

New Nollywood: A Sketch of Nollywood's Metropolitan New Style

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Abstract: Recent experimentation by Nollywood producers has encouraged increasing differentiation of film practices as a strategy for contending with a demanding video market. “New Nollywood” refers to a select group of aesthetically sophisticated films intended for a new tiered distribution method, beginning with theatrical release and ending with DVD release. Nigeria’s upscale multiplex cinemas are therefore a starting point for examining what is new—and not so new—in Nollywood. This article argues that New Nollywood films and the cinemas in which they appear appeal directly to spectators’ senses by promising not only a movie and shopping, but also an affective experience closely bound up with global consumerism. The films exhibit a metropolitan vantage point that emphasizes subjects such as airline travel, trendy technology, consumer culture, global pop culture, lifestyle brands, high fashion, and luxury goods. These films advertise their “modernity,” which is not presented as a consolidated order of knowledge and values, but rather as an assemblage of signifiers of city life. Whereas mainstream Nollywood continues to produce strong narratives that resonate with its intended audience, New Nollywood—with its emphasis on images and style—is a direct expression of the cultural and economic forces shaping life in Lagos today.

Résumé: L’expérimentation récente par les producteurs de Nollywood a encouragé la différenciation croissante de pratiques de cinéma en tant que stratégie permettant de soutenir un marché de la vidéo en constante évolution. “Nouveau Nollywood” fait référence à un groupe restreint de films esthétiquement sophistiqués destinés à une nouvelle méthode de distribution à plusieurs étapes, en commençant par la

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sortie en salles et en se terminant avec la sortie en DVD. Les cinémas multiplexes haut de gamme du Nigeria sont donc un point de départ pour examiner ce qui est nouveau—et pas si nouveau—dans Nollywood. Cet article affirme que les films de Nouveau Nollywood et les cinémas dans lesquels ils sortent font appel à la sensibilité des spectateurs en mettant l'accent sur les thèmes de connectivité, mobilité et contemporanéité et en reliant ces thèmes avec le consumérisme mondial. Les films présentent un point de vue métropolitain qui met l'accent sur des sujets tels que les voyages en avion, la technologie à la mode, la culture de consommation, la culture pop mondiale, les marques vestimentaires, la haute couture et les produits de luxe. Ces films annoncent leur “modernité,” qui n'est pas présentée comme un ordre consolidé des connaissances et des valeurs, mais plutôt comme un ensemble de signifiants de la vie en ville. Alors que le Nollywood traditionnel a maintenu une connexion avec l'imaginaire populaire de son public cible, le Nouveau-Nollywood avec son accent sur les images et le style est une expression directe des aspirations culturelles et économiques qui façonnent la vie à Lagos aujourd'hui.

Keywords: Nollywood; popular culture; urbanism; affect theory; globalization

The story of Nollywood's unlikely origins has by now been thoroughly detailed in scholarly and journalistic accounts that often frame the Nigerian film industry as perpetually on the rise. It is true that in its first decade Nollywood thrived by releasing thousands of films directly into video markets and networks of petty commerce that carried the films across West Africa. However, by 2007 signs within Nollywood suggested that the industry had entered a period of generalized fatigue, both among producers disheartened by various constraints on its growth and among audiences hungering for new stories and more refined images. Now earnings have also dwindled due to piracy and high levels of competition. Nevertheless, Nollywood's rise to the status of regional cultural domination has brought about alternative opportunities for distribution, prompting a number of filmmakers to begin experimenting with high-stakes, big budget films explicitly intended for exhibition at national, regional, and diasporic cinemas. The results have stirred optimism that the industry may soon witness a renaissance and have inspired a new watchword, “cinema culture,” which in Lagos in 2011 captured the hope that Nollywood might find new life at the clutch of multiplex cinemas that continue to multiply in major cities across southern Nigeria. The top-of-the-line films that have since emerged from this ongoing process of industry segmentation have come to be known as “New Nollywood.”

For industry insiders, this new brand of films satisfies the anticipation that the industry will gradually rise to achieve so-called international standards as its films travel along broader regional and diaspora cultural flows, extending their reach to wider audiences and propelling even more growth and improvement. But the films themselves remain scarce in local video markets, in part because producers must safeguard their films—and the

large financial investments they represent—from exposure to the piracy that attends wide-scale DVD circulation. New Nollywood finds itself confronted by the same dilemma that canonical African cinema has faced for decades—how to make sophisticated filmmaking both widely appealing and financially sustainable to audiences on the continent. To be sure, the production and distribution circuits for Nollywood and African cinema remain distinct, and as Jonathan Haynes (2014) admonishes, we should be careful not to flatten or conflate them.¹ For instance, the film festivals that traditionally sustain the repertory of African cinema, including FESPACO, the Carthage Film Festival, and the Durban International Film Festival, marginalize video film submissions, while alternative vetting institutions such as the Africa Movie Academy Awards emerge as part of the momentum created by Nigeria's video film boom. Alternatively, countries like Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon continue to produce great achievements in film, even as they play a role in the growth of popular screen media. Recent scholarship has linked Nollywood to vibrant video film practices in Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Barbados, and the global African diaspora (see Garritano 2012; Krings & Okome 2013; Şaul & Austen 2010; Ajibade 2007). In an important essay on this proliferation of screen media, Moradewun Adejunmobi discusses a “televisual turn” in African filmed narrative fiction (2015). I intend here not to argue that New Nollywood negates this televisual turn, but rather to suggest that competition or convergence are both insufficient models to describe the diversification of film practices and media forms found in Africa today.

This article examines how New Nollywood and its spaces of exhibition lend fuller texture and density to an emergent neoliberal subjectivity. An urban professional class assumes a central role in these films, particularly as the aspirational model of “Africa Rising” to meet new opportunities wrought by globalization. Troubling as their ideological limitations may be, these films push the boundary of new aesthetic trends in which contradictory realities can be subsumed beneath an assemblage of affective encounters with sumptuous objects, places, and lifestyles. This analysis therefore seeks to carry forward Carmela Garritano's illuminating comments on the aesthetics of new Nigerian and Ghanaian film productions, a style she describes as “an assemblage of desires, bodies, objects, and intensities that presents spectators with pleasurable, affective encounters with new urban consumerism” (2014:47). Like Garritano, I draw from Anastup Basu's *Bollywood in the Age of New Media* (2010), a study of affect and informatics in Bollywood cinema, in order to imagine a new set of questions that we might put to new African screen media.

Trends of Segmentation

The recent shifts in film production and distribution methods respond to the overproduction of low-grade movies that continue to saturate the video market as well as the unregulated television broadcast of Nollywood movies,

which has created a new puncture in an already leaky distribution system.² These conditions have prompted some producers to push the limits of how quickly and cheaply a film can be shot, pressed to video CD, and disbursed to video markets, a process that appears today more like the assembly line of a factory, or “subsistence filmmaking,” as one veteran director skeptically terms it (Bond Emeruwa, personal communication, June 15, 2014). These sensationalist films rip stories straight from the headlines of local tabloid publications and even acquire their cover images directly from local video tabloids.

Another trend has produced a boom in indigenous-language films that appeal to audiences based on shared language, experiences, and attention to topical issues. Yoruba-language filmmakers have quite successfully operated in this way for years, addressing a ready-made loyal audience on perennial themes, with actors whose presence alone implies a welcome predictability for audiences familiar with their screen personas and performance repertoires. Carmela Garritano has observed a similar trend in Ghana’s video film industry, where she identifies a surge in Akan-language films that are “topical in focus and made and consumed quickly [and that] dialogue directly with local publics” (2012:172–73).

Producers on the other end of the spectrum have created a growing body of films that depict particular modes of consumption, gender relations, family bonds, and forms of global popular culture in a bid for wider transnational reach. These filmmakers have pursued the path of greater professionalization, but the most successful production companies employ a strategic combination of high- and low-end film practices. Emem Isong’s Royal Arts Academy, for instance, is organized so as to allow the production unit to work simultaneously on four or five films in different stages of completion and to release no fewer than six features in a year.³ Like a major film studio, Royal Arts can anticipate that a few features like *Okon Lagos* (2012) or *Nollywood Hustlers* (2009) will sell exceptionally well and will thereby allow Isong to recuperate any expenses lost on other films. This method gives Royal Arts the advantage of maintaining continual forward momentum, since Isong does not depend on turnover from one film to bankroll new films. As she put it in an interview, “I don’t wait for the turnover, but I know eventually it’s going to come” (quoted in Ryan 2014:177). New productions and releases are lined up so that they overlap, meaning that Isong does not need to wait for one film to peak in sales before putting money into a new production. This affords her producers and directors the leeway to tailor different filmmaking practices to low- and high-end markets in an overall strategy for attenuating financial risk. For instance, Isong explains, her Ibibio language films, produced quickly and inexpensively, are so popular with audiences in the Southeast that they bring a larger return than her high-budget English-language films that can circulate across West Africa. In this sense, Royal Arts employs the same logic of cross-collateralization that, according to Simon During (1997), was common among the first movies consciously aimed at transnational film markets.

The difference is that Isong's company makes this model workable across the ethnic, linguistic, and regional lines along which the industry has witnessed growing segmentation. The fact that this sort of differentiation occurs within a single company, almost like Hollywood's two-tiered system of "A" and "B" films, indicates that Nollywood's recent hodgepodge of films does not arise from a gap in technical capabilities or competency as much as it reflects different filmmakers' strategies for contending with an unwieldy video market.

By contrast, the sophisticated films of "New Nollywood" reach out to transnational and metropolitan audiences by bypassing the grassroots home video market in favor of new distribution windows, including satellite television, streaming video websites, video on-demand, in-flight entertainment, and especially theaters in West Africa and the diaspora. While not every Nigerian film that appears in cinemas is a New Nollywood film, all the films in this new wave made their debut in theaters before ever appearing on DVD, and many have never made it as far as DVD distribution. The theatrical release in 2010 of four Nollywood films—Chineze Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey*, Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine*, Jeta Amata's *Inale*, and Lonzo Nzekwe's *Anchor Baby*—signaled a coup for the industry in view of local producers. These were followed in 2011 by Mahmood Ali-Balogun's *Tango with Me*, Obi Emelonye's *Mirror Boy*, Funke Akindele's *The Return of Jenifa*, and nearly a dozen others. The following year saw the theatrical release of more than twenty Nollywood films as the slotting of Nollywood movies alongside Hollywood and Bollywood fare became a normal arrangement. A number of these early films did exceedingly well at the box office, and although few films have since come close to replicating this level of success, acclaim from local critics and favorable publicity still offer these films large sums of symbolic, if not actual, capital.⁴ In this sense, the cinemas serve as both the first window in a tiered system of release and a starting point for gauging what is new—and not so new—in Nollywood.

Metropolitan Audiences and Multiplex Cinemas

In 2004 Silverbird Group, a private media house with holdings in radio, film distribution and exhibition, television, and real estate, opened a five-screen cinema on the top floor of the company's newly built shopping center in the posh seaside residential and commercial district of Victoria Island.⁵ The construction of the country's first multiscreen cinema in an affluent pocket of urban development signaled a departure from the cinema culture of the 1970s and 1980s, which flourished around some thirty cinema halls located across Lagos that brought American, Chinese, Indian, and some Nigerian films to broad urban audience until these theaters closed in the early 1990s.⁶ The success of the Silverbird franchise sparked renewed interest in cinema exhibition, which seemed more viable given the return of relative security and stability to Lagos. Today three companies—Silverbird, Genesis, and Filmhouse—operate more than twenty

multiplex cinemas in major cities across southern Nigeria, including Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Uyo, Enugu, Calabar, and Ibadan.

These cinema operators envision their theaters as leisure destinations for those seeking entertainment and an escape from the enervating grind of the city. “It’s an excursion,” as Jonathan Murray-Bruce, the general manager of Silverbird Entertainment, put it to me during a conversation about the galleria’s opening.

If you have a cinema alone, then people just come and go. We want to have an entertainment area, a mall where people will come to the cinema, go to shops, and [partake of] everything. When you have a mall and a cinema together, you have a lot of people coming, but you want them to stay around. Those same people will want to go to a movie, will want to eat, will want to shop. . . . It’s interrelated. They play off each other. And soon it becomes a destination, a full day event—especially considering traffic and how hard it is to get anywhere [in Lagos]. You want a place where its convenient for people to come, enjoy their time, and then they go home so they aren’t going from one place to another. It’s more incentive for them to come out. (Personal communication, March 20, 2013)

The boundary between the chaotic streetscape and the galleria’s highly controlled interior is marked by a security gate manned by a detail of private security guards. Beyond the entrance, one immediately confronts large advertisement banners draped from the top to the ground floor, bearing the brand images of telecommunications companies such as MTN, Airtel, and Etisalat, as well as those of Airk Airlines, Coca-Cola, and regional banks. The images encourage one’s identification with a lifestyle of pleasure and enjoyment, of high technology, high fashion, and the idea that one must, as the motto above one retail clothing store exhorts, “Wear it, Love it, Live it.” Within the building, screen media are pervasive. A digital projector casts a video image across the floor before the circular central plaza, while dozens of smaller digital screens are perched around the mall showing advertising images. The Union Bank on the ground level features a twelve-by-eight-foot flat screen television that cycles through trailers for films currently showing at the cinema on the fourth floor. Small plasma-screen consoles beam image and sound from atop small kiosks provided for patrons to charge their mobile devices. The mall’s dedicated private generator, an expensive but essential infrastructure given the unreliable public grid that subjects Lagos to daily blackouts, produces the electricity.

The configuration of shops and attractions gives one the sense of an array of global spatial imaginaries drawn together, enframed within the structure of the shopping mall and composed to suggest their immediacy and accessibility. The complex configuration of this spatial design expands the “cinema experience” into a dense set of affective associations, such that, as Silverbird’s Jonathan Murray-Bruce observed, they “play off each other, and soon it becomes a destination, a full day event.” As he later remarked

to me: "Cinema, what you're selling is an experience. You come in, you get into a hall, and you are away from the outside world. You come in by yourself, with a date, with a friend. They get to immerse themselves in another world. They have the big screen, the sound. It is easier to lose yourself in the story" (personal communication, March 20, 2013). In this way, the material organization of the multiplex cinema conscripts the body in the constitution of "modern" subjectivity and foregrounds the illusion of free and infinite mobility in the experience of that modernity.

Carmela Garritano recalls that when she entered the Silverbird franchise branch at the Accra Mall in Ghana, "though many of the specific stores were unknown to me, the mall seemed an utterly familiar place, its geography and atmosphere replicating any shopping mall I might find in the United States. And this, of course, is precisely the point" (2012:176). Be it Accra or Lagos, the mall promises the same pleasures that a clientele who have enjoyed a level of cosmopolitan exposure come to expect from similar encounters abroad. To produce this effect, Silverbird Galleria in Lagos imported specialized technology and equipment and enlisted expert consultants from Universal Cinema Services, according to Patrick Lee, general manager of Silverbird's sister cinema, Ozone, and a member of Silverbird Group's board of trustees (personal communication, March 13, 2013). Based in Texas, Universal Cinema Services functions something like a one-stop shop for cinema franchises from Japan and Italy to Ghana and Nigeria. The company provides consultation on architectural and spatial design, specialized labor for outfitting the cinema, and procurement of technology and equipment, from the film projector and sound system right down to the seating, popcorn machine, wallpaper, and tiles. It should therefore come as no surprise that for any well-traveled cinema-goer, entering a cinema hall provokes an experience of the uncanny.

The shopping center thus caters to the city's most elite consumers and explicitly brands itself as a landmark of exuberant leisure. It is precisely because of this overt coding that the Silverbird Galleria serves as a symbolically charged reference point for all Lagosians. In one scene from *The Return of Jenifa*, for instance, the metropolitan "big girl," Jenifa (Funke Akindele), enjoys an afternoon of shopping and spa treatment there. The sequence, otherwise insignificant to the plot, moves from establishing shots to interior shots so as to follow the character as she crosses the mall's threshold. The sequence suggests a fascination with the ability of the mall, like that of the cinematic apparatus, to create a lifelike world of its own. The shopping center provides the enhanced allure of environments that Achille Mbembe calls "synthetic spacetimes" or "constructed tableaux on which disparate images are grafted": environments "through which late modernity and the globalization of capitalism have transformed human [sensory] perceptions" (2008:60). This stimulation of visitors' sensory perceptions and the mall's commodification of leisure time are integral to the space's construction of modern subjectivity, as we glimpse in Jenifa's orchestrated passage through the mall's threshold.

Although a singular landmark within Lagos, Silverbird's architecture and décor are a local iteration of a spatial form that is reproduced around the world, a globalized sensorium providing a unique affective experience and promising to insert spectators, as if seamlessly, into an immersive space of consumption that is shared around the globe. Significantly, the theater and cinematic experiences around which it is constructed promise similar pleasures: the illusion of freedom, as Amit Rai argues, in the form of choice from a plethora of options, and the complete immersion of the body in "image-commodity consumption through the simulation of reality as its intensification" (2009:140). The cinema's sensorium, furthermore, is as much temporal as it is spatial. In fact, the fantasy of immediacy and perfect contemporaneity with global media flows is so integral to Silverbird cinema's aura that the company petitioned (successfully) for the rights to premiere Hollywood blockbusters in tandem with their American premiere. Closing the temporal gap has enhanced the cinema-goer's fantasy of partaking in a global consumer culture in real time. In short, when attending the cinema, one retreats into a décor of continuity, mobility, and immediacy that dramatically contrasts with the economic scarcity and spatial disjuncture found elsewhere in Lagos.

In the Nollywood films screened at Silverbird, the stories are themselves invested in the display of goods that "offer themselves as artworks not just for sale but also for use in people's fantasies and in the production of lifestyles" (Mbembe 2008:60). One can imagine an analogy between the films' engagement with the spectator and the shopping mall's designed effect on the shopper, a parallel that has long existed in other commercial film industries but seemed impossible for Nollywood given its arduous conditions of production. Garritano argues similarly, in regard to the Ghanaian film industry, that the cinematic world of glamour films functions in parallel with the environment of the mall, "provoking desire not only for the goods on display, but for the characters' lifestyles" (2012:177). This same commodity aesthetic is at work in many New Nollywood films, such as Michelle Bello's romantic comedy *Flower Girl* (2012). In one key scene, set in a clothing boutique, the modest and plainly dressed protagonist, Kemi, transforms herself into a posh socialite in a makeover montage that would be recognizable to anyone familiar with contemporary Hollywood romantic comedies. Kemi models for her friend in the dressing room, trying on several outfits that stylistically signify different personas and new subjectivities, virtually enacting the fantasy inspired by the mall boutique's "Wear it, Love it, Live it" motto. In this scene alone, we can glimpse Nollywood's growing power to link image, affect, and the performance of new subjectivities.

New Nollywood gravitates toward these mall venues because they bear the imprint of global consumerism, and because releasing a film at the multiplex cinema can be imagined as tantamount to injecting Nigerian film culture into the global slipstream of image-commodities. With images styled after sleek advertisements and enclosed, controlled storyworlds that lend an illusion of seamlessness, New Nollywood appears comfortably at home in

the world of the multiplex, striking an eerie visual harmony with the cinema sensorium. On another register, the films and cinemas both demonstrate a deep preoccupation with real and imagined mobility, as evident in the films' narratives, which traverse national, cultural, and economic borders, and in the confines of the multiplex where the fantasy of having the world in one's grasp comes alive through a complex assemblage of semiotic and sensory stimulations.

Multiplex cinemas of this sort do not succeed by catering to the biggest audiences possible but rather by drawing an urban consumer class willing to pay ₦1500 (U.S.\$9.50) per ticket and a loyal cadre of university students able scrape together ₦500–1000 for a discounted seat. Reluctant cinema operators began scheduling local films to appease tacit pressure from the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and public comments by Nollywood stakeholders. The move was viewed as a small concession to avoid a publicity battle over the cultural content of films appearing at the new cinemas. Since then, however, cinema operators have turned the matter to their advantage by displacing publicity and advertising expenses onto producers. From their perspective the current arrangement costs nothing, requires no long-term commitments, expands their film offerings, and attaches their brand image to the "cool" aura surrounding New Nollywood. Nevertheless, these cinemas do not envision themselves as part of the local film industry, with the exception of Filmhouse, which is amenable to local producers. This poses an obstacle for producers who would like to see cinemas develop into a viable alternative distribution platform. Recently the case has been made that what Nollywood and the average Nigerian needs is an extensive network of single-screen community cinemas in low-income, high-density neighborhoods. Proponents envision something similar to existing cinema venues in Kenya and South Africa and more formal than the ubiquitous video parlors (Tomaselli & Shepperson 2014).⁷

Among producers, cinema distribution has prompted excitement owing, in part, to the belief circulating within and outside the film industry that New Nollywood movies do not suffer financial losses. Speculation has further fostered the belief that any theatrical release, even a short run at a handful of screens, will generate at least modest revenue for the producer, while some dream of making back their money before their film ever hits the video markets. But appearances are not what they seem, given that, in more cases than not, local films lose money on theatrical releases.⁸ Federal and state entertainment taxes on exhibition venues remain punitively high, at as much as 20 percent of a film's net box office earnings. The remaining revenue is shared between the cinema operator and the producer according to a prearranged sliding scale which, under the most equitable contracts, begins at an even 50/50 split and slides each week in favor of the cinema operator. In a film's final week in theaters, as much as 70 percent of the revenue could go to the exhibitor, but few Nigerian films remain in theaters for long. Finally, producers who contract with a film distributor,

like Blue Pictures, Silverbird Film Distribution, or Film One Distribution, forfeit a percent of their film's earnings to the distributors in commission fees. When all is settled, the producer collects between 30 and 35 percent of the gross box office earnings, and 30 percent of next to nothing is still next to nothing. This means that all but the highest performing films will fail to meet expected earnings and others will sustain colossal losses.

Producing the New Image

Today, a mere five-minute walk south of Silverbird Galleria, the largest urban development project in Lagos's recent history is underway. Eko Atlantic City, this newest expansion to the Lagos metropolitan area, is a spit of luxury real estate that extends from Victoria Island directly into the Atlantic Ocean, appearing like some Dubai-style paradise risen from sea, but in fact the product of immense sand dredging. This monumental private construction project has consequently erased—or rather, buried—the historic Bar Beach, where urchins and tourists, drug peddlers and Pentecostal prayer warriors, *suya* sellers and families on holiday were once free to congregate. The way in which Victoria Island and its surrounding districts (Lekki and Ikoyi, in particular) have developed into a world onto itself with shopping malls, towering luxury apartments, and corporate headquarters, a Porsche car dealership, and countless nightclubs calls to mind James Ferguson's oft-cited contention that in Africa today “capital is *globe-hopping*, not *globe-covering*” (Ferguson 2006:38; his italics). Capital, in other words, tends to connect discrete locations rather than bringing whole locales into economic confluence in some flat world fantasized by neoliberal ideology. The curtailed traffic of commodities and people within specific sedentary urban spaces brings into focus the degree to which a similar disjuncture reproduces itself in the megacity. But images, especially digital images, have a more kinetic circulation, and they are able, therefore, to flood an array of surfaces and screens, flow in a viral—rather than formal, agential—manner, and take hold as one of the most flexible and supple commodity forms available in Lagos.

Here it is key to attend to what Arjun Appadurai terms the variable “spatial scopes” that differentiate forms of circulation, and the fact that “visually and electronically mediated forms can have a much larger reach in the era of the cell-phone, the Internet and the digitized image” (2010:9). Digital imagery's unique facility for rapid, expansive circulation arguably elevates its role in the production of urban social life and what “the metropolitan” means, especially given the growing abundance of advertising images, visual enticements, and sights of impossible desire scrolled across a city like Lagos. In Lagos today, one also notices an uncanny parallel between New Nollywood films and the advertising sensorium that is reproduced across the surface culture of the city as corporate advertising targets urbanites with ever more sophisticated marketing. The most felicitous examples include billboards for celebrity endorsements in which Nollywood stardom

and corporate marketing directly converge. What is troubling is the globalization, democratization, or proletarianization of desire whereby urbanites are everywhere invited to embrace their yearnings and longings while the means of fulfilling desire have been segmented, confined, and reserved for specific zones of development.

Achille Mbembe has recently suggested that contemporary capitalism's reliance on images has reinvigorated the link between image technology and affect, such that the nature of images is increasingly defined by how they act upon one's emotional and sensory experiences while the images, in turn, shape one's subjectivity. He describes the pathway that leads from affect to emotion and on to passions and convictions, and how these pathways are activated by the circulation of images intended to stimulate desire, demonstrating that the link between affect and capital not only inscribes itself on everyday life, but also shapes the physical, political, and psychic conditions surrounding subjectivation.⁹ This observation provides a useful means of understanding key aspects of Nollywood's new look. The distinction between mainstream and New Nollywood turns on the fact that while the former carries on as an index of popular reactions to the fraught and corrosive effects of contemporary capitalism on social life, the latter serves more and more as a direct demonstration of capitalism's production of social life in the city.

A consensus within Nollywood studies holds that the formal qualities of a film bear an important relationship to the places where it is circulated, sold, and viewed. In the case of mainstream Nollywood, the images that adorn videocassette jackets and VCD slips are often a tableau of celebrity actors whose faces alone signify certain expectations about the genre, story, and acting style, arranged according to unstated but habituated codes that promise something about the drama and imagery contained inside. These videos then flow through street settings that resemble a dense shopping center turned inside out, presenting to the public commodities marked by little or no aestheticization. The images compete with one another for attention in saturated urban markets, neighborhood video shops, and the piles of videos wheeled about in carts by mobile vendors. In short, the industry has grafted itself onto the existing media circuits (Ajibade 2007) and engendered new social spaces of its own (Haynes 2007), which have effectuated "the re-mapping of the visual and aural landscape of the city" (Okome 2007:11). However, this "cottage industry" of image creation is dramatically different from the media environment of the shopping-mall-cum-multiplex-cinema where images make direct appeals to one's affect and immerse the senses in an aesthetic designed to stimulate and channel desire.

In New Nollywood's endeavor to standardize its trade and foster a glossy visual style, considerable effort has been put toward the mastery of cinematography and production design, such that the image itself directly expresses value rather than merely providing the frame or container for some valued object. For many producers, well-crafted visuals attest to the industry's

adoption of so-called global best practices, and the public's wide praise for New Nollywood's heightened production values suggests that there is general satisfaction with the industry's new look. One might consider, as Alessandro Jedlowski (2014) does, the reflexive glimpses the industry offers of itself in the "making-of" videos that now commonly serve as an online promotions tactic. Such videos showcase the technical skill of the filmmakers, the costly state-of-the-art equipment, the trendiness of the celebrity actors, and the fashionable aura that surrounds Nollywood. These producers are keenly aware that they have a unique purchase on the personal and collective desires of African audiences, and this awareness seems, in recent years, to have motivated producers to pour resources and effort into creating ever more sumptuous representations of those fantasies and fears. As a result, New Nollywood has become synonymous inside and outside the film industry with high production values, or at least the appearance of achieving elevated standards.

The budget of New Nollywood has generally grown beyond anything home videos could ever manage: from U.S.\$100,000 to \$400,000, or nearly ten times what mainstream producers allot for production costs. More than anything else, a budget of this size buys the filmmakers time—meaning that the gestation period for a film may now stretch into months rather than the weeks or days allocated to the more slapdash productions associated with Nollywood. With time and money, filmmakers have also begun to scout locations that before were out of the question. By necessity Nollywood movies have always been shot on location, either behind the compound gates of a villa in the city or at more modest homes tucked away in rural locales. With larger budgets available, some producers have begun to build sets and shoot at sound stages around Lagos where once only television and music video producers could afford to shoot.

With the advent of private satellite television and a corresponding rise in demand for Nigerian advertisement, television, and music video content, private investors began building commercial sound stages in converted warehouses.¹⁰ For example, Dream Factory Studio, which features two separate sound stages, was founded in 2010 by Yinka Oduniyi, a television producer who shoots high-end advertisements for multinational corporations and local companies. The studio has all the equipment needed to shoot a film: a full lighting workup, grips, microphones, dollies, and tracks, as well as Panasonic camera equipment. Oduniyi also keeps an editor and sound engineer on contract so that postproduction sound mixing and editing can take place under the same roof. Spaces of this type offer producers a great deal of control over the lighting, sound, setting, and camera movements that produce the cinematic features that viewers recognize as defining high production values. The price tag is high, between ₦200,000 and ₦300,000 (U.S.\$1200–2000) per day, but this has not deterred producers like Mildred Okwo, who shot her romantic comedy *The Meeting* (2012) almost completely within the Dream Factory sound stage. The same studio provided the art director of Kunle Afolayan's *Phone Swap* (2012) the necessary

facilities to construct a replica airplane interior for a key scene of the film. The plane was fabricated entirely from scratch, including the addition of decals to give the illusion of details where none existed. To create the overhead console, its dials, and the overhead storage compartments, for instance, the art director photographed the interior of a real airplane, printed the images onto laminate, and pasted them onto the structure like an artificial skin.

As one can surmise, such a feat demanded a great deal of space, a meticulously constructed set, a precise lighting design, and considerable effort put into production design and cinematography. On Afolayan's set, those duties fell to the art director, Pat Nebo, and to the director of photography, Yinka Edward, who together are responsible for the hallmark naturalistic realism of Afolayan's films. A veteran from the earliest days of the video film boom, Nebo trained professionally in interior design and today builds sets for advertisements and publicity events for major Nigerian companies. Edward is likely the most esteemed Nigerian cinematographer today, having also shot Kenneth Gyang's *Confusion Na Wa* (2013) and Izu Ojukwu's *Lions of '76* (forthcoming), and as such makes his primary living as director of photography for advertising segments. In conversation (May 19, 2013), Edward explained to me that Afolayan's crew shoots at a very deliberate pace, capturing only five minutes of usable footage each day.

Branding and cross-promotional strategies are favored by producers who must mount formidable publicity campaigns in order to cut through the video film glut and make their film reverberate across multiple media spheres. When Afolayan was still conducting preproduction on *October 1st*, he directed the music video "Baby Mi Da" for the acclaimed singer-songwriter known as 2face Idibia and the trumpeter Victor Olaiya which showcases the highlife modernity aesthetic of postindependence Nigeria that Afolayan would develop more fully in *October 1st*.¹¹ A promotional "making-of" documentary about the video that appeared on YouTube mentions the state-of-the-art film equipment and the fact that Afolayan flew the final edit to London for color correction, implying professionalism and prestige.¹² Afolayan himself comments that although his crew had never before shot a music video, he believes the finished product demonstrates that today's film professionals can deliver high production values. This manner of cross-promotion makes the reverberations of Afolayan's upcoming feature film felt across local screen media, given that the promotional video represents a spinoff of the music video, which is itself in its aesthetic concept a spinoff of *October 1st*. Furthermore, it permits the director to amplify his popular persona and strengthen his relation to parallel spheres of popular culture, as Nollywood celebrity actors do, by channeling what Noah Tsika calls "the simultaneity of various modes of transmedia publicity" (2014:101).

From a producer's perspective, formal finance partnerships and corporate sponsorship grow more central to filmmaking as, on the one hand, the costs of production rise, and on the other, as the financial returns continue to be eroded by piracy. In this regard, Kunle Afolayan leads the way in

securing sponsorship deals from major Nigerian corporations like the construction and food processing company Dangote Group and the telecommunications company Globacom, not to mention multinationals like Honeywell, GSK Luzocade Sport, and Toyota. In fact, his 2012 film *Phone Swap* was conceived and scripted to meet a call by Samsung for a feature-length Nollywood film that would go beyond product placement and integrate Samsung phones directly into the premise of the narrative. The measly ₦5 million budget they offered was not enough for Afolayan, who chose to produce *Phone Swap* on his own and later landed sponsorship contracts with Blackberry, Honeywell, and Globacom (Glo). With this type of attention from formal-sector investors on the rise, a third of a film's budget can derive from sponsorship deals, although the relationships forged are far from fair and equal.

Even when corporate sponsorship does not leave a heavy footprint on the film itself, it often manages to position itself in the interface between the film and the audience through celebrity endorsements, social media marketing, and event marketing. In Lagos in 2013, one could find a film premiering at cinemas almost every weekend. Producers have turned these red carpet events into an opportunity to draw additional funding for the film by selling advertising rights. According to Afolayan, the mobile phone company Blackberry paid twice the amount it paid for its product placement within the film itself simply to advertise the brand at the hotel where he held the red carpet premiere of *Phone Swap* (personal communication, June 20, 2014). On occasion, the red carpet itself can bear a sponsor's brand image. In short, the growing penetration of Nollywood by marketing and advertising finance leads to a scenario in which the capital gap closes, and to follow Anastup Basu's provocative suggestion, the flashes of words and images on and around the theater screen become "capital itself (and not the reflection of it) precisely because it acquires a 'life of its own' by virtue of being value in serial flow" (2010:99).

"Advertised Modernity"

New Nollywood films are diverse in setting, theme, story arc, and genre, but similar in their production values and orientation toward globalized consumerism. The films demonstrate a continuum in terms of extending the major conventions of Nollywood film culture, with some films navigating familiar terrain and others studiously avoiding the habits of mainstream Nollywood. For example, *Return of Jenifa* and *Weekend Getaway* (2013) spring directly from the Nollywood imaginary, while *Ije: The Journey* and *Anchor Baby* rely heavily on melodrama's signifying practices, even if put to work on foreign soil, and *The Figurine* and *Phone Swap* (2012) do away entirely with home video conventions.

The films inhabit a metropolitan vantage point that orients its vision toward the world at large and naturalize metropolitan phenomena such as airline travel, consumer culture, global pop/MTV culture, high fashion,

lifestyle brands, and luxury items. Garritano (2014) notes that these changes in Nollywood resemble changes in India's Hindi-language film industry, which only became the internationally recognized "Bollywood" after a comparable period of segmentation and aesthetic formalization in the 1990s. That industry's A-grade films soon began to flaunt an aesthetic of "advertised modernization," a term that Anastup Basu uses to refer to cinema's transposition of modernity into a collection of fungible signs within a megacity's kinetic ecology of sights and sounds. In this case, modern subjectivity does not arise from consolidated systems of value, forms of order, or domains of knowledge, but is instead experienced "in volumes and quick saturations" that flit across the screen as bits of information, "without any obligation to 'totality'" (Basu 2010:92,94).¹³ Thus, as Basu points out, films can showcase all the trappings of modernity, such as technology, consumer culture, and democratic values, without holistically grounding them in the domain of science, discourses of bourgeois taste, or the rights of the liberal subject. I would also underscore that this assembling of modernity, or transposition of the notion of modernity, makes possible the accommodation of contradictory realities, or what would otherwise appear as a film's ideological limits.

Kunle Afolayan's *Phone Swap* best illustrates this aesthetic trend as well as a number of impulses driving New Nollywood. The narrative situates its main characters, Mary and Akin, as polar opposites, divided along lines of social class and lifestyle, barriers that are exacerbated before finally crumbling as the two unwittingly fall in love. The story satisfies the generic expectation that in romantic comedies opposites will attract and that in the end love will conquer all. Romance, family bonds, marriage arrangements, and the betrothed's moral character are not unusual concerns for a Nigerian film. What is striking is the role in the film of mobile phones, which represent the technological connectivity that enables romantic and familial connectivity and overcomes challenges of physical distance as well as social and economic boundaries.

The narrative centers on Mary, a tailor with aspirations of becoming a fashion designer, and Akin, a fastidious businessman with a callous personal demeanor. When they physically collide in the airport on their way to pressing engagements, they accidentally swap phones and end up routed to the wrong destination. Mary arrives in Abuja, where an important shareholders' meeting that could decide the fate of Akin's career is scheduled to take place, and Akin arrives in Owerri, where Mary's family has called an urgent meeting to resolve a marital dispute. The story is animated by the personal transformations that Mary and Akin undergo as they work in cooperation to resolve the disparate conflicts, which also correspond to each character's personal weaknesses. Mary must become more assertive if she wishes to leave her work as a tailor and advance to working as a self-employed fashion designer, whereas Akin must shed his Western pretensions and learn humility in order to counsel compromise within Mary's family and realize the need for reunion with his own.

In the opening sequence of *Phone Swap*, the camera wanders, in extreme close-up and shallow depth of focus, over the objects in the each character's room, studiously picking out and ascribing significance to the volumes of books, trays of designer watches, and silk ties in Akin's room, and the Singer-style sewing machine, mannequin, and piles of colorful ankara cloth in Mary's. These shots bring the spectator's eye right down into the minute details of the *mise-en-scène* and allow us to inspect them for what they tell us about characters we have yet to glimpse. In other words, these objects speak the language of commodities, an idiom in which the viewer is presumed to be fluent. Mary receives a wake-up call from her employer on the other side of town and another phone call from her father from his cornfields in Owerri. A jump cut from Mary's bedroom to a high-angle panoramic view of the fields at the precise moment the phone rings punctuates the distance, and as Mary enters the streets of Lagos the film cuts between golden corn stalks of the village and the buzzing okada motorcycles and pungent LAWMA garbage trucks of the city. The sequence concludes in parallel fashion with Akin and his mother. The camera recreates the same high-angle panoramic shot over the mother's lush compound depicting her phoning her son as he is chauffeured to company headquarters in a private vehicle, the Lagos traffic shunting by outside the window of the car.

Like many other New Nollywood romantic comedies, *Phone Swap* develops a world of complementary binaries that it seeks to resolve by binding one to the other. When Mary and Akin find themselves holding the phone and inhabiting the life of the other, they are displaced from their natural element, the confines of their everyday lives. The film resolves the situation by bringing about a new balance in each character's life and bringing the two together in a romantic union. The switch—with Mary attending the shareholders' meeting and Akin mediating the family dispute—and later reunion achieves an overlapping of urban corporate power politics and rural kinship politics. These overlapping diagrams can be called an assemblage, which Basu defines as “energetic, diffuse, but practical combinations of statements, bodies, sounds, events, matter, spaces, knowledges, beliefs, or subjective stances that come together and disperse constantly, in an opportune manner, without being organized into, or even appealing to, stable diagrams of human subjectivity and consciousness” (2012:12). This assemblage depends on the mobile phone and its publicized ability to suture together vastly disparate spaces and times. The phone motivates the narrative drive toward closure in which Mary and Akin's detours lead back to the site of their first hostile collision, this time as a romantic reunion. On the level of aesthetic form, the cinematography and editing do the work of stitching together these divergent worlds, visually producing the connectivity that mobile phones promise.

Within this aesthetic of advertised modernity, air travel emerges as the supreme expression of free mobility, and consequently, the international airport at Lagos becomes an ever more common sight in Nollywood films. In Afolayan's films, as in Tunde Kelani's, the protagonists do not travel

internationally and the narratives focus on dynamics within the nation. However, many New Nollywood films orient themselves in relation to life elsewhere, as with characters who travel abroad freely (*Flower Girl* [2012]), who have established lives abroad (*Ije, Anchor Baby*), or who embark on a journey home after years abroad (*Mirror Boy, Maami* [2012], *Doctor Bello* [2012], *Streets of Calabar* [2012]). A number of New Nollywood stories are structured by a journey back to Africa rather than the reverse trajectory, which almost by definition structures the story arc of the diaspora genre that Jonathan Haynes identifies (2013). For instance, the narrative of *Mirror Boy* is set in motion when a child born in the U.K. to African parents travels back to an unnamed African country and is drawn into a quest of self-actualization that sets him in search of his estranged father and patrimonial village.

These films tend to view the family village with a romanticized gaze, although it is significant that in many New Nollywood films scenes of villages and hometowns must be polished up and ornamented before they are inserted in the story. Home, that is, must be written into the world in a visual language consistent with New Nollywood's spectacular assemblages. In the production of *Phone Swap*, Afolayan's crew clearly went to great lengths to erect the rural domestic compound where Mary's family members, in the course of resolving their grievances, gradually humanize the callous Akin and expose him to a vague, ineffable, life-changing truth about the authenticity of village life, a truth we perceive in the beautiful visuals of the cornfield or family parlor at dinnertime. Tunde Kelani's *Maami*, similarly, portrays a tight-knit neighborhood in Abeokuta reproduced by the filmmaker from his memories of childhood. Here the protagonist's memories of the small city come to us by way of visually sumptuous and nostalgia-infused flashbacks of the child hunting for fruits in the bush, marveling at the *egungun* masquerades, reading Yoruba novels to his parents and grandparents, and learning the moral ideals of the community. The sets, in this way, bring to mind Basu's observation that "in a new dispensation of the image as a direct expression of value, the home has to acquire a cinematic plenitude of colors, textures, bodies, and objects in order to upgrade its affective strengths and emerge as an exemplary exhibit of a national-cultural heritage" (2010:80).

Conclusion

Like any popular cinema around the world, Nollywood must depict the impassioned struggles that make everyday survival possible, while simultaneously endeavoring to forget those struggles in an imagined escape from the demands of the mundane. The same could be said of the industry itself as it strains to make do while it simultaneously projects a fantasy of its own effortless success. But a paradox arises, as Moradewun Adejunmobi points out, whereby audiences relate to these films out of "both the desire for escape from everyday life and the desire for relevance to everyday concerns" (2010:110).

New Nollywood exacerbates this ambivalence by offering viewers what are to date the most refined and carefully crafted images of collective desires in which few obstacles bar exuberant consumption, free mobility, and the achievement of high social status. At the same time, the narratives in which these desires are couched offer fewer points of connection to everyday concerns than mainstream Nollywood does. These films avoid a view of the world as seen from the cracks or margins of society and take for granted that a certain level of wealth is normal. Neither the marginal characters nor the overarching logic of these new narratives demonstrates the same moral doubts about prosperity and poverty that one finds in mainstream home videos. In fact, in many ways Nigeria's new screen media exacerbate a frustration whereby collective desires outstrip the means to attain them within what is for most Nigerians an economy of scarcity.

The New Nollywood thus illustrates a contradiction of neoliberal capitalism, which works "to produce desire and expectations on a global scale yet to decrease the certainty of work or the security of persons; to magnify class differences but to undercut class consciousness" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:298). If we ask who is represented in these films, who appears onscreen and who remains outside the narrative frame, or what sort of spectator these films construct, we find that many New Nollywood films are grounded on a terrain that stands apart from what many viewers experience in everyday life. Just as neoliberal capitalism has wrought the radical, albeit selective, transformation of the material landscape of Lagos, it also shapes the social landscape of the city by dictating what it means to be "metropolitan." It should come as no surprise that consumerism is embedded in the deep structure of the films, or that they publicize their purchase on a modern subjectivity and define that identity with fungible signifiers drawn from metropolitan life.

It is easy in the short term to see how the films considered here place limitations on imagination, accommodating themselves, as they do, to an aspirational vision of metropolitan life that plays out some of the most pernicious features of neoliberal capitalism. It takes a more conjectural approach to suppose that these films might also lead to something more. Kenneth Gyang's *Confusion Na Wa* (2013), a tangled dark comedy of chance encounters, is illustrative in this regard. Based on one of four scripts selected by the influential Hubert Bals Fund of the International Film Festival Rotterdam and produced with a budget of U.S.\$27,000, *Confusion Na Wa* does not fit the New Nollywood trend of costly production and marketing. But although it failed in its Nigerian theatrical release, it earned recognition at AMAA (including the "Best Film" award of 2013), the New York African Film Festival, and the Los Angeles Pan African Film Festival. Not relying on box office revenue or corporate sponsorship, Gyang achieved a great deal with limited means but an abundance of talent—which has always been the story of Nollywood. This suggests that Nollywood may not solve its distribution crisis at the distribution end, but by continuing to experiment with film practices that suit the industry's shifting terrain, and by navigating both its persistent obstacles and emerging opportunities.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Jonathan Haynes (2014) contends that New Nollywood and African cinema continue to differ in their sources of funding, the type of audience they address and attract, and the politics they represent on screen. I share his concern that we not overstate the convergence of these different film practices, but we should continue to reconsider the types of questions we put to different films.
2. During the initial home video boom, the trickle of new feature-length films, about four per week in 1995, became a torrent of at least twenty per week in 2001 (Abua 2002). Productivity steadily grew, and by 2007 the video marketers were cramming thirty-one new feature-length movies onto already crowded shelves every week (Bala 2007). Though records of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) show the number of films approved for release decreasing slightly to about one thousand films a year between 2008 and 2012, those figures mask the influx of films submitted for review, which did not decrease. Meanwhile, some producers simply circumvented official review altogether. If we go by numbers generated by the marketers themselves, nearly half the films produced go unrecorded by the Censors Board. At Idumota Market in Lagos, the heart of finance and distribution for Yoruba-language films, the marketers association organizing and regulating the sale of video films has imposed limits on vendors, effectively holding the number of new releases to thirty every two weeks and going so far as to suspend all new releases for a full month. According to the marketers association's own records, even under these self-imposed restrictions, the Yoruba-language producers released twice as many films in 2012 than the 389 recorded by the Censors Board.
3. The Royal Arts Academy is a production company founded by Emem Isong in 2010. Today Royal Arts comprises three branches: a film school, a production unit, and a distribution arm. This production company is vertically integrated and thus has more creative control and more direct oversight of the financing, production, and distribution of its films than many other companies. The studio retains a writing team of four, some of whom also produce the films they write. It owns a full battery of film equipment, including camera, lenses, tracks and dollies, lighting and sound recording equipment. Editing and postproduction are done in-house by both contracted and freelance editors, circumventing the Editor's Guild to whom most producers turn for postproduction facilities and services.
4. According to one Nigerian distributor's box office figures, the highest grossing Nollywood film remains Anyaene's *Ije: The Journey* (2010), which made over ₦52 million (U.S.\$325,000) after appearing in just six theaters around the country. For perspective, that figure is double the earnings within the Nigerian market of most Hollywood films of the same year, like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Twilight Saga*, and *Sex and the City*.
5. Silverbird Group was founded by Ben Murray-Bruce as an entertainment and event promotions company called Silverbird Productions. Beginning in

the late 1980s, its cornerstone event was the Miss Africa World Beauty Pageant, a regional competition for which Silverbird acquired the rights from the Miss World Beauty Pageant. As Patrick Lee of the Silverbird Board of Trustees related to me, the idea to build a multiplex cinema arose when foreign dignitaries attending the beauty pageant protested the lack of Lagos nightlife (personal communication, March 13, 2013).

6. During Nigeria's oil boom, when cinema halls enjoyed a peak attendance due to boosted domestic consumption and strengthened purchasing power, Lagos alone hosted twenty-eight licensed cinemas and a rumored forty "pirate" cinemas (Ekwuazi 1987). The American Motion Picture Exportation Corporation of Africa (AMPECA) supplied these cinemas with Hollywood B-films from MGM, Columbia, United Artists, and 20th Century Fox. Chinese and Indian films arrived through illicit import networks linking Bombay and Hong Kong to Nigerian cinemas through pirate distributors in Dubai, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, and Singapore, in part because the cinema halls were often owned by Indian and Lebanese Nigerians with personal relationships (N. K. Murthy, personal communication, July 16, 20013; see also Larkin 2008). By the end of the 1990s these cinemas had closed due to growing economic and social instability.
7. The "pirate cinemas" that Ekwuazi (1987) describes have been substituted by video parlors and football viewing centers that have Nollywood movie channels in their satellite television subscription. Though sports viewing centers must be licensed in Lagos and are prohibited from televising anything but sports, most neighborhoods in the city have several viewing centers that screen with impunity whatever content appeals to patrons. Possessing only the most basic infrastructure—perhaps benches "arranged facing the viewing area while curtains block out light and, unfortunately, air from the outside" (Ajibade 2007:5)—these spaces of exhibition provide the cheapest access to films to perhaps the largest audience.
8. Documents from Blu Pictures Distribution show that of the nine Nollywood films that appeared in theaters in 2010, only two, *Figurine* and *Ije*, earned over ₦10 million. In 2011 only three films earned above the same benchmark, while the other nineteen local films that appeared in theaters rarely broke ₦3 million in ticket sales.
9. I paraphrase here comments that Achille Mbembe offered during his "Africa in Theory" presentation at Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Witwatersrand on April 13, 2013. The institute's website provides an informal print version of the presenter's statements (<http://wiser.wits.ac.za/content/africa-theory-10795>).
10. I learned of the growing availability of sound stages after a visit to the offices of Femi Odugbemi, the executive producer of the most popular soap opera on Nigerian satellite television, Tinsel. The program is shot at a sound stage in Ikeja, Lagos.
11. The music video "Baby Mi Da" can be found at: <https://youtu.be/enf68hEsyys>.
12. The video "Behind the Scenes of Victor Olaiya's 'Baby Jowo' Directed by Kunle Afolayan" can be found at: <http://www.tundekelani.tv/features>.
13. The distinction between information and knowledge is key to Basu's notion of advertised modernity. He writes that "information is different from knowledge precisely because while the latter consolidates truths through an agonistic navigation of difference or a dialectical resolution of problems (what Benjamin calls 'explanation'), the former only scatters and makes kinetic renderings in varying densities, without any obligation to 'totality'" (2010:94).