence in the 1960s, Black people held hope for true liberation, a better life, and most importantly, to retain their dignity. Unfortunately, in the 29 years that have passed since then, this aspiration remains unfulfilled.

There is a growing branch of scholarship concerned with questions of temporality within Afro-pessimism. Afro-pessimists suggest that Africa has been frozen in time. This idea should be entertained because essentially it argues that the conditions for Africans have not changed since slavery, colonisation, and in the case of South Africa, apartheid. They argue that the hierarchies that once existed still exist today. So, how do we conceptualise or speak about time for a people whose past, present, and future are collapsed into one thing? A people who are plagued by Anti-Blackness, where the cries uttered by Africans during colonisation are the same cries today?

I suppose the question that remains is: what is to be done? Of course, any attempt to think about Africa without soliciting the opinions of those who live the African experience is already a failed project. Historically, academia, mainstream media, NGOs, and the likes have tried to speak about Africa without consulting its people – the people who actually know the continent. What ought to happen is to speak with Africa, not of it. The idea that Africans are oblivious to their problems and that they are unaware of the dire conditions within which they exist is false. The truth is that they do know, and they know it more intrinsically than those who come to study them. This is evident not only in your work, but also in the work of the entire cohort of the 2022 Building Beyond programme, which has demonstrated that we have the necessary tools, ideas, and skill

“show me a good artist, and i’ll show you a good activist.”

sets to reshape the narrative of the continent. This is to say that we must move away from the anthropological approach of engaging with the continent and we must adopt a more collaborative style. Only through this shift can we hope to gain a better understanding of the fabric that makes up the continent and of what threads we can use to mend and tailor it.

Throughout this mentorship, there have been many memorable moments, but I draw my most valuable lessons from the intimate, informal conversations we shared together. In these moments we could be ourselves and tell our real life stories without a sense of formality or performance. One such occasion was when you said to me, “*show me a good architect and I’ll show you a good politician.*” Of course, the definitions of “good” or “politician” are subjective, but the statement struck home. In that exact moment, my perspective changed on the future of my practice and the role that I, as an architect and activist, have to play in a post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Drawing from your previous sentiments and my interactions with all the participants in this year’s programme, I’d like to add: “*show me a good artist, and i’ll show you a good activist.*”

From Jozi to Lagos,
Inam

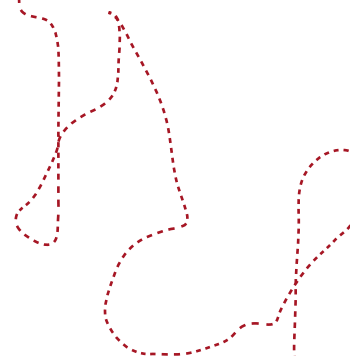




Figure 3. Miriam Makeba pictured with President Thomas Sankara.



Figure 4. Fela Kuti pictured with President Thomas Sankara.

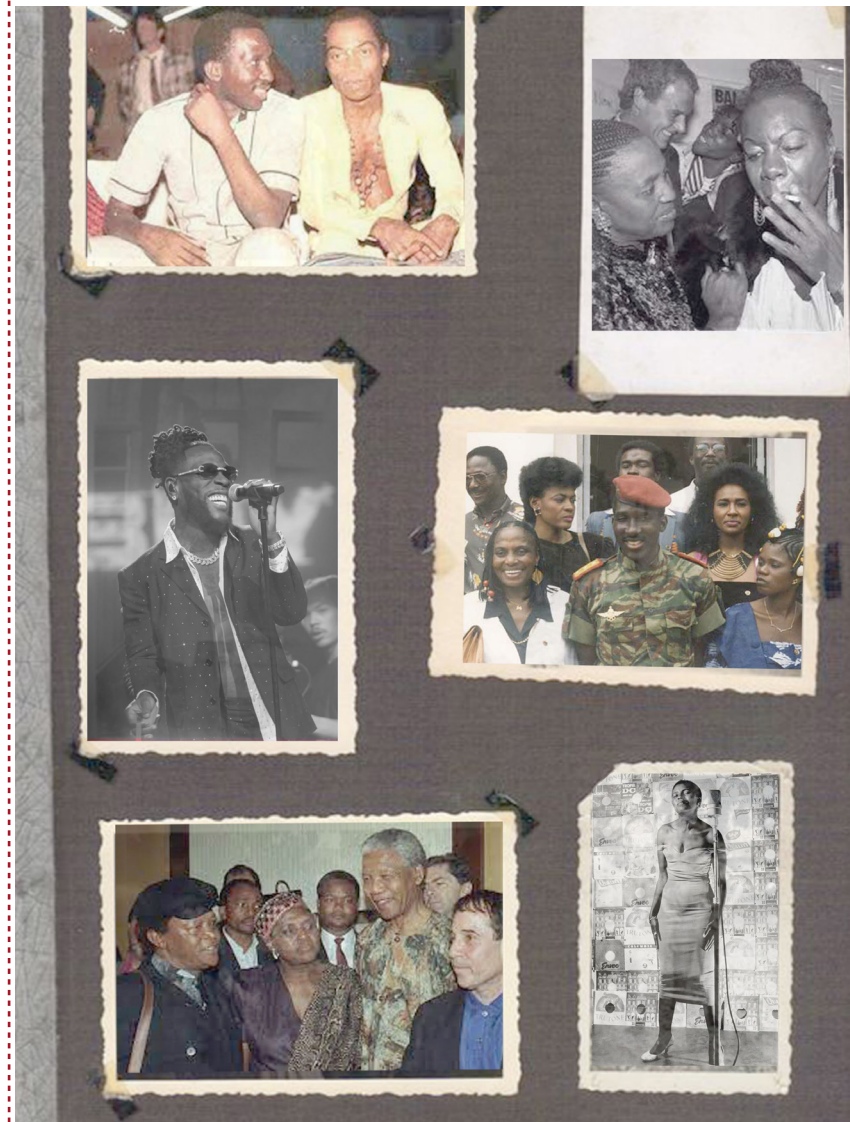
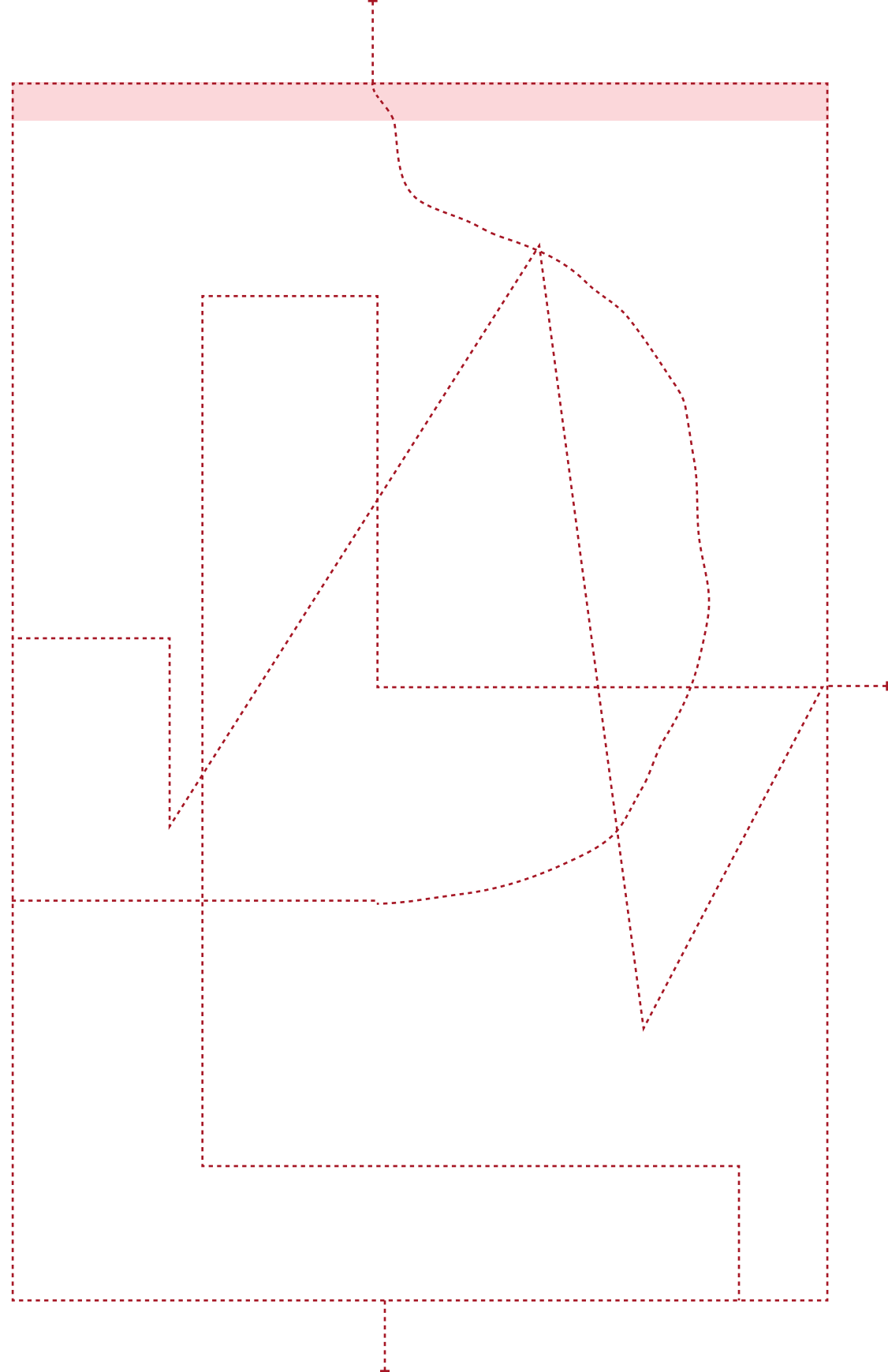
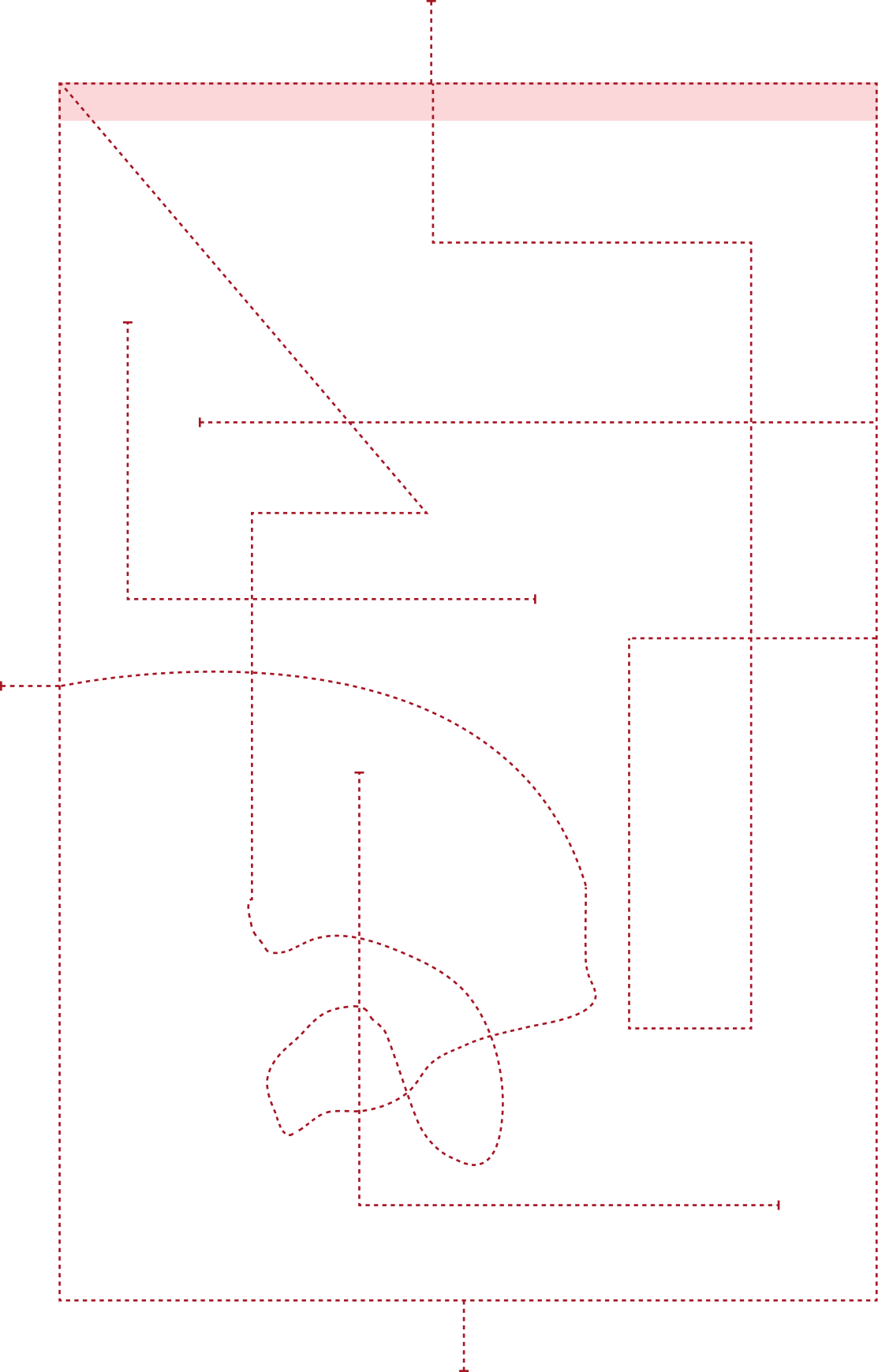


Figure 5. A collage of 'The Greats' from my perspective.



building beyond

FROM: Inam
TO: Nifemi

One such occasion was when you said to me, “show me a good architect and I’ll show you a good politician.” Of course, the definitions of “good” or “politician” are subjective, but the statement struck home. In that exact moment, my perspective changed on the future of my practice and the role that I, as an architect and activist.

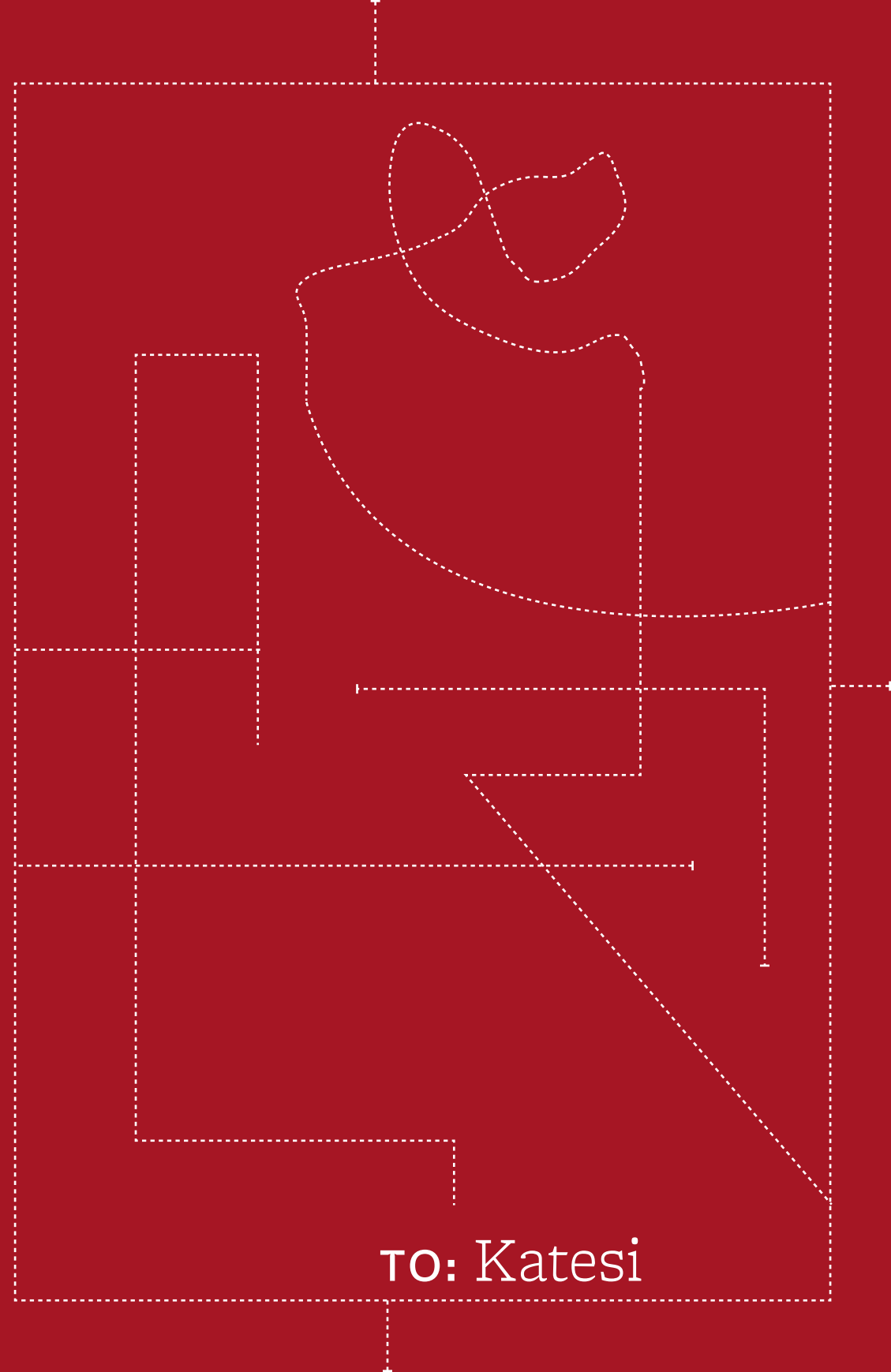
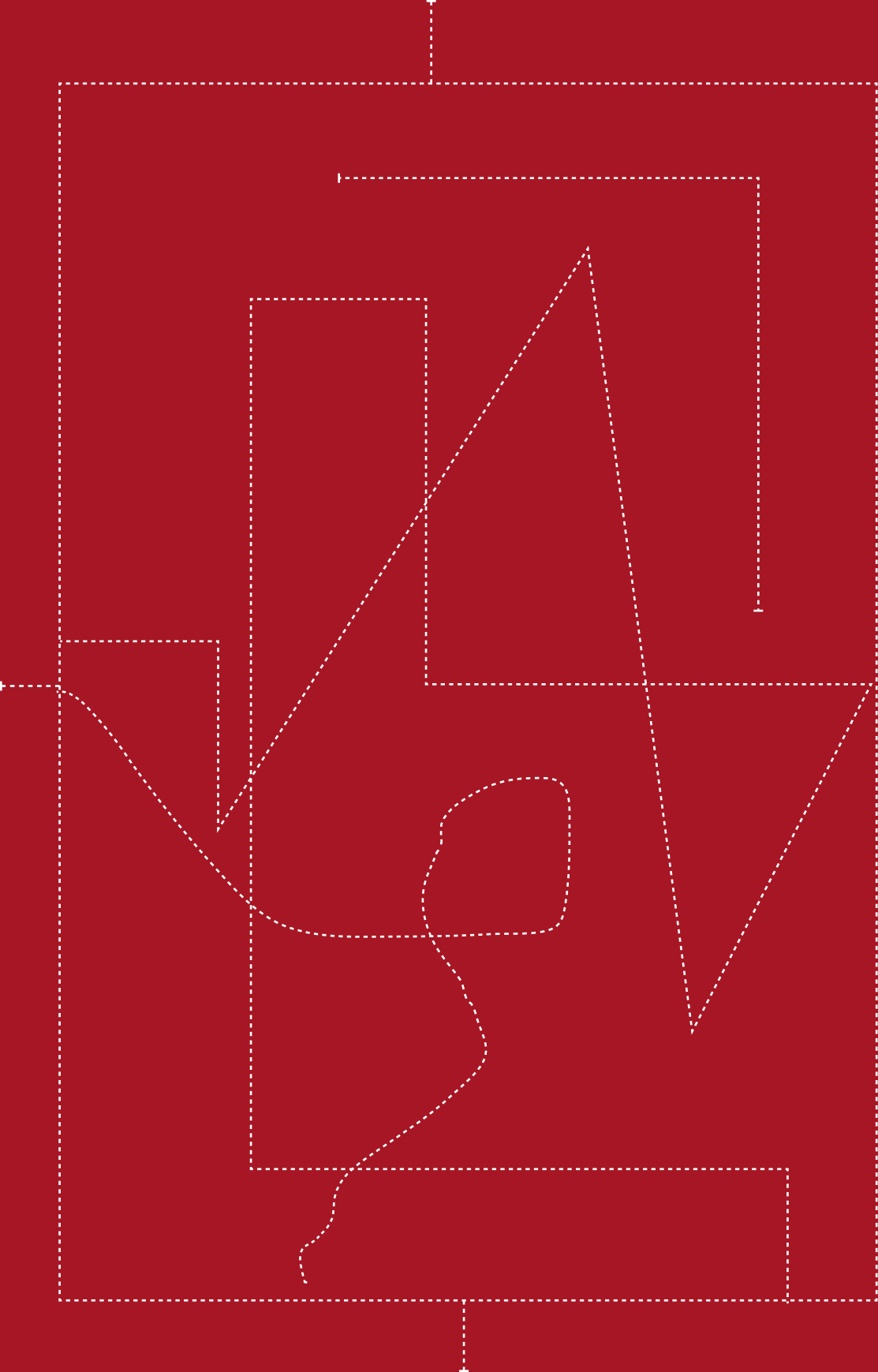


C

F o n d s

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
**Nifemi Marcus
Bello**



TO: Katesi

Nifemi Marcus Bello's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Inam's LETTER

FROM: Nifemi
TO: Katesi

Dear Katesi,

In November 2019, I was invited by Mpho Matsipa, the adjacent professor of Architecture at GSAPP, to be part of the lecture series and workshop called *Building Cultures: Making in Nairobi, Lagos, Accra/Tema, and Johannesburg*. As a designer based in Lagos, Nigeria, I was asked to give a lecture about my practice, my journey as a designer, and the maker culture in and around Lagos. Going back and forth and toying with what to talk about, I decided to title my lecture, *Lagos: A Designer's Utopia*."

You see, before receiving the invitation to the lecture, as a designer practising in the most populated city in Africa, I had already posed questions to myself like, What is contemporary African design? Does it exist? Is there enough design happening in my city, and, if so, in what capacity?

These questions drove me to change a great deal of my thinking and thought processes on what it is to be a designer based in contemporary Africa.

I was born in Lagos to a Yoruba mother and father. Together they created a home environment that held up a mirror to who I was culturally and opened my eyes to appreciate cultures from other parts of the world. I was taught to value everyday products and craft from a young age, and when I think back, this was probably where my journey to design began.

When I turned eight, my parents split up and the family unit became a single mother household. My mother was very aware of the fact that I had creative tendencies and would be damned before she asked my father for assistance in this direction. So she placed me in circumstances where I was always working with my hands through activities such as carpentry and welding. In my formative years, I later realised that all of these experiences and more introduced me to the world of making.

Fast forward a couple of years and a series of events later, I found myself studying product design at the University of Leeds in the north of England. At Leeds, in my spare time I dove into and immersed myself in the world of European design and art. I studied and got introduced to the works of Dieter Rams, Marcel Brueuer, Jasper Morrison, and Hussein Chalyan, to name just a few. Most importantly I stumbled upon the work of the architect Sir David Adjaye (his colour palette and reference to his African roots resonated strongly with me). I also stumbled on the work of New Zealand designer Jamie McLellan, whose interviews have been ingrained in my memory for the longest time. All of this curiosity was to understand and educate myself on the standard of what good design was in today's market or space.

After my studies, I moved back to Lagos to pursue a career in design, and I looked at my surroundings with a chip on my shoulder. I often asked myself if I had made the right decision to pursue a career as a designer. Does contemporary design exist here? It can't exist here, there is nothing for me here! In my mind the only thing I could do was try to survive with whatever design and maker skill I had. So I pitched myself to an architectural firm looking to start a furniture line. Later, I would replace a designer at *ALARA*, a concept store designed by Sir David Adjaye, which designed bespoke pieces of furniture and more. My final official job before starting my studio was at an Asian-owned telecommunications company where I designed affordable smartphones for the African Market. There I learnt the importance of considering cultural biases towards colour, material, and finish on a product.

After these formative years working as a designer in Lagos, I decided to do the unthinkable and open a design studio. Why the dramatics you may ask? You see,

I noticed that the way I had been raised to understand, appreciate, love, and educate myself on African culture wasn't the norm.

the voice in my head I mentioned earlier and the questions I was asking myself were actually echoes from the city and the people around me. I noticed that the way I had been raised to understand, appreciate, love, and educate myself on African culture wasn't the norm. I would come to understand that colonisation really did a number on us — most Nigerians of older generations are totally disconnected from our crafts and aesthetics. They see these things as less than and cling on to design and aesthetics from the western world. They study and obsess over the way things are done in other parts of the world, craving external validation from the west, and making it a way of life.

To kickstart the studio, I had to hold up a mirror to my city once again, with the same intentionality my mother did in my youth. I did this by diving into Lagos, reintroducing myself to it, falling in love with it all over again, and figuring out what contemporary Lagos had to offer.

During this time, I came to realise that design was happening all around me and that ingenuity and Indigenous design thinking was being used to create and cater to stakeholders across a unique supply chain. I remember getting my tyre changed with a roadside mechanic and he used a thick paste made of garri (cassava flakes) and sand — two extremely accessible materials — as a sealant. We laughed about it and he joked that it was more durable than the imported sealant. He was right.

The ability to solve problems with an innate and almost childlike curiosity is rooted in our identity, and it was very emotional for me to discover that it also defines our design. There is a design revolution happening in Lagos, without the “design” label attached to it. These everyday solutions tick all the boxes of a “well thought out” design process without trying. They enhance and improve daily lives, and in a great deal of cases they create job opportunities, networks, and are extremely beneficial to the masses.

With this discovery, I have become curious about other African cities: what is unique to each one; and how culture, tradition, and history influence their design identities. I started revisiting southern, eastern, and more of western Africa to reflect upon and draw comparison to the cities I know well and have fallen in love with over the years. I realised that African cities have

a vast array of Indigenous products that create socio-economic solutions. While the overarching theme is necessity and ingenuity, no two cities are alike.

A good example that I tend to lean on and have carried out various case studies on is the portable convenience store known as Kwali, which is used by street hawkers to sell confectioneries in heavy traffic around Lagos and across Nigeria. Made out of recycled cardboard and Styrofoam, Kwali is extremely sustainable, lightweight, and easy to use. Mostly used by northerners who have migrated to Lagos in search of jobs and opportunity, it also serves as a great start for new business ventures, as it is extremely affordable to purchase and can be customised to hold as many items as they are looking to sell.

In order to understand the ingenuity of these products and, consequently, to understand what contemporary design means in Africa, it is integral to break down, document, and share these findings with others. Over the years, I have drawn a great deal of inspiration from some of these Indigenous contemporary products to create new age products and solutions with my studio.

The gatekeepers of design in other parts of the world are usually at the apex of society, culture, and social class, but in Africa the reverse applies. The gatekeepers of design come from the grassroots, creating accessibility and a utopian future for African design.

Warmest regards,
Nifemi Marcus-Bello



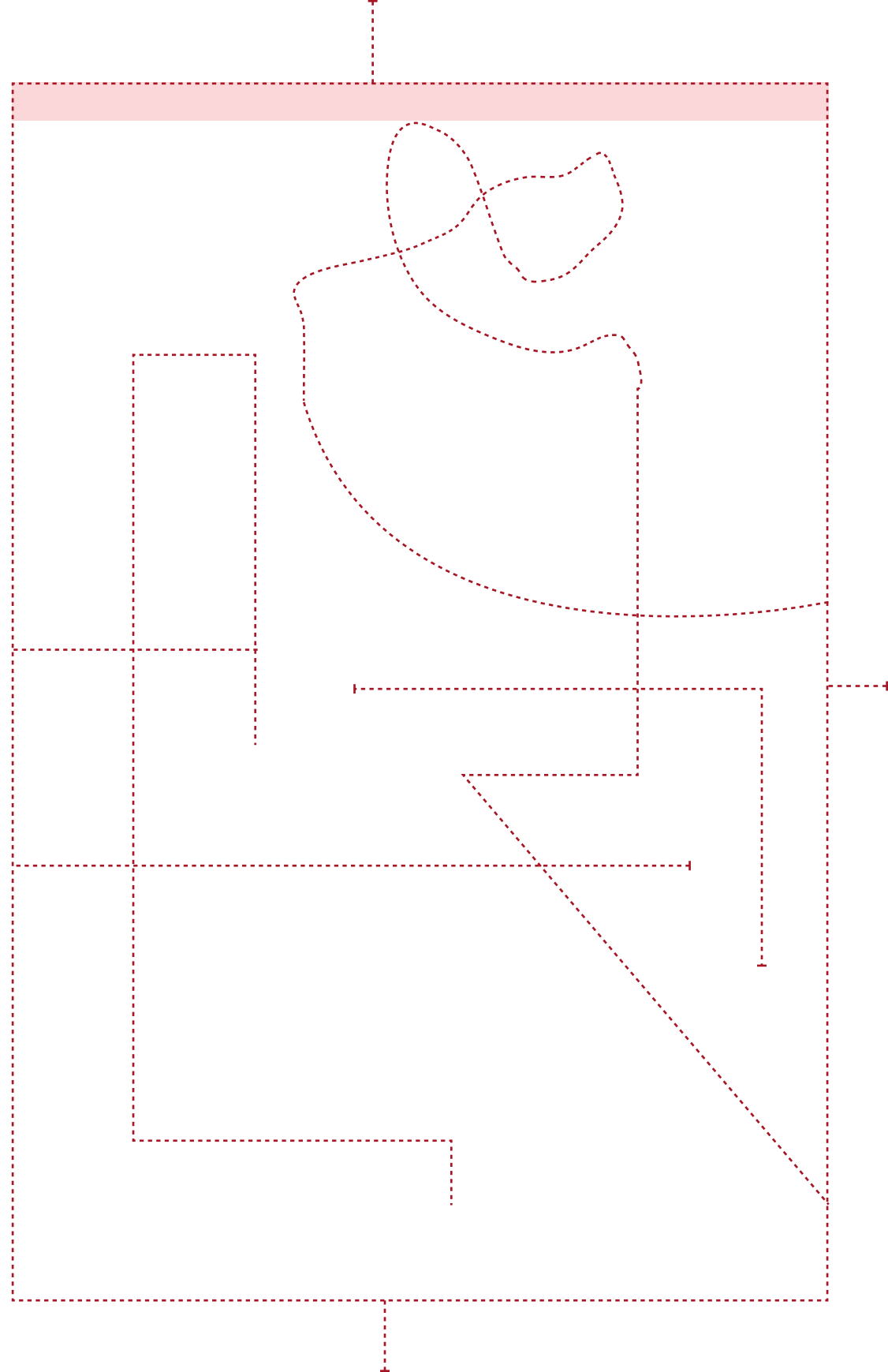
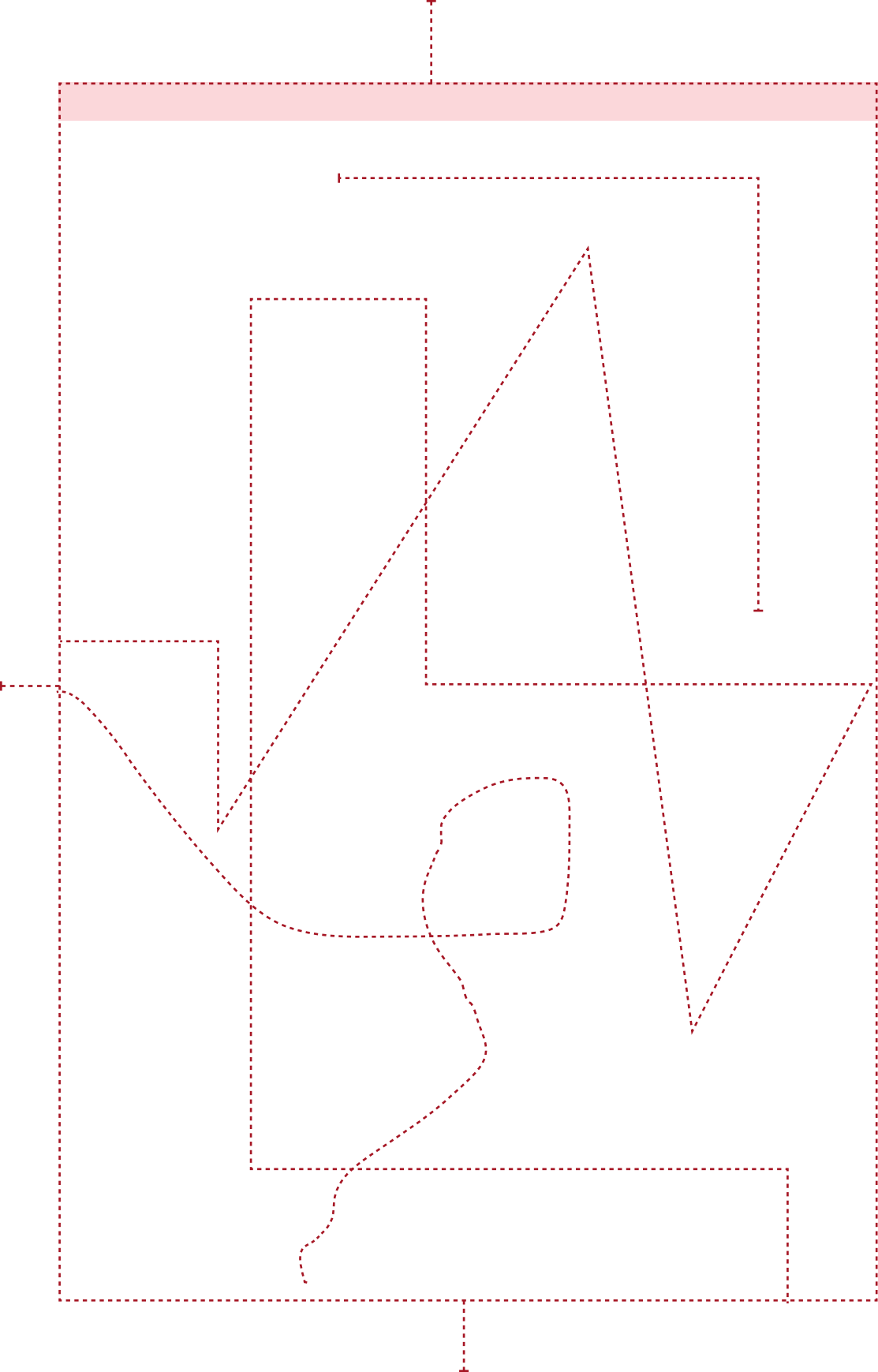
Figure 1. Three hawkers carrying Kwali in a settlement in Lagos, Nigeria, 2022.
Image: courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. Water being transported in a Meruwa in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, 2022.
Image: courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. Bill of Material of Meruwa by nmbello Studio, 2022.



building beyond

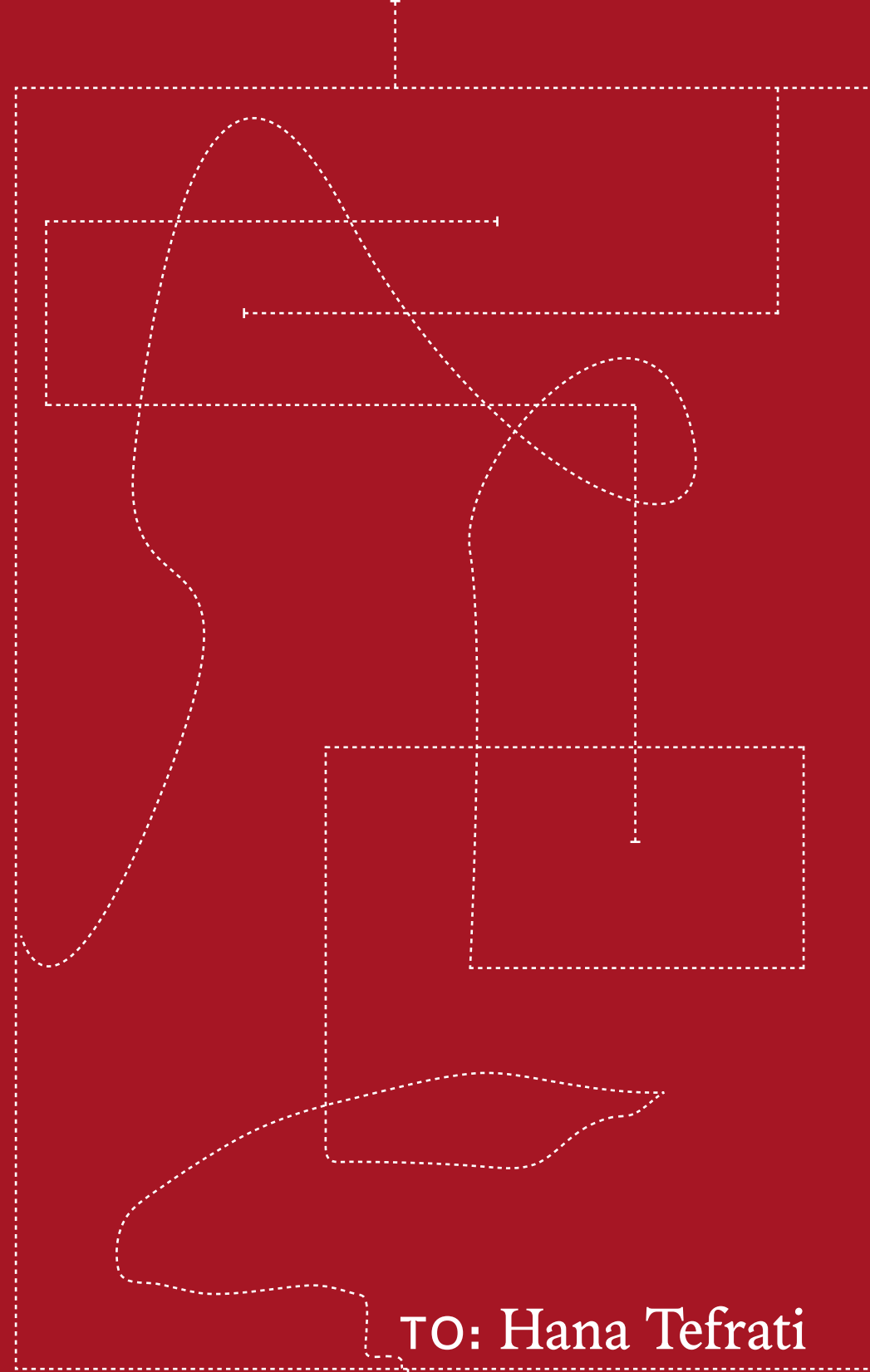
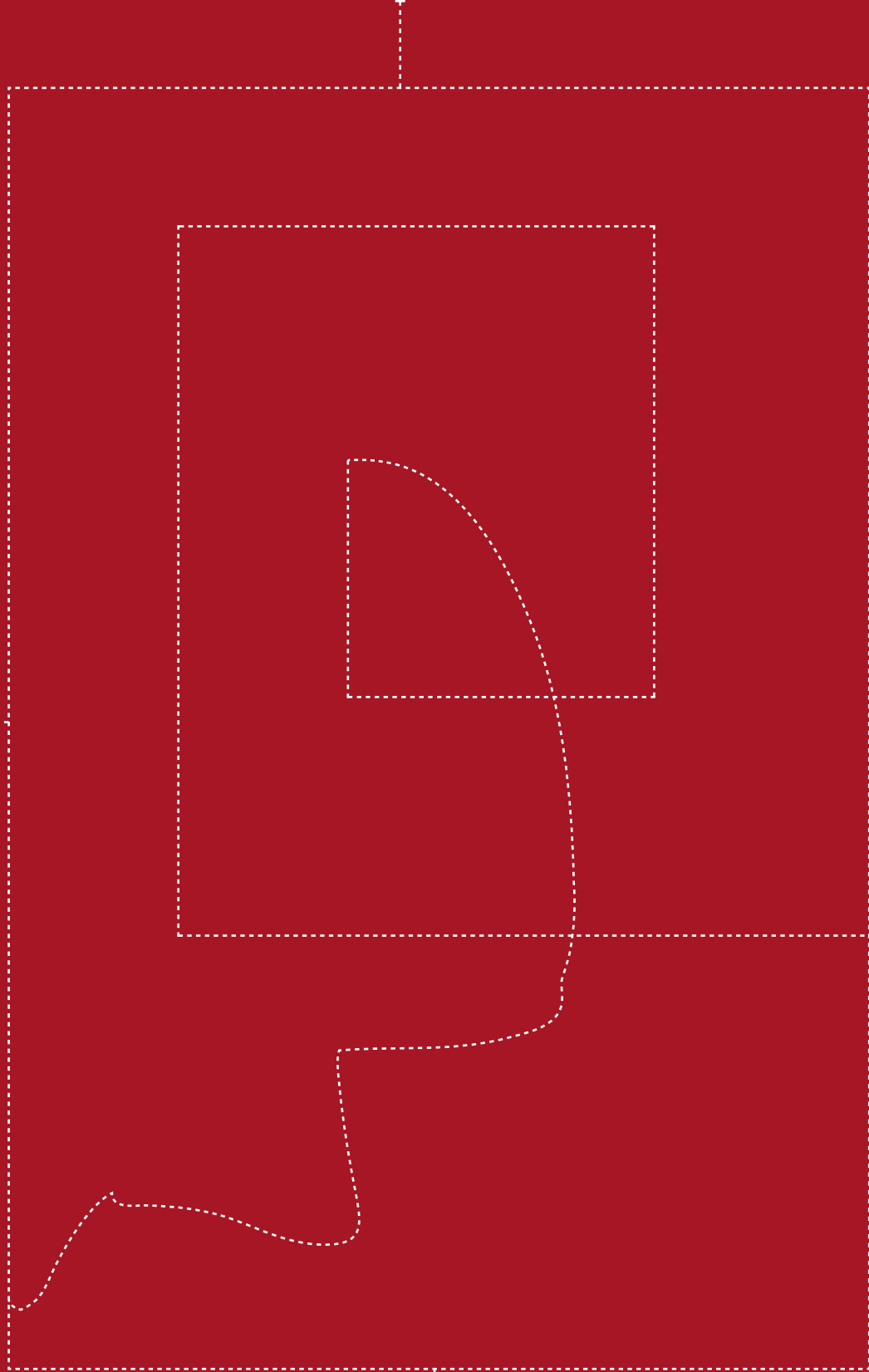
FROM: Katesi
TO: Ikram

I resonate deeply with the notion that excellent design is not merely seen or heard, but felt. My interactions with local artisans and the broader community now assume greater intentionality, as I channel my energy into stretching artisanal techniques to their limits and nurturing conversations that foster novel art forms through age-old practices.



creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Ikram Hamdi
Mansour



TO: Hana Tefrati

Ikram Hamdi Mansour's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Katesi's LETTER

FROM: Ikram hamdi Mansour

REVIEWED: 21.05.2023

TO: Hana

Dear Hana,
As I sit down to write this letter, I can't help but contemplate whether it was mere chance or a higher calling that brought me to this moment. I choose to perceive it as a magical sign, a gentle nudge from the universe itself! Your work has had a profound influence on the trajectory of my own endeavours.

Before delving into the impact you had on my current vision, allow me to share the genesis of my professional journey. It all began in 2015 when I made a deliberate decision to embark on my final architectural project of my studies in the captivating expanse of the Sahara desert. This decision led me to Timimoun, Algeria, where I discovered the intrinsic value of natural materials and their pivotal role in fostering sustainable living. Eager to deepen my knowledge, I embarked on a voyage to India, immersing myself in the wisdom of Indigenous communities and their instinctive ability to adapt construction techniques to local environments. This transformative odyssey took me further to the enchanting cities of Iran, namely Yazd and Bam, where the art of earth architecture thrives. These cities showcase ingenious

systems such as qanats for water distribution, and architectural marvels like arches, vaults, and windcatchers, which are designed to work in harmony with the demanding climate. Following this, I found myself amidst the lush jungles of Thailand, immersed in a permaculture project that embraced regenerative practices and celebrated a symbiotic connection with the natural world.

Throughout these experiences, I began to question the prevailing economic and social paradigm and its habit for fostering competition while eroding our innate bond with nature. It became apparent that the future I sought, nestled within the annals of our past, could only be realised by commanding a shift towards a new paradigm rooted in shared values of well-being, solidarity, and cooperation. Humanity must recognise itself as an integral part of the planetary ecological system; only then can we forge a path towards a self-determined existence with dignity for all. This realisation led me to establish "Climate Change Culture Change" in Algeria in 2020. Through our artistic and cultural initiatives, we aim to raise awareness among local communities about ecological justice, social justice, and self-awareness. We intend to do this by fostering a deep connection with nature and promoting a sense of collective responsibility.

During our mentorship programme last year, I embarked on an exploration of our deep connection to the earth through our bodies. This exploration went beyond a view of the body as a mere tool for analysing and transforming soil. Instead, I aimed to cultivate a skillful embodiment, tapping into our kinesthetic intelligence. Within the realm of your artistry, Hana, I discovered an unexpected wellspring of inspiration. As an observer, I was captivated by your profound comfort with your own body, how



Figure 1. *Echoes of Time: Transgenerational Healing*, by Ikram Hamdi Mansour.
Image: courtesy of Sonia Kessi.

fearlessly you express yourself through movement. Your performance awakened a dormant aspect of my own artistic journey, and unveiled an awareness long repressed by societal conditioning. Now, I aspire to use earth as a medium through which to celebrate the body and its sensations. I yearn to infuse built spaces with an ambiance that ignites our senses, where earthly materials transmit emotions, transforming architecture into immersive sensory experiences.

My current project is a short film set in the mesmerising Algerian Sahara. It revolves around a woman who meticulously constructs her dwelling by utilising the abundant earth materials available. This process establishes a profound connection between herself and the raw elements she employs. Beyond physical construction, the connection between the woman and the earth transcends into something spiritual, surpassing tangible boundaries. Every touch and movement as she shapes her house becomes an expression of this profound bond. The intimate contact between her body and the natural materials ignites heightened sensory sensitivity, awakening her sensual side. This transformative union propels her

I have attached three pictures from the film.

forward on a journey of self-discovery intricately entwined with the essence of the earth she moulds.

The film explores the significance of this connection, capturing the essence of her craft and the depth of her experience. It invites viewers to witness the profound unity between humanity and nature, where building becomes a pathway to self-realisation. Through this lens, the audience catches a glimpse of the beauty and harmony that arises when we align with materials and embrace our innate connection with the world around us.

I have attached three pictures from the film.

Warmest wishes,
Ikram



Figure 2. *Soil, the ecstatic skin*, by Ikram Hamdi Mansour.
Image: courtesy of Sonia Kessi.

Figure 3. *Embrace within, embrace beyond*, by Ikram Hamdi Mansour.
Image: courtesy of Sonia Kessi.

building beyond

FROM: Ikram
TO: Hana

It became apparent that the future I sought, nestled within the annals of our past, could only be realised by commanding a shift towards a new paradigm rooted in shared values of well-being, solidarity, and cooperation.



C

F o n d s

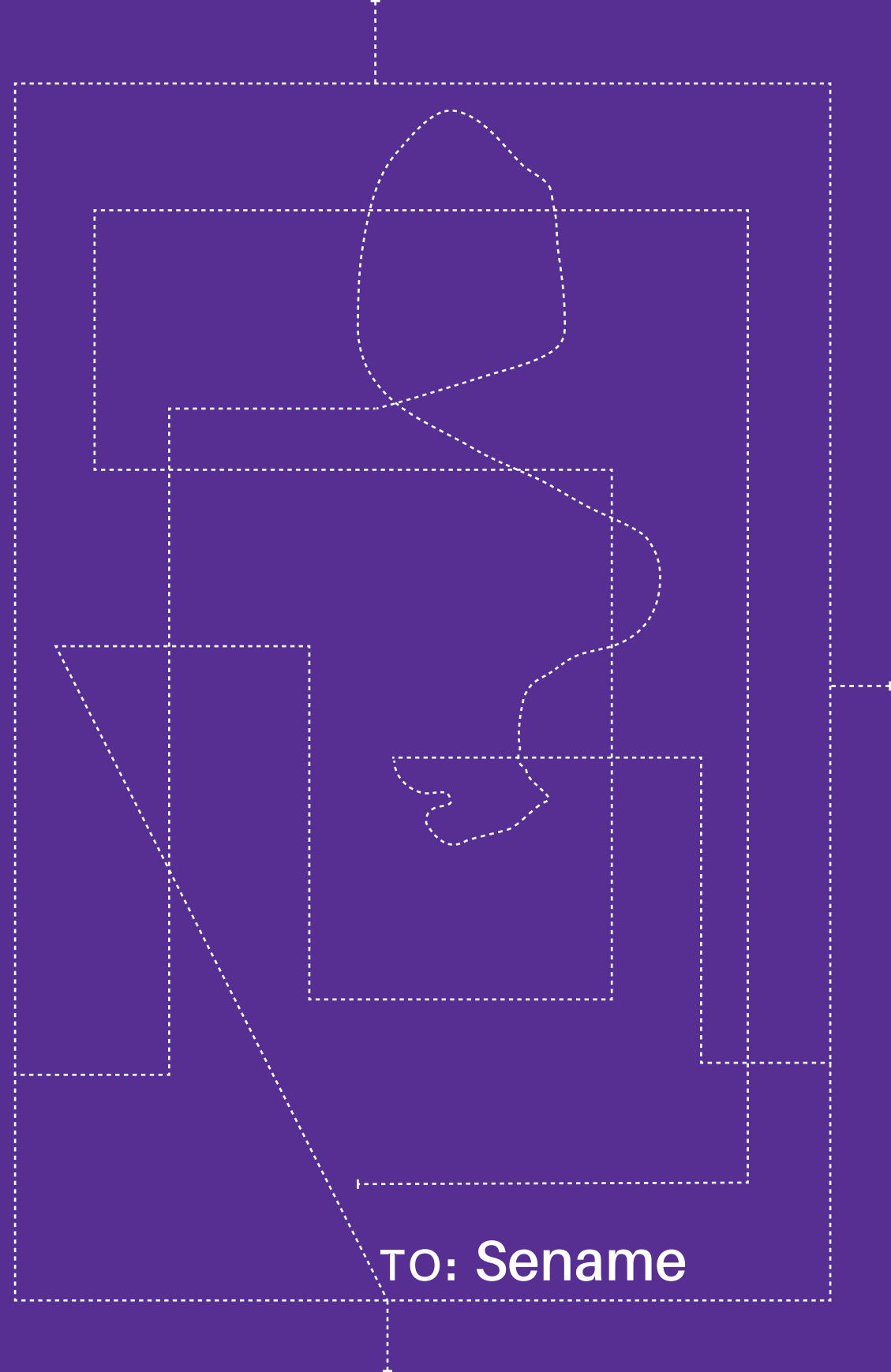
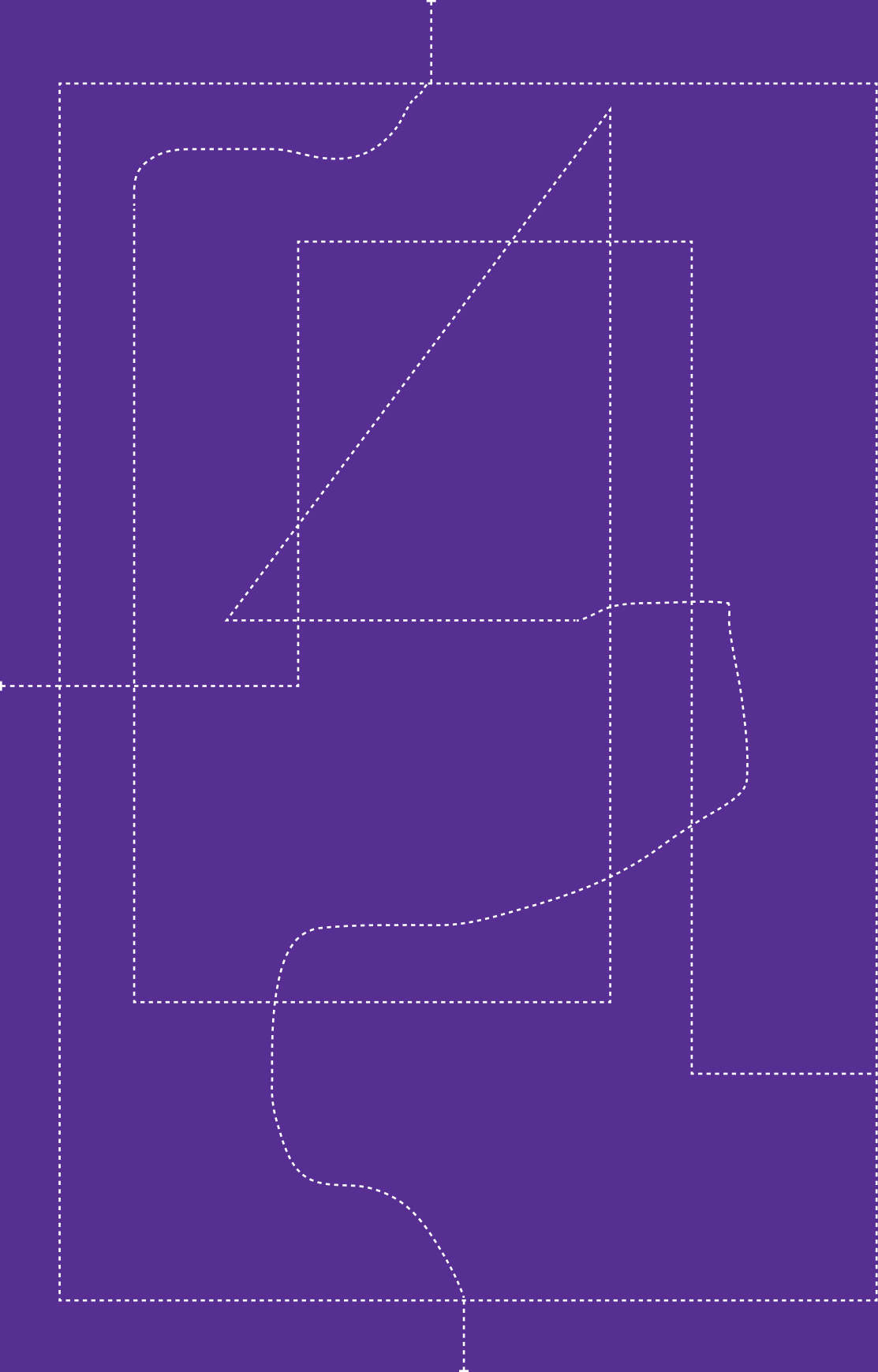
creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:

Hana

Tefrati

building beyond



Hana Tefrati's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Ikram's LETTER

AND AGAIN TILL I'M REAL ()
ET ENCORE JUSQU'À CE QUE JE SOIS RÉEL

FROM : Hana
 TO : Sename

Sename
 Se name

Sin ame Sans âme
without soul

Comment?
How?

How?
Comment?

Sans arme
without weapon

Sans larme
without tears

Sena me Sin ame Sin amen

Oui ça oui je le sens plutôt
Yes that I rather feel that

Sin with me, bêtises on fait des bêtises. +++++ J'adore les bêtises
avec moi nonsense we do nonsense. +++++ I love nonsense

Je pense toi aussi
I think you as well

The only lettres I like to write are love letters.
 So..... voila this is yours
Les seule lettre que j'aime écrire sont des lettres d'amour.
Donc here la tienne

Que ce que tu veux que je te raconte sur moi?
 Tu me connais par coeur. I am you and you are me
What do you want me to tell you about me?
You know me by heart. Je suis toi et tu es moi

How could it be different after so long time so many lives.
Comment cela pourrait-il être différent après tant de temps et tant de vies.

You and me again
Toi et moi encore
 Quelle chemin de désire
What a path of desire

Quelle chemin
What a path

What a desire path, *quelle chemin de désire,*
 what a desire, *quelle désire,*
 path what, *chemin de*
 a desire, *désire*

path what a
 desire,
chemin quelle
désire

path what, *chemin de*
 a desire path, *chemin de désire*

On en a détruit des système imposé Et on en a construit des rêves
 de liberté.
We have destroyed imposed systems And we have built dreams of freedom.

This dream of freedom
Ce rêve de liberté

C'est pas la peine que je te le dise, tu le sais déjà.
I don't need to tell you, you already know.

This time it's me who suffers
Cette fois c'est moi qui souffre

I want it so much, too much
Je le veux tellement, trop

My Sisters j'en ai ralle le bol. Enough
Mes soeurs I had enough. Assez

Let's celebrate us. Quelle bordel, what a bullshit,
 arrrrrrr fuck IT, scheiss drauf etc
Célébrons nous. What a mess, quelle connerie putin,
de merde fuck it

AND BEHIND ALL THIS WE ARE ALL THE SAME
 HAHAHAAAAAAAAHA
ET DERRIÈRE TOUT CELA NOUS SOMMES TOUS LES MÊMES
 HAHAHAAAAAAAAHA

c'est absurde
it's absurd

Je veux marcher, que marcher.
I want to walk, just walk

Where are you.
Où es-tu

Jais besoin de toi cette fois.

I need you this time

C'est pas la peine que.

I don't need

je te le dise.

to tell you.

You already know

Tu sais déjà

Tell them.

Dis leur.

You speak.

Tu parle.

I am muted.

Je suis en sourdine.

I only have my body.

Je n'ai que mon corps.

Move me.

Bouge-moi.

Catch me.

Attrapez-moi.

No just look at me.

Non, regarde-moi.

My sister

Ma soeur

Quelle désire qui te fait souffrir et sourire.

What a desire that makes you suffer and smile.

We are here.

Pas encore arrivé.

Nous sommes ici.

Not yet arrived.

Attend moi.

Wait for me.

On es la.

Je veux sauté.

We are here.

I wanna jump. Attrapez-moi. Where are you?

Non la-bas.

No there.

Ou es tu?

I want to listen more.

Je veux écouter plus.

Teach me.

Enseigne moi.

I want to listen

Je veux écouter

amore.

love.

Tu as choisi un autre costume.

You choose an other costume.

yes I also studied art.

oui j'ai aussi étudié l'art.

Walk with me for a bit.

Marche un peu avec moi.

your footprint will proof

ton empreinte prouvera

my existence.

mon existence.

I am writing you from a restaurant I choose for us.

I ordered you a dish with local beef but you didn't

Je t'écris d'un restaurant que j'ai choisi pour nous.

Je t'ai commandé un plat avec du boeuf local mais tu n'as pas

like it.

aimé.

C'est pas grave.

It doesn't matter.

Alors ils on débarrasser.

So they took it away.

Let's go for a walk

Allons nous nous promener

I see you too.

je te vois aussi.

Tu le sais déjà

You already know

I miss you already

Tu me manques déjà

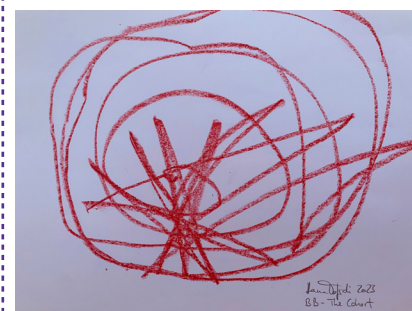
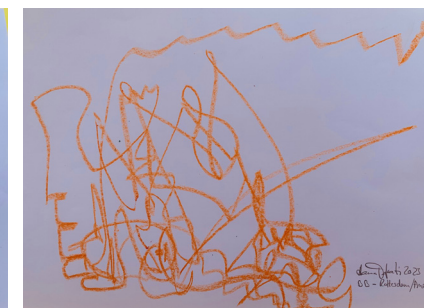
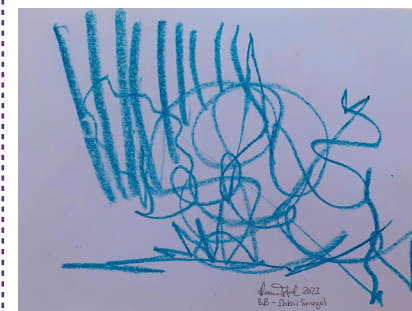


Figure 1. Dakar Senegal - Hana Tefrati.

Figure 2. Desire Path - Hana Tefrati, 2023.

Figure 3. Experience - Hana Tefrati, 2023.

Figure 4. Rotterdam and Amsterdam - Hana Tefrati, 2023.

Figure 5. The Cohort - Hana Tefrati, 2023.

building beyond

FROM: Hana
TO: Sename

*This dream of freedom
(Ce rêve de liberté)
C'est pas la peine que je te le dise, tu le sais déjà.
(I don't need to tell you, you already know.)*

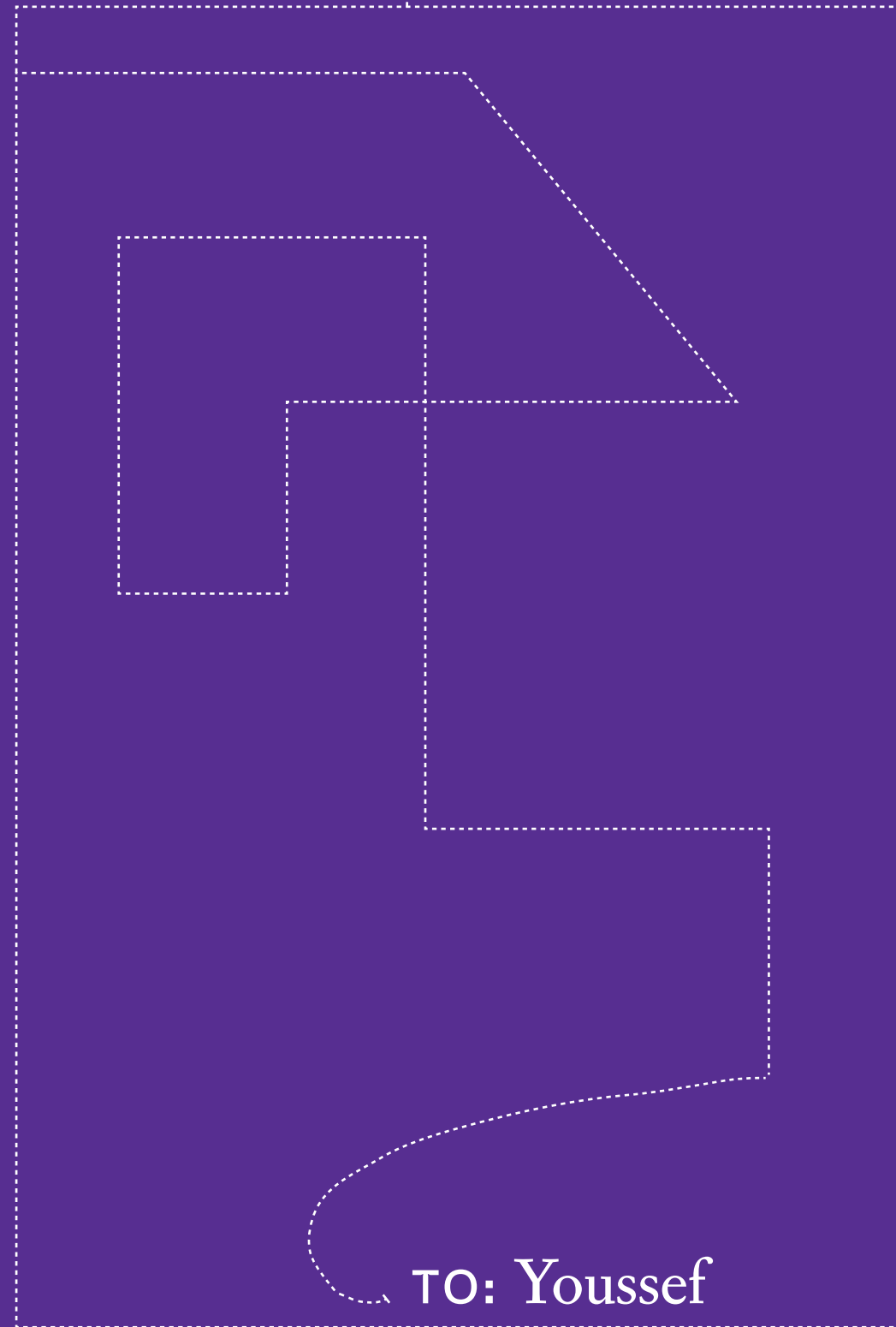
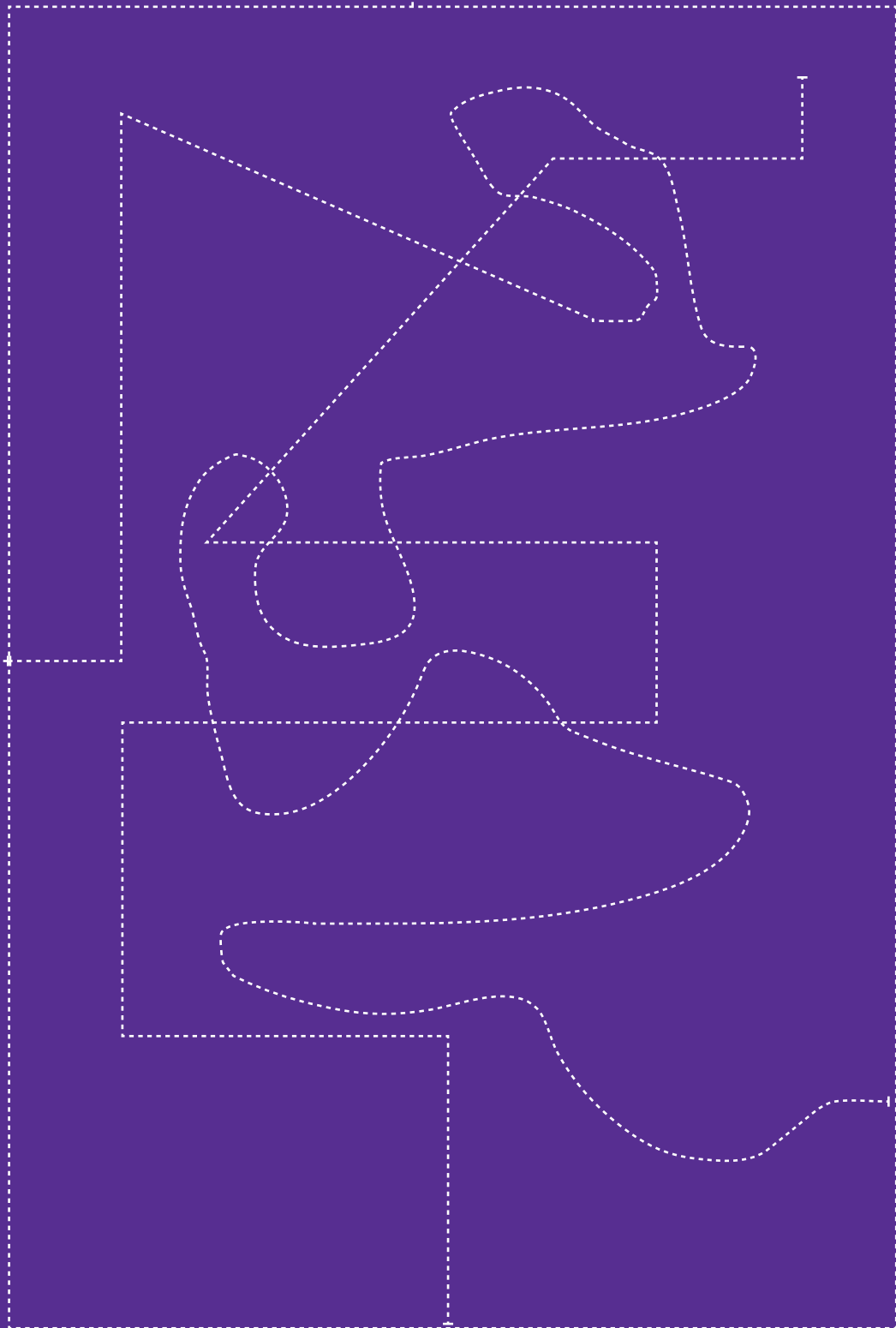


C

Fonds

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Sename
Koffi
Agbodjinou



TO: Youssef

Sename Koffi Agbodjinou's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Hana's LETTER

VERDIR À LA MARGE DU PIRE

FROM: Sename
TO: Youssef

Cher Youssef,

Comme j'essaie de me remémorer les Labs dans le projet de t'écrire, ce qui me revient d'abord à l'esprit ce sont tes joyeuses interactions avec Ikram et tout ce que vous assumiez mettre en scène ainsi du ridicule des tensions entre vos deux pays l'Algérie et le Maroc, cristallisées, ces tensions, au sujet de la dispute du Sahara occidental.

C'est de cette inventive fraternité en face de la guerre annoncée, cette possibilité exacerbée d'une respiration débridée que fabrique la promesse de congestion, qu'il me plait de te parler dans ce courrier.

C'est là en vrai, le seul moyen d'advenir d'une utopie concrète, celle sécrétée fatalement par tout processus dystopique: comme de la vie résiduelle, outrageuse et radicale dans la marge de la mort.

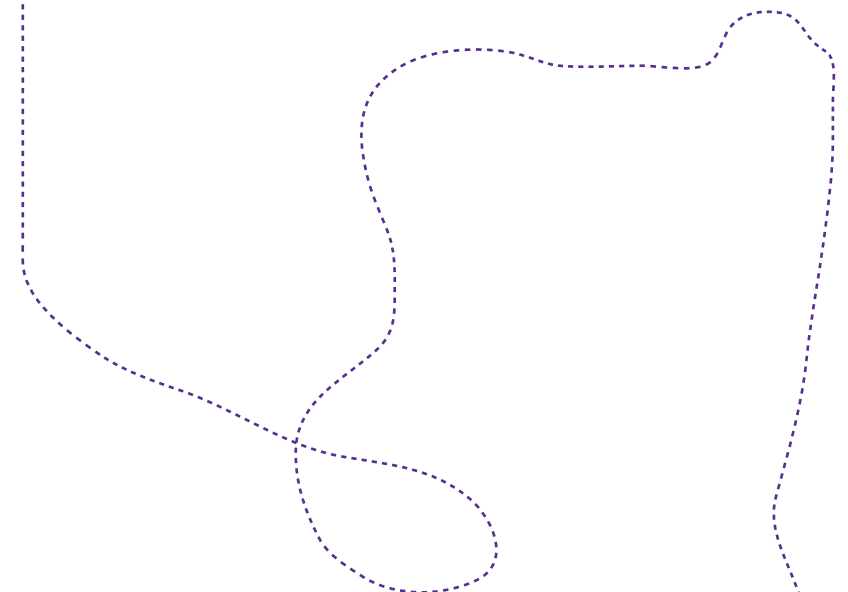
La ville dont nos rendez-vous à Dakar et Amsterdam étaient l'objet accueillera vers 2030 les deux tiers de l'humanité. Parce que c'est une question qui concerne au premier plan notre continent, je te sais obsédé autant que moi de cette tension dans l'objet urbain à éliminer la spécificité d'un lieu. Et tu questionnes ce que la ville fait aux choses avec la loupe sur le psyché...

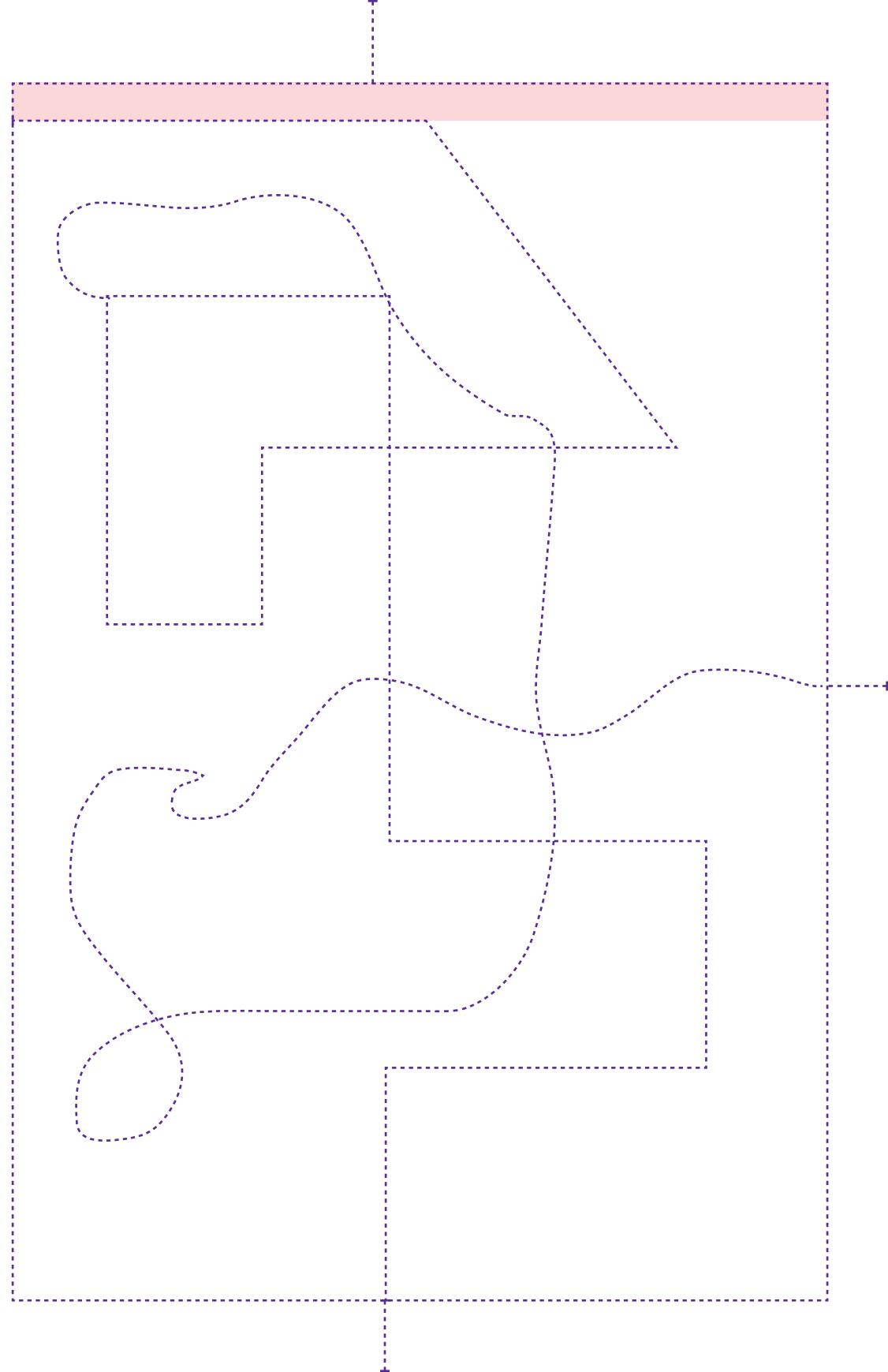
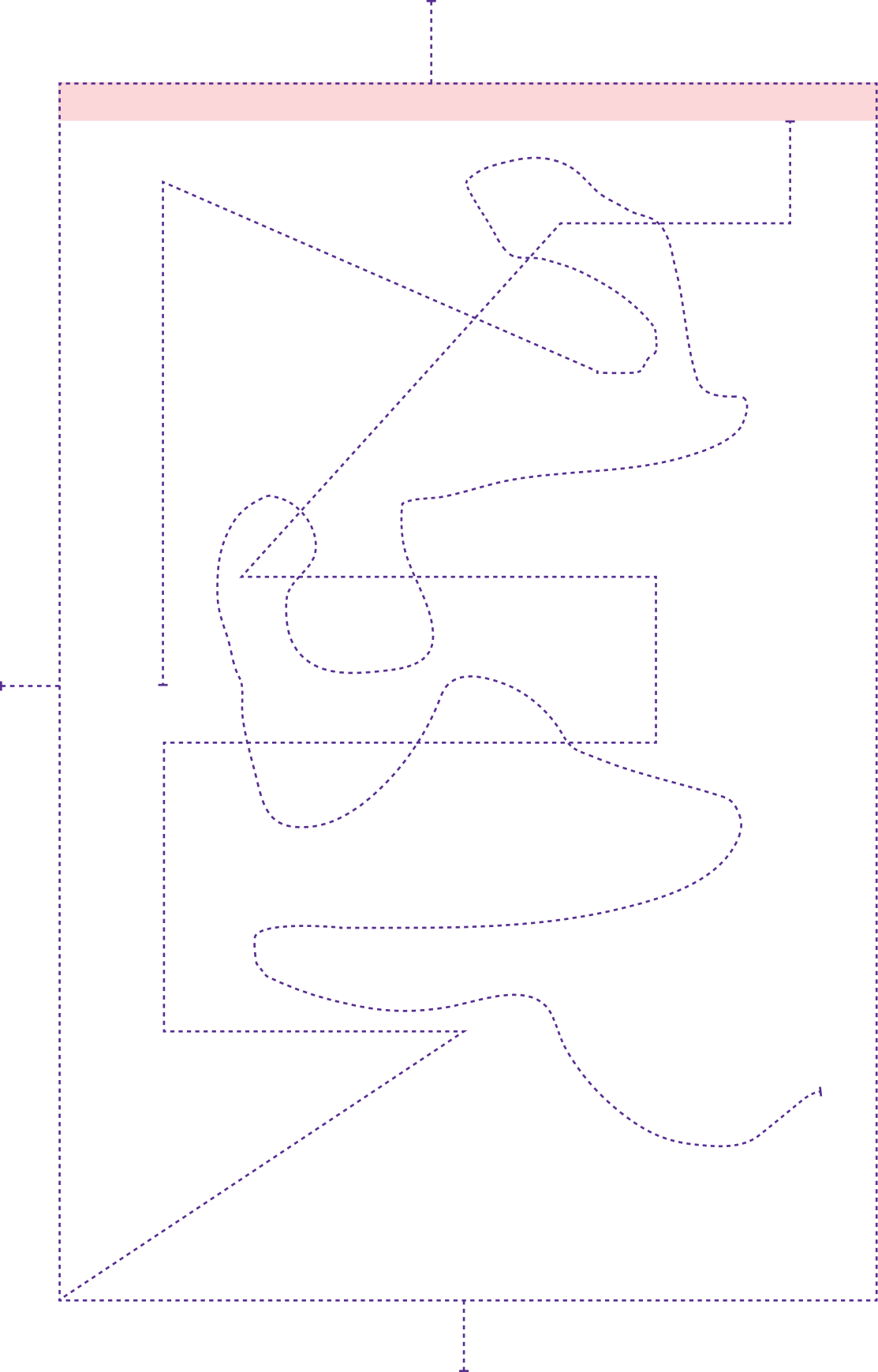
Je pense pour ma part que l'élimination de la spécificité du lieu, c'est pour le rendre calculable. Elle est devenue la ville ainsi le dernier mot de la modernité. Mais il me semble que le mot n'est appelé à être final qu'au sein de la Smart City et cette mise en mathématique systématique de l'humanité qu'elle met en chantier parachevant l'idéal rationaliste. L'enjeu donc de la géolocalité algorithmique rendue globale c'est la vie entière humaine et non humaine demain régie par un formidable système performatif.

Que fabriquerait en sa périphérie une telle machine à calculer ? J'entrevois au cœur de tous les humains et espaces laissés pour compte, la possibilité d'un radical organique. J'entrevois plus concrètement des communautés d'hommes uniquement augmentés d'autres hommes ne se complaisant plus de fait dans l'accumulation technique, de l'intelligence du réel, et des imaginaires enfin fertiles.

Et pendant que le centre hégémonique, celui des riches et des conformés à l'impératif de la calculabilité acheverait de s'assécher, la marge pauvre, anciennement rebut, mis en jachères informelles par tous les refoulés armés uniquement des outils du bon sens et de l'intuition, se retrouverait désormais noyée de la nature.

Pour atteindre ces nouvelles utopies, il s'agit pour certains contextes de renouveler les imaginaires, mais pour nous autres en Afrique de s'autoriser simplement enfin des imaginaires.





building beyond

FROM: Sename
TO: Youssef

*J'entrevois plus concrètement des communautés d'hommes uniquement augmentés d'autres hommes ne se complaisant plus de fait dans l'accumulation technique, de l'intelligence du réel et des imaginaires enfin fertiles.
(I see more concretely communities of men only augmented by other men no longer delighting in technical accumulation, intelligence of reality and finally fertile imaginations.)*



Fonds



creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Youssef El Idrissi

Youssef El Idrissi's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Sename's LETTER

FROM: Youssef
10/01/2023
TO: Flavia

Dear Flavia,

The past year has been rather busy, and we, Kounaktif, are still processing what we've been through as a collective¹. In late November, we opened our space L'FADAE in the heart of Casablanca, through which we are exploring and expressing our various interests, needs, and longings within the community.

I'm currently wrapping up my main project, DAMJ— which explores spatiality, psyche, and the hidden margins of our inner and outer cities— with a publication in which I bring together a selection of articles and artworks² from different artists and scholars. Among the contributors is Kwasi Darko, who accepted my invitation to be part of it. The publication, which is entitled *The Neglected Margins: Inner and Outer Regions*, intends to highlight the fractal dynamic we find between the centre and the periphery— the outside and inside of things, cities, psyches, practices, as well as in the global economy and geopolitics.

On this journey, I've gained a core understanding of the dynamics between space and psyche, and between the centre and periphery of various areas of knowledge, the body, psyche, and practice³. For example, one of the contributions in the publication, *The core dominance and the periphery dependency: Uneven exchange in the global economy*, highlights how a central global economic power is dominating the “second” and “third” worlds. This is the same dynamic we see in cities between the centre, where everything is available in terms of goods

1. Kounaktif is a collective that operates at the intersection between the arts, technology, and ecology through creativity, education, and dissemination. It promotes collective intelligence and collaboration through its programmes in the form of discussions, exhibitions, participatory workshops, and concerts: www.instagram.com/koun.aktif

2. For example, «ON SPACES & SPECIES 4'7» is a multidisciplinary approach that intends to question centre-periphery and psyche-space interrelations: <https://vimeo.com/732309269>

3. By practice, I refer to the processes of thinking and knowing within maker communities, which inform how and what we do.

and infrastructure, and the margins, which are generally neglected by policies, and are treated as incidental byproducts of the centre as well as being perceived as needing redevelopment. There is a similar dynamic that occurs between the Global North and the Global South, where the “civilised” (the white, male, heterosexual) intend to spread their values and “civilisation” (the centre of knowledge, of light, and goodness) to the neglected margins, which is occupied by barbarians and ignorants who must be educated.

After two years of research and work on the ground, we are defining new, critical modes of intervention, consisting of formulating and elaborating projects that allow us to build on our insights and learnings. Namely, we are doing so through the project *Scar-city*, which focuses on healing the inner and outer “wounds” of our cities. This intervention, though still in its research phase, is a continuation of the corpus of work that I had the opportunity to develop through my interactions with and insights from my peers and mentors on the Building Beyond programme in Dakar and Amsterdam. These insights helped me to take the project a step further towards action and intervention.

The scars of the city illustrate how much it is neglected by city policies. Our intention is to heal these spaces through artistic interventions by filling actual sections with resin and other objects, such as LEGO pieces, that remind us of our childhood. These scattered, colourful building blocks are to remind us of the source of our

strength. This poetic intervention aims to raise questions among both citizens and politicians in relation to the politics of city-making, and more deeply, it's a call to repair our internal grounds (psyches), and to be reminiscent of the playful terrains of our childhood, or, as Nietzsche eloquently puts it, *"the struggle of maturity is to recover the seriousness of a child at play."* Similarly, when it comes to maturing, and by extension healing, our cities (and this lies in stark opposition to the notion of "developing"), it is our role as artists and citizens to actively contribute to (re)shaping our inner and outer worlds.

It was, and continues to be, an intense journey, but the Building Beyond cohort felt like one big, decentralised family upon which we could all rely. Together we lived on this affective island of shared ideals and enthusiasm for better city-making and ways of inhabiting the world(s), including that of how to inhabit our skin, our bodies, and our psyches, while allowing and encouraging one another to manifest our ideals.

Before this gathering closes, I would like to share some reflections with the cohort, which I'll post on our collective Instagram account. Here is an excerpt from one of the three posts:

"A trust necessary to explore the city not with vision, but with the other oppressed sensations such as listening, smelling, sensing, and feeling. How can we navigate the city through other senses? How can we begin to trust our complete sensory apparatus and explore using touch, smell, sound, or their synthesis, instead of always trusting that which we see only? How can we decentralise our sensory organic being, our collective making, and our cities?"

Kindly,
Youssef El Idrissi



Figure 1. Oussama Ait Ouah exploring the city using his other senses during psychogeography workshop, DAMJ project, Chefchaouen, 2022.

Image: courtesy of Omar Kassimi.



Figure 2. Youssef El Idrissi listening to the whispers of the trees, during psychogeography workshop, DAMJ project, Chefchaouen, 2022.

Image: courtesy of Omar Kassimi.

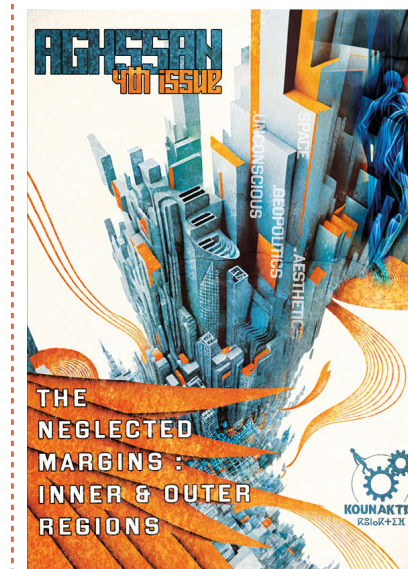


Figure 3. Cover of the publication Aghssan 4th Issue – *Neglected Margins: Inner and Outer Regions*, 2023. Designed by Youssef El Idrissi.

building beyond

FROM: Youssef
TO: Flavia

When it comes to maturing, and, by extension, healing our cities (and this lies in stark opposition to the notion of “developing”), it is our role as artists and citizens to actively contribute to (re) shaping our inner and outer worlds.

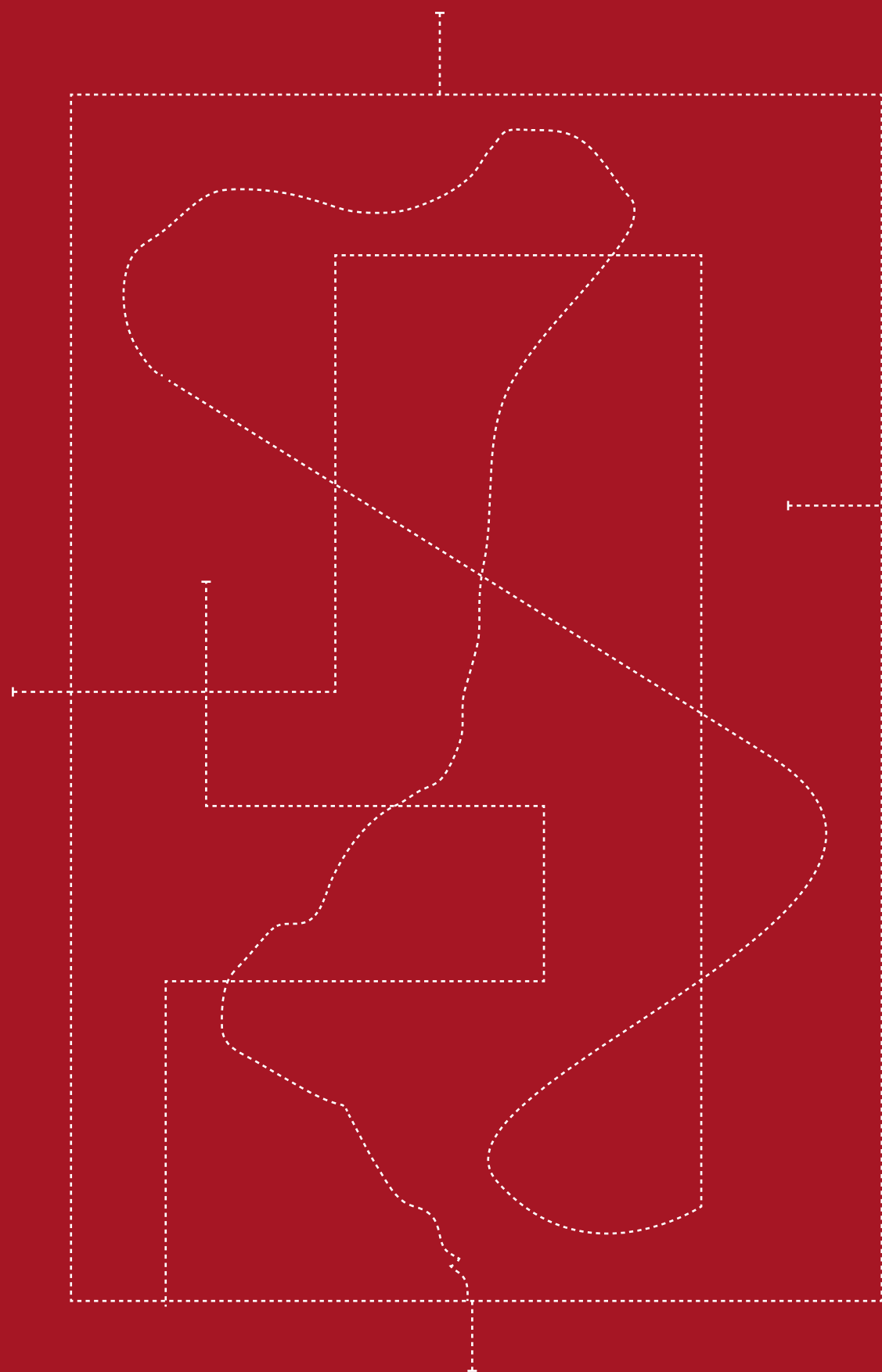


Fonds



creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Flavia
Gwiza



Flavia Gwiza's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Youssef's LETTER

FROM: Flavia Gwiza
REVIEWED: 21.05.2023
TO: Khensani

Dear Khensani,

As our programme drew to an end, I found myself feeling deeply appreciative of the opportunity I had to reflect on the remarkable evolution of my practice since the programme started. The concepts of liveable cities and the intricate dynamics of our coexistence and interactions within the public sphere perpetually fascinate me. A pivotal moment occurred in March 2013 when I was a fourth-year architecture student, serving as one of the panellists for a platform centred on the Kigali masterplan, entitled *Kigali Nouveau: From Vision to Implementation*. This remarkable public event embarked on a visionary expedition, unveiling the conceptual masterplan's audacious vision for a speculative new city. Intriguingly, the room overflowed with foreigners, the majority of whom have since departed, leaving me to ponder over why the residents of Kigali, who grew up and planned to raise their families here, showed minimal interest in shaping the future of their city through such discussions.

The lack of resonance among the local populace stemmed from an inability to envision themselves within the future city as

depicted by the masterplan renders, which appeared detached from Kigali's unique essence. Moreover, the disconnect was amplified by a prevailing sense of not truly belonging to the city, except within the confines of our individual dwellings. Whenever revisions were proposed to the masterplan, the pressing concern invariably arose, "*What will become of the area where my plot is located?*" Consequently, the scarcity of public spaces emerged as a topic of paramount importance. Nearly a decade later, the city has made modest strides by establishing a single public space in the bustling commercial business district and transforming select streets into car-free zones, providing people with outdoor spaces to enjoy as restaurants. Nonetheless, if our objective is to cultivate social cohesion and instil a profound sense of belonging within the city, we must aspire for an abundance of such spaces, strategically positioned within our neighbourhoods, and in close proximity to our workplaces. The revised masterplan of 2020, with the tagline "*Kigali Yacu*," which translates to "*Our Kigali*," may represent the city's earnest endeavour to foster ownership and elicit the general public's genuine interest in shaping the future trajectory of Kigali.

When this programme started, I had a vision to create public spaces within the city, yet I lacked a clear roadmap for realising this ambition. Kigali—a city where regulatory frameworks govern even the erection of signage on a street corner or building facade—necessitated meticulous research and careful planning for the acquisition and establishment of any form of public space. Gratefully, through our engaging discussions and the wisdom shared by you and our esteemed mentors, I have been bestowed with invaluable resources upon which I now can rely.

A critical first step entails documenting the various ways in which Kigali residents currently lay claim to the city, embracing it as their own. Consequently, I have granted myself some time to delve deeper into the city's vibrant tapestry, meticulously observing the range of unplanned, spontaneous, and recurring interactions that people engage in within the public realm. Following your insightful suggestion, I embarked on deliberate walks through different neighbourhoods, aiming to intimately explore the city's essence. It is remarkable how much we overlook when restricted to the confines of our vehicles. Although, I must admit, my walks in most parts of the city fail to evoke a profound sense of excitement. Surprisingly, according to the Kigali masterplan, an estimated 52 percent of the city's residents rely on non-motorised modes of transport such as walking and cycling. A truly inclusive "Kigali Yacu" should thoroughly reflect and accommodate these realities. Presently, planning documents predominantly cater to motorised transportation, inadvertently assuming that as our financial means improve, we will naturally gravitate towards such modes of transport. However, such an approach proves problematic, as motorised vehicles contribute significantly to pollution, a major catalyst of global warming. Currently, the utilisation of motorised transport accounts for 40 percent of greenhouse emissions within urban landscapes of Rwanda. This percentage will experience a substantial surge in the foreseeable future, as the country's annual urbanisation growth rate recorded over the past decade has been an impressive 7.8 percent. Given that nearly half of Kigali's residents move around the city on foot, how, precisely, does Kigali accommodate their needs? Can they genuinely refer to it as "Kigali Yacu"? During my walks I have observed a myriad of formal and informal walking practices. Some streets provide



Figure 1. Claiming the city through mobility: pedestrians, a cyclist, and "bridges"
Image: courtesy of the artist.

well-defined sidewalks, while others lack such amenities. However, regardless of the presence or absence of designated walkways, people invariably find their way. Situated upon three hills with valleys and wetlands between them, Kigali's roads are often designed to avoid steep slopes or marshy terrain, inadvertently resulting in longer routes that connect neighbourhoods. Inevitably, pedestrians forge their own paths through the wetlands, crafting shortcuts that save them time and energy—a testament to their unwavering claim on the city. Alas, these paths prove troublesome during the rainy season. In an ideal manifestation of "Kigali Yacu," the vision would comprise a city intentionally designed to facilitate pedestrian mobility, ideally achieving a 50 percent walkability threshold. Neighbourhoods situated in close proximity would be seamlessly connected by pedestrian-friendly routes and strategically positioned light bridges for non-motorised modes of transport, enabling easy cross-over while



Figure 2. Children claiming the city through play.
Image: courtesy of the artist.

reducing their footprints on natural obstacles.

Furthermore, during my walks through the streets of Kigali, I have been captivated by the numerous instances where ordinary neighbourhood streets transform into vibrant playgrounds full of the laughter of children. The joy emanating from their carefree movements serves as resounding proof of the necessity for such spaces within our residential communities. Moreover, I have also noticed unoccupied plots, which effortlessly become impromptu gathering spots for adults seeking a moment of rest, entertainment, or conversation. These spirited pockets of interaction not only enrich our collective urban experience but should also embody the very essence of "Kigali Yacu," as they symbolise the notion of a city that truly belongs to its residents, fostering a sense of ownership and connection that transcends the mere physicality of its structures.



Figure 3. Adults claiming the city through different forms of gathering.
Image: courtesy of the artist.

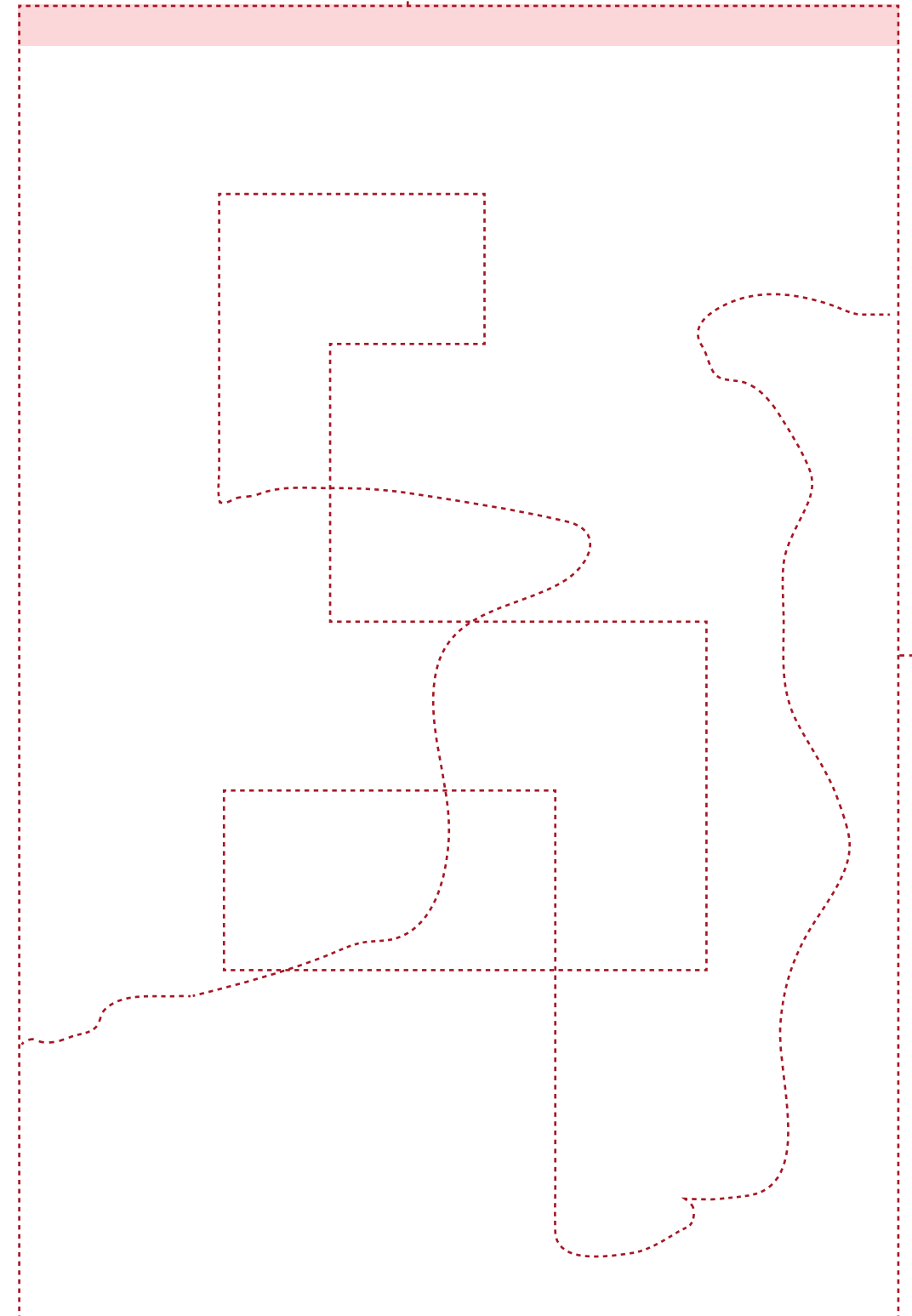
In contrast to the vibrant scenes previously described, numerous neighbourhoods in Kigali present an entirely different ambience, characterised by streets that are car-dominated. These neighbourhoods provide no sight of shaded areas, shops selling refreshments, seating areas, etc. for pedestrians within convenient walking distance, leaving them yearning for basic amenities and communal spaces. These neighbourhoods often represent newly developed areas, where public transportation options remain limited or entirely absent. One can understand that such areas are predominantly occupied by private car owners. In such neighbourhoods, it is imperative to question where children find opportunities for neighbourly interactions during weekends and holidays. Likewise, where do adults congregate for discussion or neighbourhood meetings following umuganda, the monthly community work day? While the scarcity and high cost of land in Rwandan urban areas present genuine challenges, it is crucial for us to

It is crucial for us to collectively recognise these activities as fundamental necessities, deserving of dedicated spaces within the cherished "Kigali Yacu."

collectively recognise these activities as fundamental necessities, deserving of dedicated spaces within the cherished "Kigali Yacu." In doing so, we can foster a sense of togetherness, embracing inclusivity and ensuring that the richness of community life permeates every corner of our city.

By capturing and documenting these vibrant scenes, an authentic portrayal of our city emerges. From there, an array of innovative ideas can emerge, giving rise to various design interventions, suitable locations, and approaches for engaging the wider public. Every participant, mentor, and thought-provoking discussion on urbanity within this programme has undeniably enhanced the trajectory of this ongoing project, pushing its boundaries beyond what I could have envisioned alone. It is during our thought-provoking exchanges that the seeds of endless creative possibility are sown, where imagination intertwines with practicality. From here I forge ahead, guided by the vision of a city that thrives on inclusivity, creativity, and a collective yearning for a brighter and more connected urban experience.

Sincerely,
Flavia Gwiza



building beyond

FROM: Flavia
TO: Khensani

It is crucial for us to collectively recognise these activities as fundamental necessities, deserving of dedicated spaces within the cherished "Kigali Yacu."

In doing so, we can foster a sense of togetherness, embracing inclusivity and ensuring that the richness of community life permeates every corner of our city.

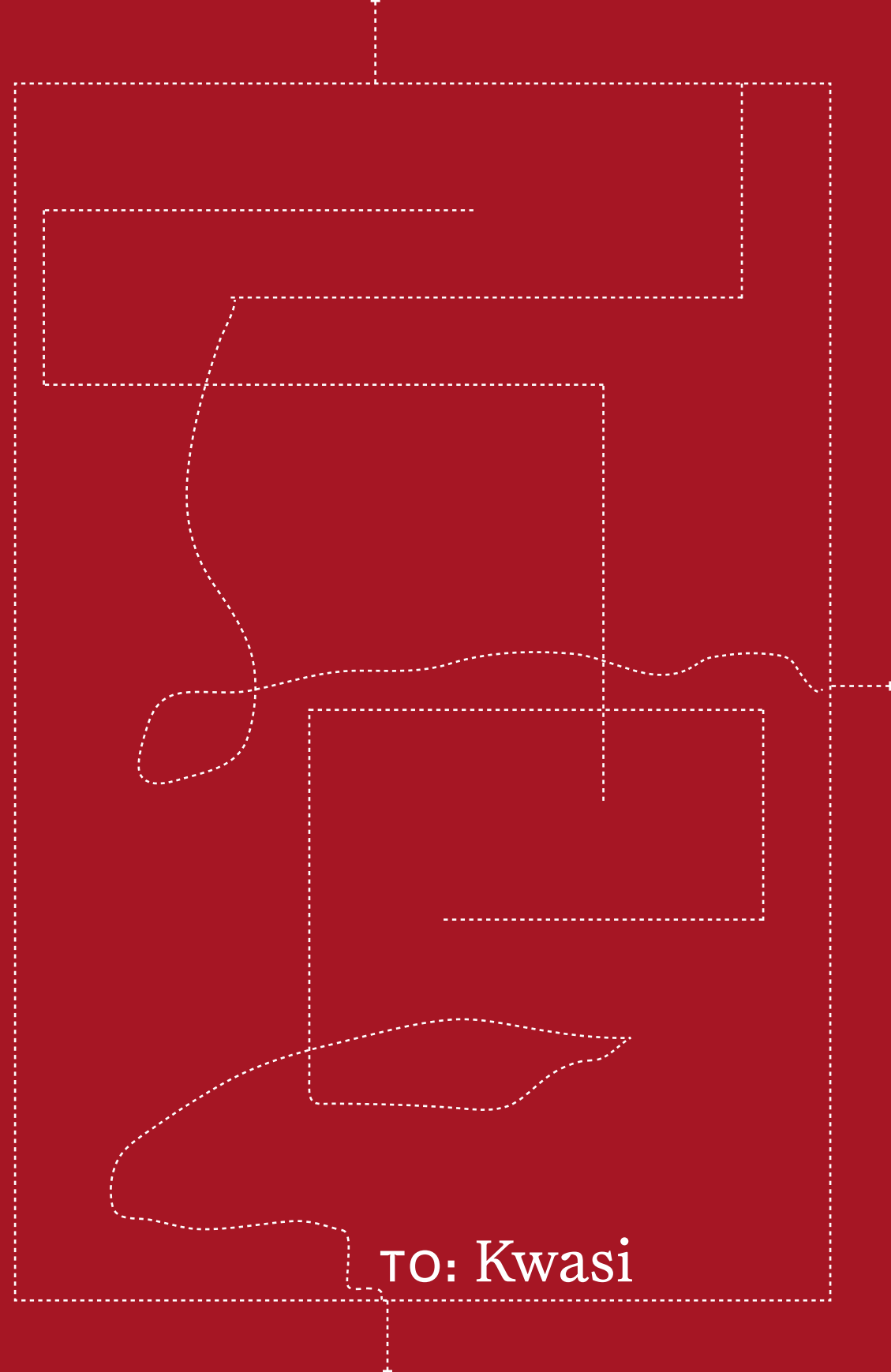
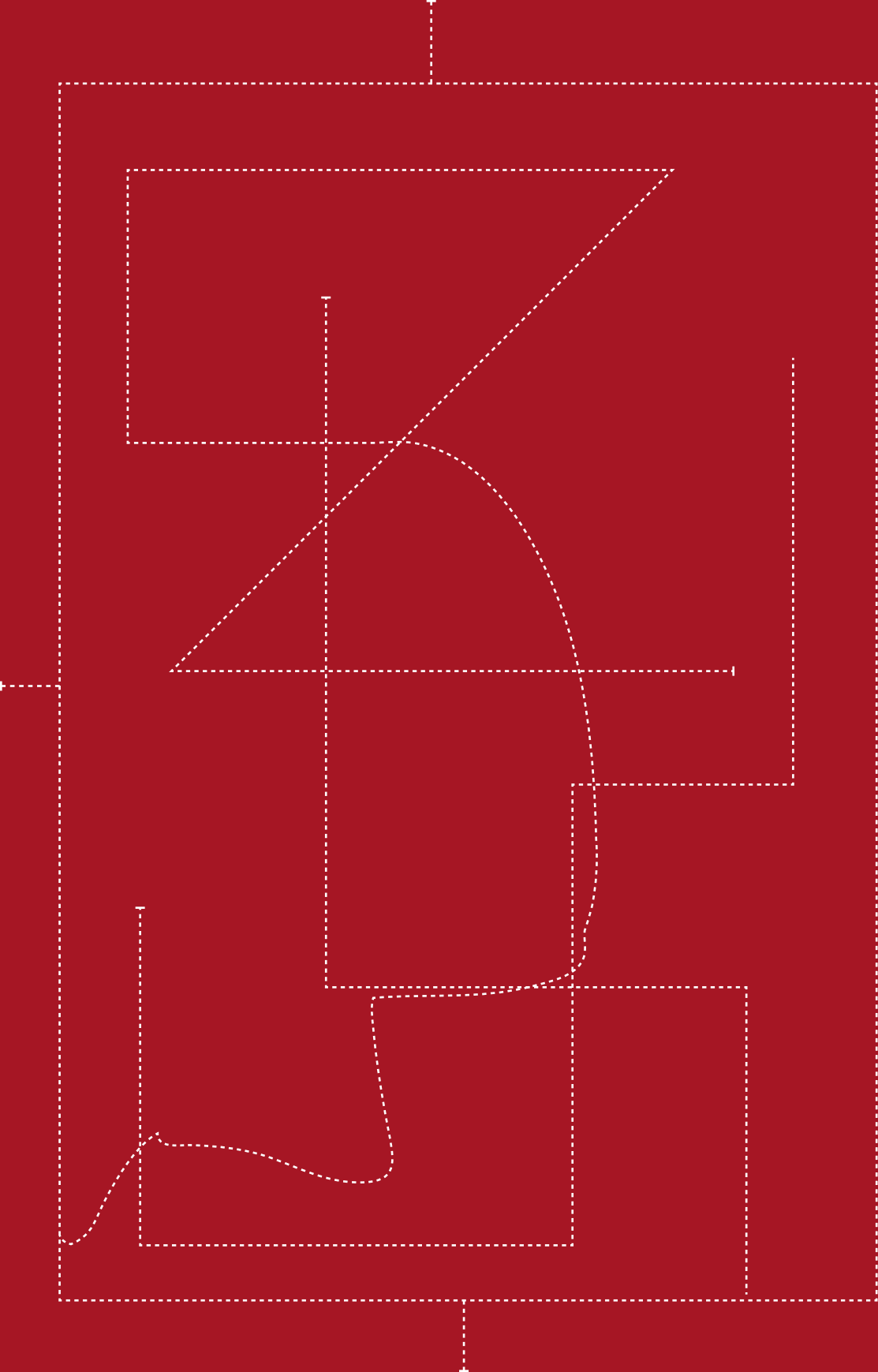


C

F o n d s

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
**Khensani
Jurczok-de
Klerk**



Khensani Jurczok-de Klerk's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Flavia's LETTER

WITH LOVE, FROM NO FIXED
PLACE OR TIME.

FROM: Khensani
REVIEWED: 11.05.2023
TO: Kwasi

Dear _____

Kwasi,
I write to you from a space where time
or at least the clockwork version we've been
made to follow against our natural rhythms
means nothing.

I write to you whilst thinking about Ikram, of her telling
about the connection to the earth as home, as I fly above
Algiers, across the open air. The open air which Ola has
been spending time with as a place to be
to dwell.

I'm writing to you from high up in the open air. It's dark
and the glimmers of light hint to me hauntingly that life is
buzzing, booming(!) against what evidence tells us is the
city, is the urban, is the light.

I'm currently thinking about fugitivity, rereading Moten
and Harney's Undercommons: Black Study and Fugitive
Planning again and again and again.
Thinking about dark space.

De-corrupting it,
Since we,
Black folx
operate in it.

Since we,
Racialised folx
are it.

It's happening down there in that dark space(!) and from
up here it's unbelievable, or not possible to believe, right?

But we

Black folx
Racialised folx
Du Boisian folx

know it. We live between both worlds
in between the strata

and are able to see far enough through that supposed-
ly transparent oxygen, which, mind you, becomes a thick
delusion of opaque fog due, unsurprisingly, to the dis-
tance from an unknown ground.

How do we travel through this fog, narrowing the distance
between multiple worldviews vibrating with contradic-
tions — churning whirlwinds that demand our energy to
move, to be?

I write to you from a space in movement, a mystical vehi-
cle moving through,

whilst holding life

it's surrounding environment unsettling it by defying that
it is fixed

in time, space, or state.

This mystical vehicle is how I think about my practice at
the moment; a vessel offering a space
for coming together, departing, arriving.

I'm interested in collisions, beautiful encounters — some
lasting seconds, others lifetimes.

In this vehicle, we are not following clockwork time.

As I move, in this concentrated direction back South, to-
wards the southern tip of Africa, I look at the map on the
screen, I look at the names

some, always new.

There's a lot we have and I look forward to learning from
and about one another.

I look at the names highlighted in bold, mostly only shown
along our straight line path.

I think of Hana, in Morocco, who we just passed over. I
think of their movement, their call to make us speak

feel, listen

through movement. Not in a straight line.

I wonder what new names I'd learn if this vessel went so
far, reaching Accra, meandering back to Addis Ababa, in
an effortless avancé as Hanna taught us in Dakar that
first day we met. Would Kwasi see me? Would Yishak?

It's easier to see those moving vessels from the earth
 our home, the ground
 than it is to see moving people
 beings, souls, bodies
 from above.

That's the paradox
 one of many
 of architecture and urban design.
 We think we have it under control from above, but we
 don't know a fraction of it. it's
 we, they, us
 always changing.

But what brings me joy, brings me reassurance, is that
 when we sometimes get severed from dominant thinking
 when we meet
 and we feel it under our feet,
 the earth
 it sparks in us some sense of home
 being.

I'm singing in movement, chorusing Sun Ra in his provocation

and call!
 to dominant members and systems of society
 — we know that to be Western
 in saying, "your problem is, you don't feel."

I'm reminded how to feel
 when I'm in movement.
 I'm reminded how to feel
 in unsettled notions of time.
 I'm reminded how to feel
 of movement,
 of unsettled notions of time,
 when I think of our bodies assembling in izimbizo.
 Imbizo means to gather.

It means to gather in a specific form.
 Circular.
 Everyone has the right to speak,
 uninterrupted.
 The imbizo demands and calls for deep listening.
 Listening
 to rhythms, rituals, ideas, others,
 with precision.
 with love,

from no fixed point or time
 Khensani



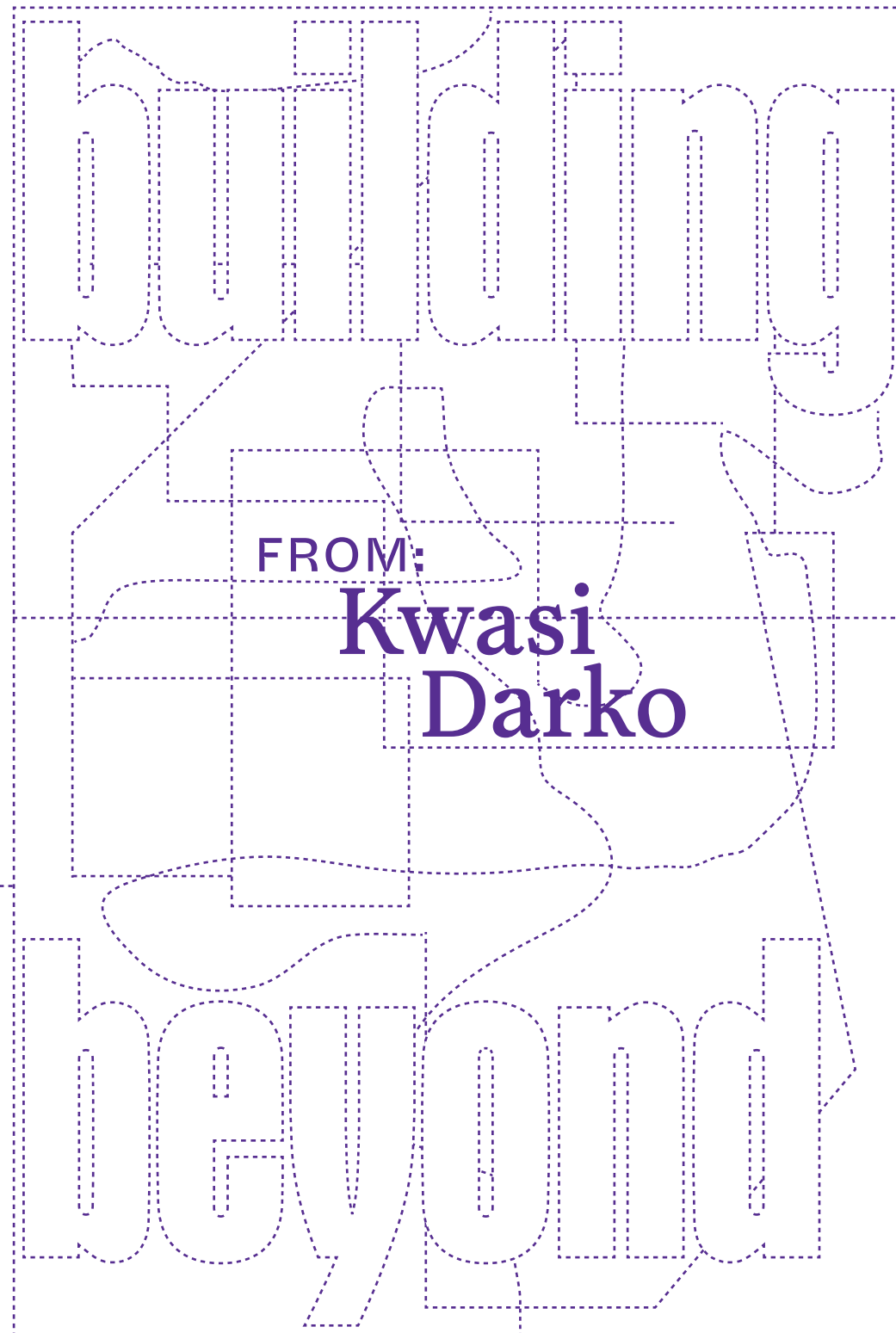
Figures 1&2. *Imbizo* from Building Beyond Lab Week, Dakar Senegal 2022.
 Image: courtesy of Kwasi Darko.

building beyond

FROM: Khensani
TO: Kwasi

This mystical vehicle is how I think about my practice at the moment; a vessel offering a space for coming together, departing, arriving. I'm interested in collisions, beautiful encounters – some lasting seconds, others lifetimes. In this vehicle, we are not following clockwork time.

FROM:
**Kwasi
Darko**





Kwasi Darko's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Khensani's LETTER

FROM: Kwasi
TO: Salma

Hello Salma!

Happy 2023! What a beautiful moment in time last year was! I feel like I have lived in over ten countries over the year on account of how much I lived through everyone in our little COMMUNITY. From Cairo to Accra through Addis and Lagos, I have learnt that the term community is broader than what I imagined before, not just one formed based on proximity or class but also through shared experiences and a homogenous state of mind. This sets my mind thinking about what we all do as cultural workers and who we do it for. So much of how we do it and the things we arrive at is so mysterious that I wonder if that is true at all.



Figure 1. *Here & Now: Cluster*, 2019.
Image: courtesy of Kwasi Darko.

A lot of the conversations that you and I had broached the subject of exclusivity in artistic spaces and I've



Figure 2. *Mobile Museum: Digital Exhibition on Ga culture & community.*
Image: courtesy of Ano Ghana & Kwasi Darko, 2020.

already been thinking deeply about the idea in relation to my practice and the spaces my work presents itself in. When curatorial and artistic institutions moved their practices online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, I was so excited because I saw it as a viable alternative to the way art and cultural spaces/workers unintentionally exclude a lot of communities and individuals from our practices even though most of the urgencies and conversations we try to spark through our work are about these communities. Almost everyone owns a phone now and if these exchanges and dialogues could be accessed in the palm of their hands, literally, communities could be engaged more now than in the past and the discourse opened to a far wider audience. In essence, already established social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram are powerful tools for communal engagement on social exigencies in artistic practice.

I realise now though that I might have jumped the gun on the lasting impact of this phenomenon because, slowly, the art spaces are going back to white cubes and caviar-laced conversations in front of artworks whose prices can sometimes build a small community center.

At this point, I am inclined to share a memory from a few moments ago at a friend's exhibition that has now reminded me of the urgency of what I am talking about.

The exhibition was about the deaf community (an excluded community in most things) and at some point I decided to take a break outside the gallery space. A woman passed by with three of her kids, all of them looking quite curiously at the brightly lit gallery space and the beautifully dressed people spread across its front lawn, sipping champagne. The youngest kid was the most curious and at some point he stopped completely to stare while the others moved on. His mom, noticing that he was trailing behind shouted in Ga (a language I understand), “*Hey, keep walking! This is not your space*”. Those words really shook me because here I was, five minutes ago listening to another artist speak about a project they were excited about which sought to investigate the Ga people of Accra and their displacement from the capital city by capitalism. I don’t know the psychological word for what I felt in the moment, but if you were there you would have summed it up so well as you mostly do with these things. So I asked her, “*Why do you think this is not your space?*” to which she replies “*Oh brother, look how well you’re dressed and look at us*”. Indeed we looked completely different. Me in my well thought-out ensemble and them looking like it had been a very active day.

I have been thinking a lot since that encounter, Salma, and I realize the work is actually beginning now. The Covid year was an opportunity in disguise to reset a lot of things and reevaluate the way cultural practitioners engage with a lot of things — but we are beginning to forget this. Why does artistic expression, which at its core is a beautiful and aesthetically pleasing way of highlighting the world’s problems, need such extravagance and performative attitude from the people that present it and the people that engage with it. Do you remember the school kids from the Dakar Biennale during our time there, and how freely they engaged with the artworks? The juxtaposition of that to us as adults and the almost overly serious ways we interact with the ideas presented? I want to go back to that freedom!

How does one do that? What needs to change?



Figure 3. Palais de Justice, Dakar Biennale, 2022.
Image: courtesy of Kwasi Darko.

On my part, I think of a constant awareness of a practice that keeps community at its centre. Mindfulness of our work as cultural makers and changers and the people that are affected by what we produce.

Before the Building Beyond programme, I thought of myself as a lot of things; visual artist, photographer, curator, but not a designer. I never went to architectural school so my relationship with spatial design has never been at the forefront of my cognition. I have however always designed the spaces I exhibited in, from the materials that house my work to the structures that house those materials, I have always been hands on. Yet I never considered myself a designer. We are all designers at our core. All of us. It takes a walk down the streets of Accra to see how shop owners and traders arranged their goods and wares in almost installation-like forms to realise this. Again. Industrial exclusivity and vernaculars condition us to separate ourselves from these abilities. Well I’m glad to tell you today, Salma, that I see myself as a designer now. And I will not take it for granted. It is such a blessing and responsibility to accept that term because what it means for me now is that I can do what I have always done; designing exhibition spaces but with a more acute awareness of whether they will include or exclude just by design. I chose inclusion.

I have started building domes that live on the outside of white cubed space. I decided moving forward, if the people will not come to artistic spaces,



Figure 4. Locally designed storage structure, Akosombo, Volta Ghana, 2023.
Image: courtesy of Kwasi Darko.

we take artistic spaces to the people. I'm excited about what they could potentially represent. They will be built from local materials synonymous to the regions they will be set up in. The first two, for example, will be built in Cape Coast and Akosombo (Central and Volta Regions of Ghana) where bamboo and clay are common building materials respectively. Also environmentally-friendly so I know Ikram will be happy about this! But the building of the domes is not the work. The work lies in the purpose of the dome beyond artistic engagements. After all the art exhibitions have been held in the domes within and with the community, do we dismantle them? No, because in doing so we are not doing anything differently from the show-and-tell tendencies of archaic artistic practices.

The plan is for these domes to be given back to the community. They can serve as community youth centers where young people can convene and share ideas. They can be turned into alternative classrooms and libraries where, with the help of the regional and international communities, books and knowledge will be stocked for use by everyone within the community. Periodic film screenings and sporting activities can also happen in these spaces. This makes the work not temporary as most of our artistic output turn out to be but a continuous stream of energy and knowledge sharing/exchange!

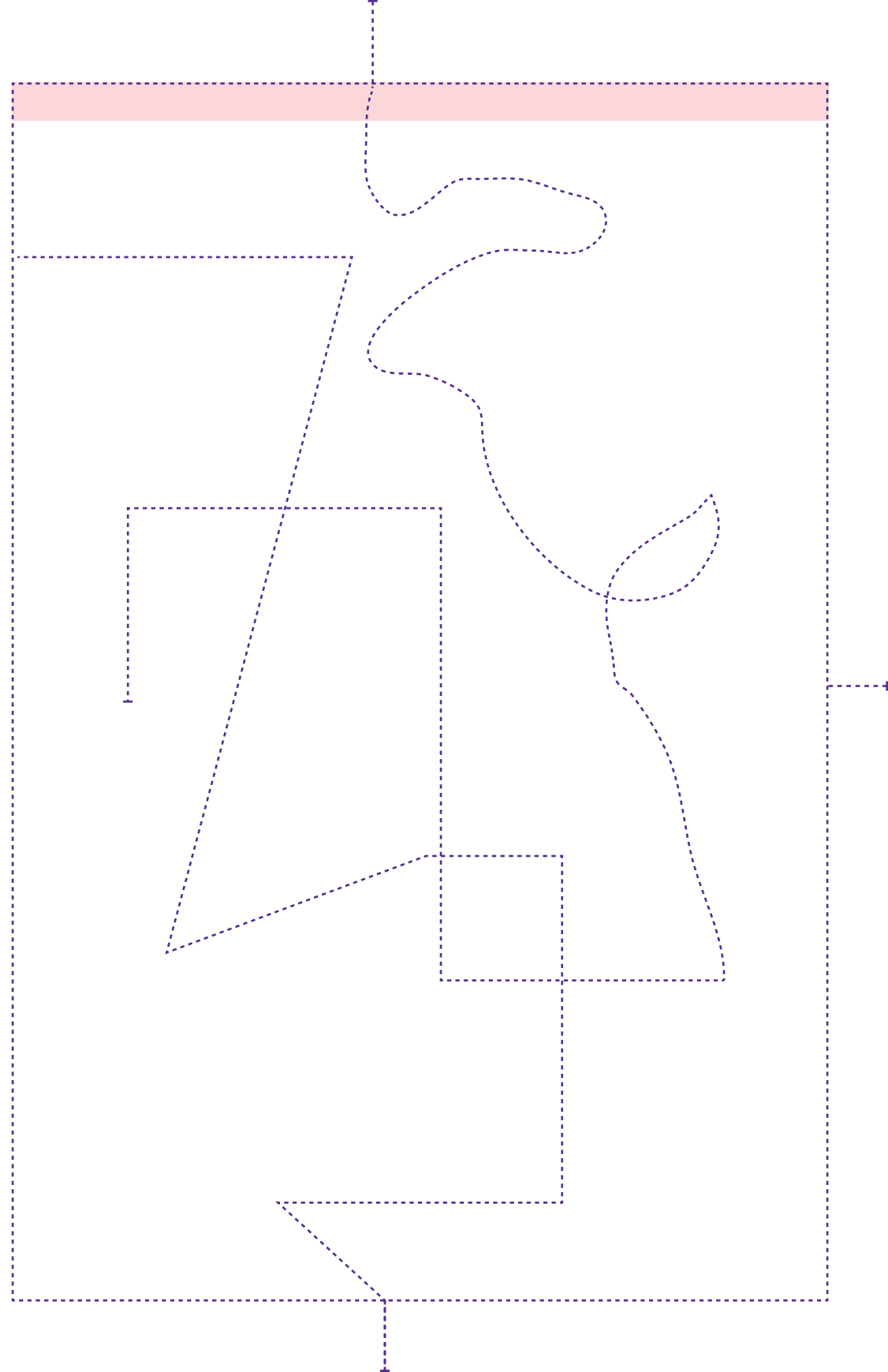
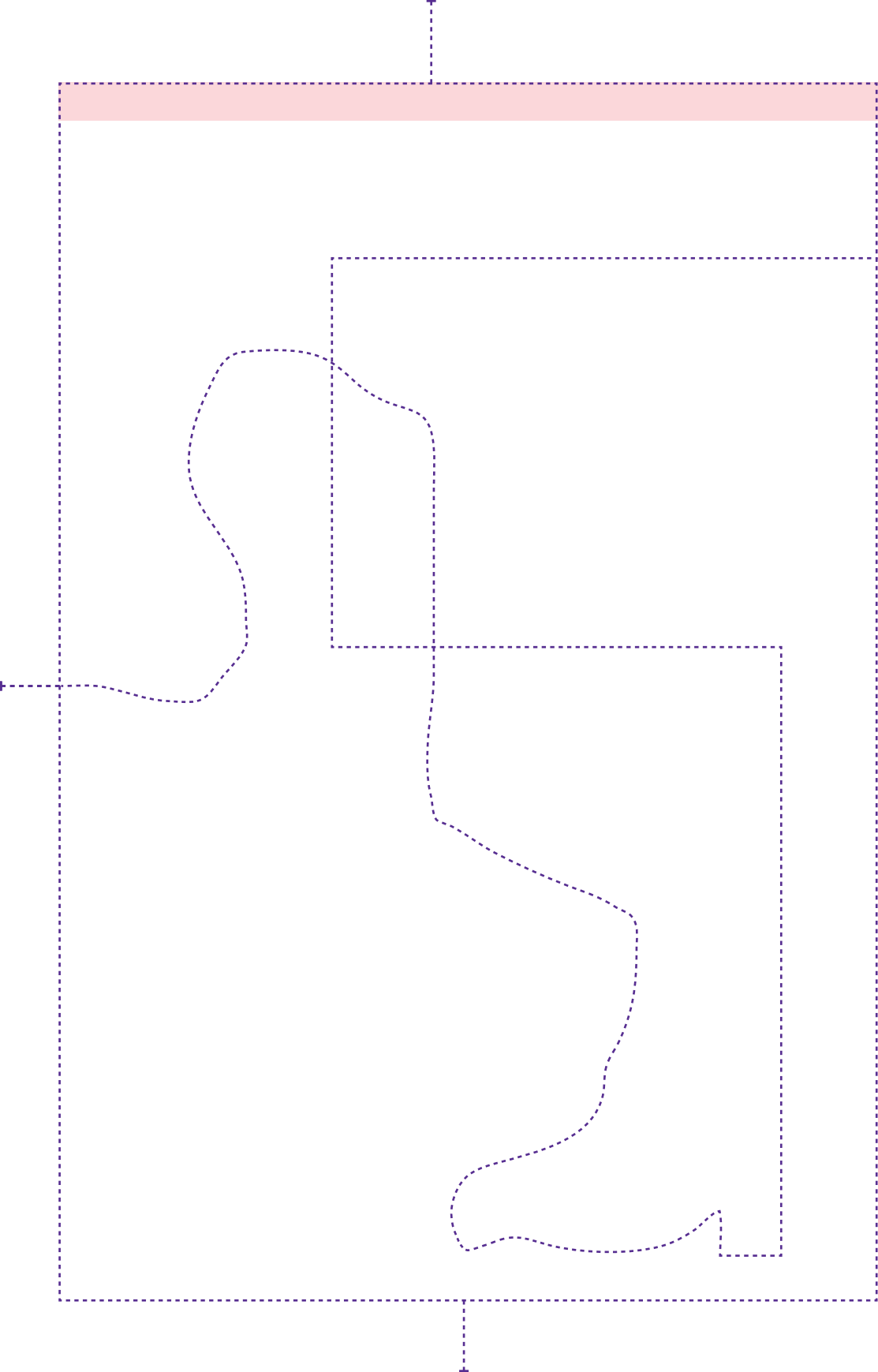
Like Nifemi always says, *"The gatekeepers of design in other parts of the world are usually at the apex of*



Figure 5. 1st Rendering of bamboo Dome for Cape Coast, Ghana (External).
Figure 6. 2nd Rendering of bamboo Dome for Cape Coast, Ghana (Internal).

society, culture, and social class, but in Africa, the reverse applies; the gatekeepers of design come from the grassroot level, creating accessibility and a utopia for the future of African design". This along with your passion that I have witnessed for fighting for the everyday person will be my mantra moving forward. I hope Cairo is treating you well in all its beauty and ambiguity.

Kwasi



building beyond

FROM: Kwasi
TO: Salma

I have always been hands on. Yet I never considered myself a designer. We are all designers at our core. All of us. It takes a walk down the streets of Accra to see how shop owners and traders arranged their goods and wares in almost installation-like forms to realize this.

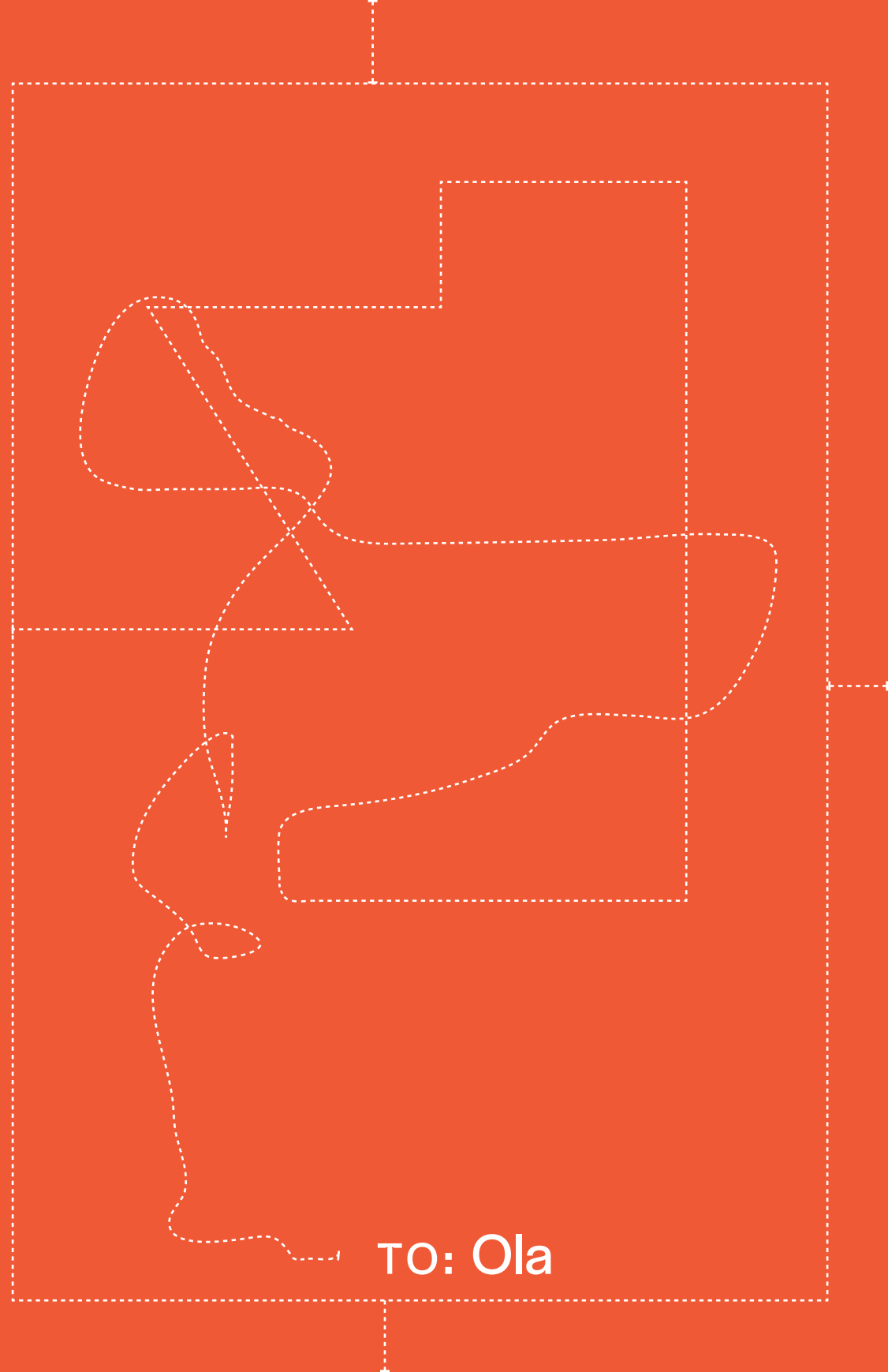


C

F o n d s

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Salma Belal



Salma Belal's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Kwasi's LETTER

FROM: Salma
01.2023 (Cairo)
TO: Ola

Dearest Ola,

As I write this letter, our walk from the ferry to the bus in Dakar comes to mind. I must admit, I've been trying to compose this letter in my head on several walks I've taken recently in Cairo, which is remarkably warm for this time of year. Between those solitudinous walks of mine and our meandering stroll back from Gorée Island in Senegal, there is something in common: a shared attempt of thinking, reflecting, and questioning particular histories. I recall you explaining how things were during your time in college at the University of Khartoum; how the university as a space for youngsters was shaped and influenced by certain ideological waves that also sculpted the social landscape of the city at that time. You also described how your personal relationship to your hometown has fluctuated since then. It makes me think of all the things, events, and places that shape us and shape the way we do what we do. It is not just commonality that motivated this letter, but rather an attempt at distinguishing the methods of reading, understanding, and making sense of things in relation to ourselves and our habitats. More specifically, I'm interested in how reading the past and the present can lead us to think about what the future might look like, and who we — as people, as practitioners, as collectives — could be in that future. The ties between Cairo and Khartoum, undeniably, have been many things at once, and if there's one thing we share, beyond the Nile of course, I think

it would be the extent to which politics shapes everyday life. Centralised power, resistance, uprising, fear, resilience, defeat — I stopped at this one for a bit — and most importantly hope, are all notions that I believe have moulded our contemporary history and our respective cities. Following the unfolding of many climactic events and ruptures, I've been asking myself: how are we adapting? And now I extend these questions to you as well. Are we keeping score of all our attempts of manoeuvring and devising? What have we learned? And where is that taking us?

I think I'll use this letter as a time capturer, to frame another rupture, but this time in mere silence. Currently, as a nation, we are harvesting what totalitarian regimes have sowed. Huge concrete columns for a halted monorail tower over the city, private waterfronts, broken flyovers, high-speed highways connecting the gated elite to the shores of the richest resorts, and towering structures are thrust into the desert, all of which provide proof of unilateral decisions in urban form, rendering the face of the "New Republic" and its "New Capital" in debt. All this newness has not come without cost. The price is vast demolitions, mass evictions, massacred green spaces, vanishing public space, and above all, the unbearable weight of an economic crisis.

'أسوأ جاي الي' or "*the future is bleak*," said a friend of mine the other day, as she monitored the latest devaluation of the Egyptian Pound on Google. To my surprise, I responded with, "*Yeah, maybe, but you never know*." My inability to affirm her prophecy was not out of a sense of hope, but rather of my uncertainty of our agency over the future.

As bleak as the present may seem, over the last decade I've been searching for signs that other narratives are possible. I trace them, and search within their margins for clues as to how they sprouted and managed to exist at this ambiguous time. During this period I've come upon multiple initiatives by individuals and groups of "urbanscapers" who have been thinking differently about our built environment, where the needs of communities are central to the project aims. They are perhaps not large and powerful in terms of scale, but they are impactful and significant nonetheless. Now I've found enough examples to trace a line of parallel and overlapping practices. And it feels a bit like I'm carving

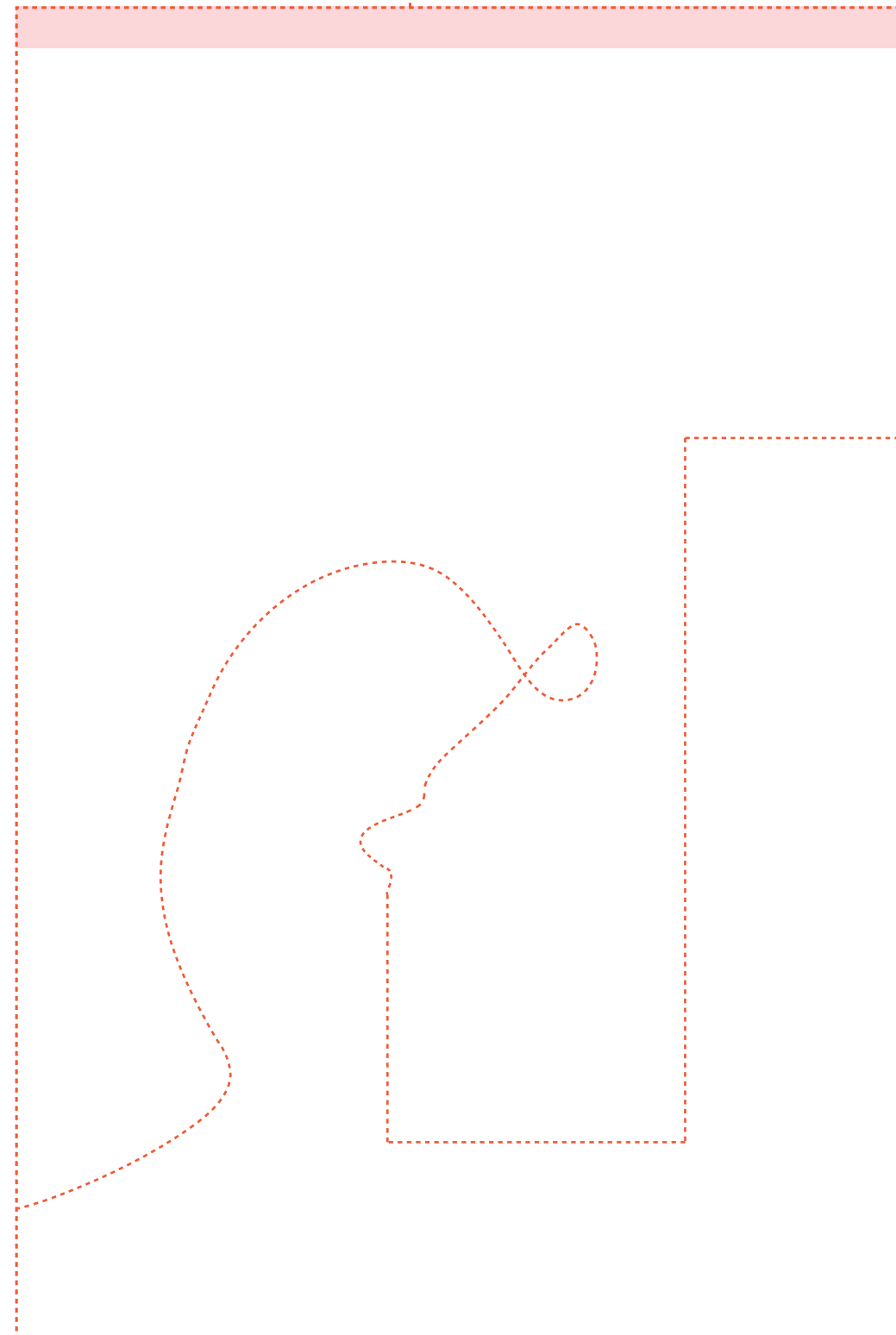
out and following my own path on that line, while I look at the emergence, evolution, and will to survive. I like to think of my research as a multi-dimensional time map, one that transcends linear direction. And rather than limiting the writing of history to something of the past, instead I wonder how the past brings us to the present moment? How will it carry us into the future? I want to redirect the question back to each of you, actually: How do we move on from here?

To draw this map, I've been looking not at what we do, but instead at how we do it. Now the question is, how will we keep doing what we do amid these ever changing conditions? I'm using the "we" in order to include myself in circumstances I am part of. The joy of this project is in capturing myself as a figure who sways across that line, landing and moving frequently, to find myself here writing about it to you.

The legend of this map is a long series of questions, which began with the initial prompt: How is local urbanism understood? A year later, this question expanded to encompass many subs, such as: How do we define "local"? How can we share our locally-rooted knowledge and experiences with others across different geographies? How can we share contemporary struggles and hopes as they occur, and not have to wait until they are archived in the annals of history? How can we think together about our future(s) across and within our differences and similarities? The list could go on, but I have to stop at some point.

These deeper questions have been established during our time together as a cohort, probably during our walks across Amsterdam, on the way to Gorée by ferry, beneath the big tree, and always on our walks back to the bus. Maybe on these walks, and on this quest for answers, we can unlock clues to help us navigate the present and hopefully the not so bleak future.

Warmly,
Salma



building beyond

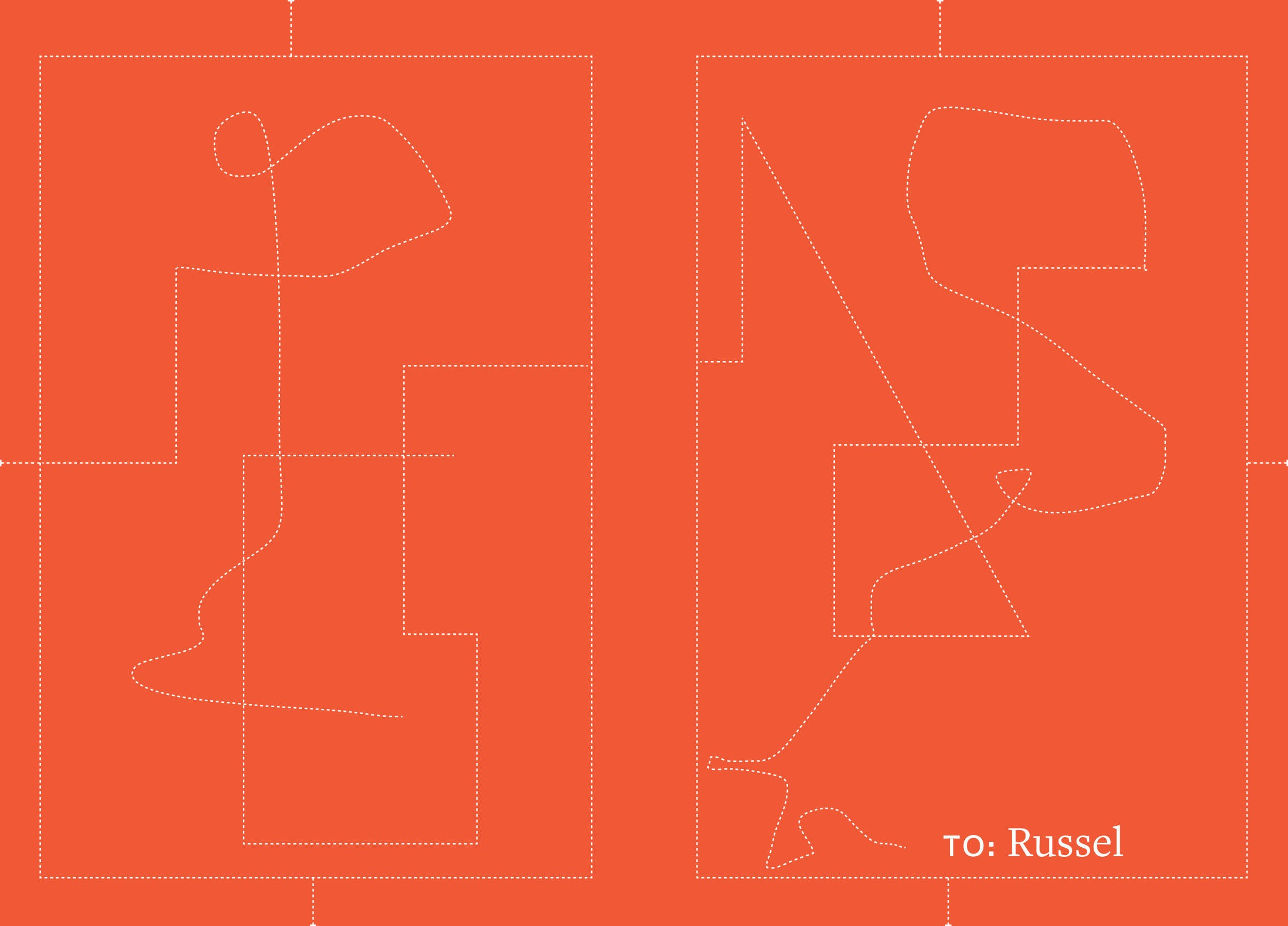
FROM: Salma
TO: Ola

Centralised power, resistance, uprising, fear, resilience, defeat — I stopped at this one for a bit — and most importantly hope, are all notions that I believe have moulded our contemporary history and our respective cities. Following the unfolding of many climactic events and ruptures, I've been asking myself: How are we adapting? And now I extend these questions to you as well.



creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Ola Hassanain



to: Russel

Ola Hassanain's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Salma's LETTER

FROM: Ola
04/2023
TO: Russel

Dear Russel,
"You have been raised in a way... but you can no longer live the way you have been raised."

These were my sister's words that rang in my head as I embarked on my trip to Europe, knowing full well that this would be a geography that held the most uncertainty.

We were in our living room when my older sister uttered these words. We sat across from my brother-in-law and his friend, sipping Kenyan black tea that was packaged in Sudan in a bright red box with a beautiful illustration of a serene landscape and two gazelles grazing. I was preparing to emigrate soon after.

Our conversation that day was about the difficulties faced by women in the public spaces of Khartoum, how certain embodied extensions of selfhood become restricted due to state laws like the *Public Law Order*, which came close to banning women from public space in the 1990s. In Khartoum, whenever you, as a woman, leave the enclosure of your home, you are faced with a daunting feeling that you might step over a threshold where expectations regarding how you should behave change. The uncertainty of the parameters put on us in public space is always transforming; the state imaginary is like a pulsating thing, and while inside it, you never fully become a being. One can set off on a journey through public space on foot or even by car, with the expectation that an entanglement of one's body and consciousness with a state terror will unfold at any given moment. The impact of state terror and the nullification

1. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Diacritics*, 17, No. 2 (Summer 1987): pp. 64-81, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/464747>.

of one's fear — just like my sister pointed out — of not being able to become a being¹, is twofold. I always read this as a demarcation of the spatial discourse and what it means to inhabit, and I was concerned about how I could break from it.

There has always been language about public space, public space and women, gender and spatial politics... just a huge body of literature. This literature — which is usually situated in academic forums and NGO practices — always works to bring forward a theory against state terror, but it is always detached from the slow and simmering violence against African bodies on the ground. Somehow the fear of not being able to become a being is never enough to change the language.

I write this letter with a simmering feeling of rage, frustration. These feelings are also part of the figuration of existing in a European geography. In writing this I have attempted to situate a firm belief that we do not have the spatial language or any form of spatial literacy that creates a lens by which we can link both our fears of existing in cities — as African women in this world — to the theorisation of ideas that could hold different political ecologies. Continuously looking through an opportunistic lens within which we view the world, a lens that is only triggered by imagery of protest and violence and the spectacular unfolding of a political event. So much so, that we usually do not see the larger scale terror, social deaths, and disposability of African populations without remorse, which runs parallel to that. The languages we have now will always render these concerns

What to do with the disposability of our fears, especially as we exist within the material conditions that perpetuate it?

devoid of political and radical ecologies. What we have now seems to gear critique towards known political ideologies (left and right, democracy paradigms, and practices and practitioners within the state institutions) rather than within the continuous, unfolding disposability of African urbanities.

The register of fear and concern that brings this language of talking about urbanity even from embodied experiences of state terror, some of which we have inherited and some of which we are implicated in, seems to be separate from the terror against our local Black revolutionary formation, also of our creative regimes and oral histories that we have inherited and that makes our material culture. They are always nullified and devoid of the struggle, death, and violence some of us have seen. What to do with the disposability of our fears, especially as we exist within the material conditions that perpetuate it? How can we translate any of this, our writings, our modes of theorising, to help build spatial literacy?

As a trained architect, I used to work in private corporations defined as “nonprofit educational institutions”. Most of the time I had no romantic illusions about the nature of our job as conceivers of our surroundings. We were hired to affirm and stabilise the elite university/college pedagogies that we were trained by. We can demand accountability for white colonial and Arab supremacist/(hetero)sexist eruptions of violence, and ask for security and the flexibility and grace to continue doing so as our counterparts are. This demand can sometimes be denied or curtailed but we do not pretend that these institutions exist to bring justice to the world or function in the interests of the oppressed (particularly if such institutions are located in gentrifying neighbourhoods and are receiving donor money). If you have no illusions about your “day job” and its function in stabilising (while admonishing excessive violence from) racial capitalism, why would you have illusions about the government/state investment in the disposability of African life? Why do we agree to be there and why are we continuing to do the labour?

Some might argue that no one forced me to be an architect or an artist (as always, the places in which we are implicated in the accumulation of cultural capital, will never afford

2. Omar al-Bashir and Gaafar Nimeiry are former head of states of Sudan.

us the power to render an equal cut from that capital). This geography runs on imperial democracy built on class, racial conquest, and rape. But we will always want the gig.

In response to the question, “*Where do we take our grievances and realisations to?*” I would often say: We are made at the limit of the end of the world, as Denise Ferreira da Silva (*Unpayable Debt*) calls it. Here I would like to point out that our Building Beyond cohort has, even if temporarily, offered us space and connections to each other where our concerns are our central.

I personally like knowing in my bones that this world isn’t really going to hold us. Because I do see a pattern of political engagement. As the Arabic saying goes, “*We see an elephant coming at us but poke at its shadow.*”

When have last seen people in this geography of working class or labouring poor or dispossessed of paid labour, draw up petitions to draft against governments or companies who are directly linked to disposability of African populations (Joy James, *Stop Cop City*) whose policies were more neoliberal than AlBashir, or Niemry².

However when people rebelled we were eliminated — and this is the ease by which African disposability takes place, fully sanctioned and witnessed by the global material conditions we are under. I hereby sign off. I can not offer a positive note, just yet...

Ola

BIBLIOGRAPHY

James, Joy, *Beyond Cop Cities: Dismantling State and Corporate-Funded Armies and Prisons*, (2024).

Ferreira da Silva, Denise, *Unpayable Debt* (2022).

building beyond

FROM: Ola
TO: Russel

In writing this I have attempted to situate a firm belief that we do not have the spatial language or any form of spatial literacy that creates a lens by which we can link both our fears of existing in cities—as African women in this world—to the theorisation of ideas that could hold different political ecologies.



C

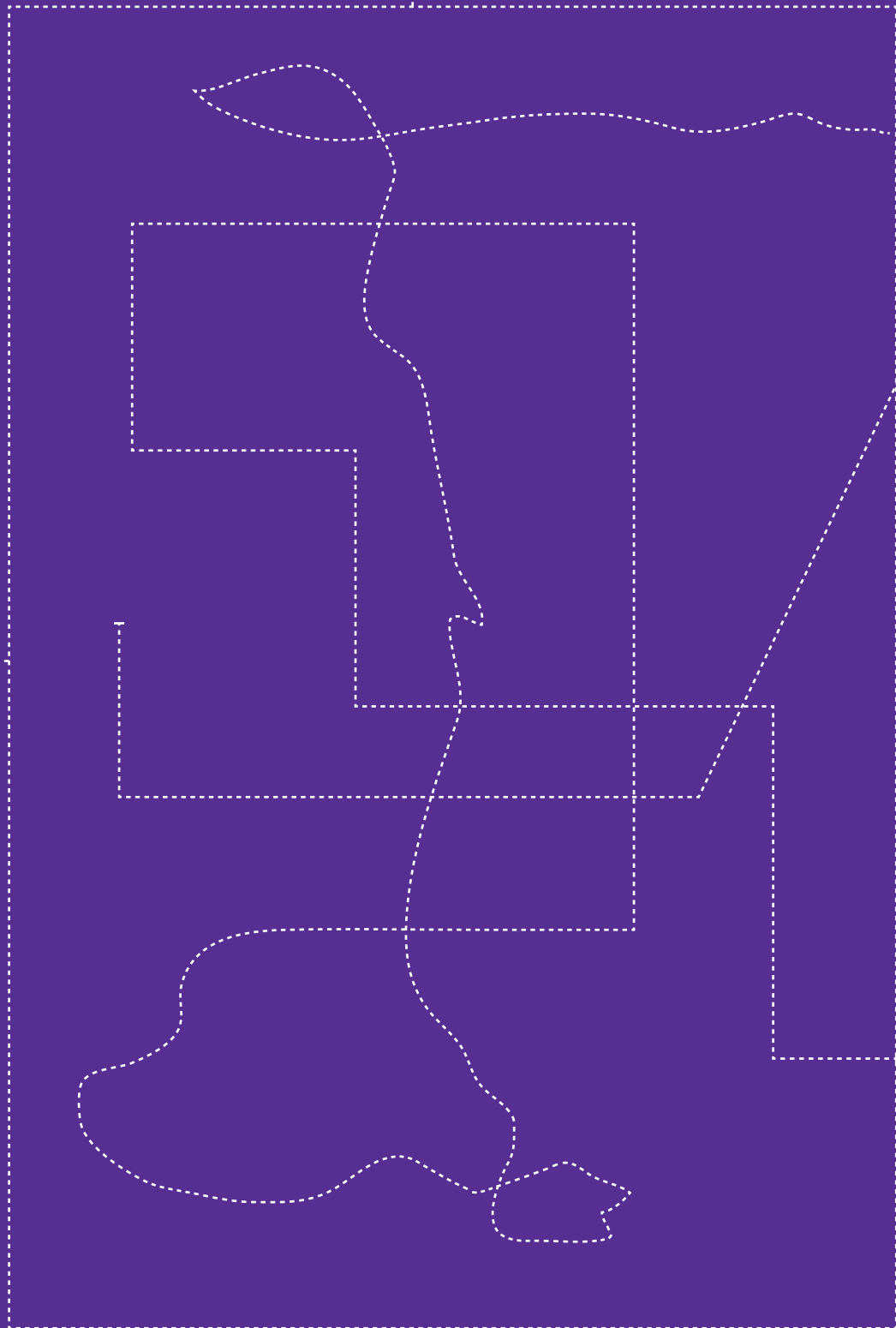
F o n d s

creative
industries
fund NL

FROM:
Russel

Hlongwane

beyond



Russel Hlongwane's LETTER

WITH EXTRACTS FROM: Ola's LETTER

ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES IS A SHAREHOLDER OF SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

FROM: Russel
TO: Yishak

Dearest Yishak,

Where to begin?

Let me start by quoting, rather begrudgingly, Shawn Carter, in my own Pan-African breath, where he quotes the Wu-Tang Clan with the line, *"Your seed, married his seed, married my seed" / That's how we keep Carter money all in the family.*" In short, it is my dream that our children combine to form next of kins who are subjects of no land or nation. Whether or not you agree with it, this is my dream.

Anyway, my friend. The first memory that springs to mind when thinking of you, or us, has to be those late night, meandering walks we took in Amsterdam. The most profound moment must have been our last day together in Dakar, and the last memory to arrive is our first ever in-person encounter on your home turf, at Addis airport. My memories come to me in that sequence, always. So many memories resurface when I think of these three, tangentially connected conversations we had on these occasions. It's safe to say that I found most value through our productive "differences". I'm reminded of these differences when I talk to you; when I say 1 p.m. it is not your 1 p.m., because Ethiopia has developed its own construct of time. In these moments, I refer to a different time orientation, and in the act of reaching for that other orientation I am able to think and respond differently. I enjoy this.

As well as your country's register of time, I've enjoyed learning about the Ethiopian custom of naming, that

you carry your grandfather's first name as your last. These two examples made possible yet another way of reorienting myself towards different ways of doing across the continent.

One of the allures of (these) difference(s), is how they offer new if not more ways of dismantling our shared "enemy". We come from different traditions yet our cultures are akin. I'm drawn to this common cultural space that we inhabit in different ways. To be more precise, we come from a long history that has taken different forms, yet here we are trying to contend with a common future, one that I think is rather precarious, if not outright beastly. I don't want to trade in the currency of doom that futurism studies often depicts, but I think architectural imagination has also fallen victim to this hyper-inflated sense of doom. It seems that our brain power is not powerful enough to reach beyond the dramatisation and overstatement of the catastrophe, especially in a moment when we are in desperate need of some pragmatic imagination that is both aesthetic and critical. This is a quality that I am earnestly trying to cultivate, to such an extent that I feel my practice is futile if it is devoid of a tangible resolve or solution in a context where excessive theory with no action will do very little for the material conditions of African people.

COFFEE BREWING AND URGENCIES OF OTHER KINDS

Just above, I spoke about a common enemy, to which I referred as the future, and I called this future precarious if not outright beastly. Allow me to build on this. Addis is clearly difficult to tame, man, and there is a particular kind of havoc that speed and time wreaks on our locales. The beast seems to change form so quickly that by the time we figure out its nature, it has already taken the form of something else.

It functions a bit like malware, invisibly eroding a longstanding tradition. And just like that, a century-long tradition vanishes, as if it never existed. Then it takes on a new form as a myth. One example of this, as you narrated, is the tradition of coffee making and drinking in Ethiopia. I think I remember you saying there was an entire elaborate sequence of gestures,

patience, communion, and sharing... A process lasting about 40 minutes with multi-layered significance has now been reduced, in urban areas, to a transaction of under two minutes. The “loss” here is not time, of course, but everything else that happens over the course of those 40 minutes. If we look at this as an equation: 2 minutes of tradition + 38 minutes of myth = the answer is up for grabs.

So, against the aggressive tide of time, speed, and change, we (as practitioners and theorists) are responding with theory upon theory, with little urgency for application.

Before I close off on this point, I wish to stress the importance of theory, and the act of world-making that is made possible through it. My concern is what happens when we respond to problems with theory upon theory that have little potential for application against the aggressive tide of time, speed, and change. With that said, your commitment to thinking and making remains inspirational to me.

NARRATING THE ENEMY

Could it be that time and speed is the enemy? Or is time and speed the tools of the enemy? If so, who is the enemy? Does the enemy have a face? Either way, this common enemy is what binds us. In the way that I’ve characterised the enemy, we could call it the future. We are bound by this common enemy that we call the future, and we are bound too, to the future. I must admit, deep down inside me, I am reluctant to cast the future as an enemy. Perhaps my vocabulary is all wrong. I need neologisms to narrate the e_n_my, I need neologisms to think with and through solutions. Perhaps, we, my friend, need a new language that is in equal parts alien and familiar. In essence I think our work is trying to produce such a language. Hopefully soon enough we can give it form and let it inhabit our world, or at best, let us inhabit a world that was produced by our language.

In one of our collective moments, you spoke movingly about how architecture has been weaponised through its imagery of an “urban future.” The alluring images mesmerise those who aspire to, yet will never reap the benefits of such mega-scaled projects. This made me

think of architecture as a form of hypnosis, or the hypnosis of form. Architecture as an elixir for the masses, a gateway drug to a new form.

Let me depart from the metropolis of Addis and return home to Durban, to a little strip that I call “Little Addis”.

LEAVING ADDIS IN ETHIOPIA AND ARRIVING AT LITTLE ADDIS IN DURBAN

South Africa has a massive migrant community of peoples from across the continent, and more recently an explosion of Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples. As with many places, on most days there are often tensions between migrant bodies and local bodies, harassment from corrupt cops, and other microaggressions. I’ve been curious now for a few years about how the children of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant folks who are born in South Africa will develop a critique of South Africa’s treatment of their parents’ generation. They will be speaking as subjects of South Africa, who are both in tension with, but also (hopefully) from a position of security in South Africa. I think this will bring a whole new texture to South Africanness.

I will close this section with two points. Recently, I was shown documentation of a debate from 1957 between high school students from South Africa, Ethiopia, the former Gold Coast, and Nigeria. These students were responding to the question: Are Americans prejudiced in their opinions about Africa? At some point in the debate, the Ethiopian student raises the thorny point that he is not a Negro, but rather a people of the lost tribe. It was as humorous as it was tragic — and vice versa.

It did, however, signal how far we have come since then, and the situation of Little Addis shows how far we have yet to go. But more importantly, I wonder how this generation of South African children with Ethiopian parents would engage with this point raised by the Ethiopian figure?

OK, let me move on and close this letter with a topic we’re both interested in: the rural.

THE POETICS OF RURAL FORM

We do not accept the city as it has been given to us, nor are we clear on the conditions on which we want to claim the city.

I wish to read a book that narrates the landscape and spatial orientation of rural households in relation to mountains, escarpment, and human and animal life. I'm endlessly searching for ways to find words for how space is inhabited, arranged, and constituted in rural settings. Across most of rural South Africa, there exist breathing spaces between dwellings, and between one homestead and the next. I am trying to understand how and where I might get the knowledge and interpretation from which to understand the rationale behind these breathing spaces — from the cranium of the mountain where the goats roam free, to the mountain's chest where cattle venture, all the way to the mountain foot where human settlements are scattered.

I am unsatisfied with my inability to narrate the poetics of rural form and being. Till next time...

Best regards,
Russel Hlongwane

