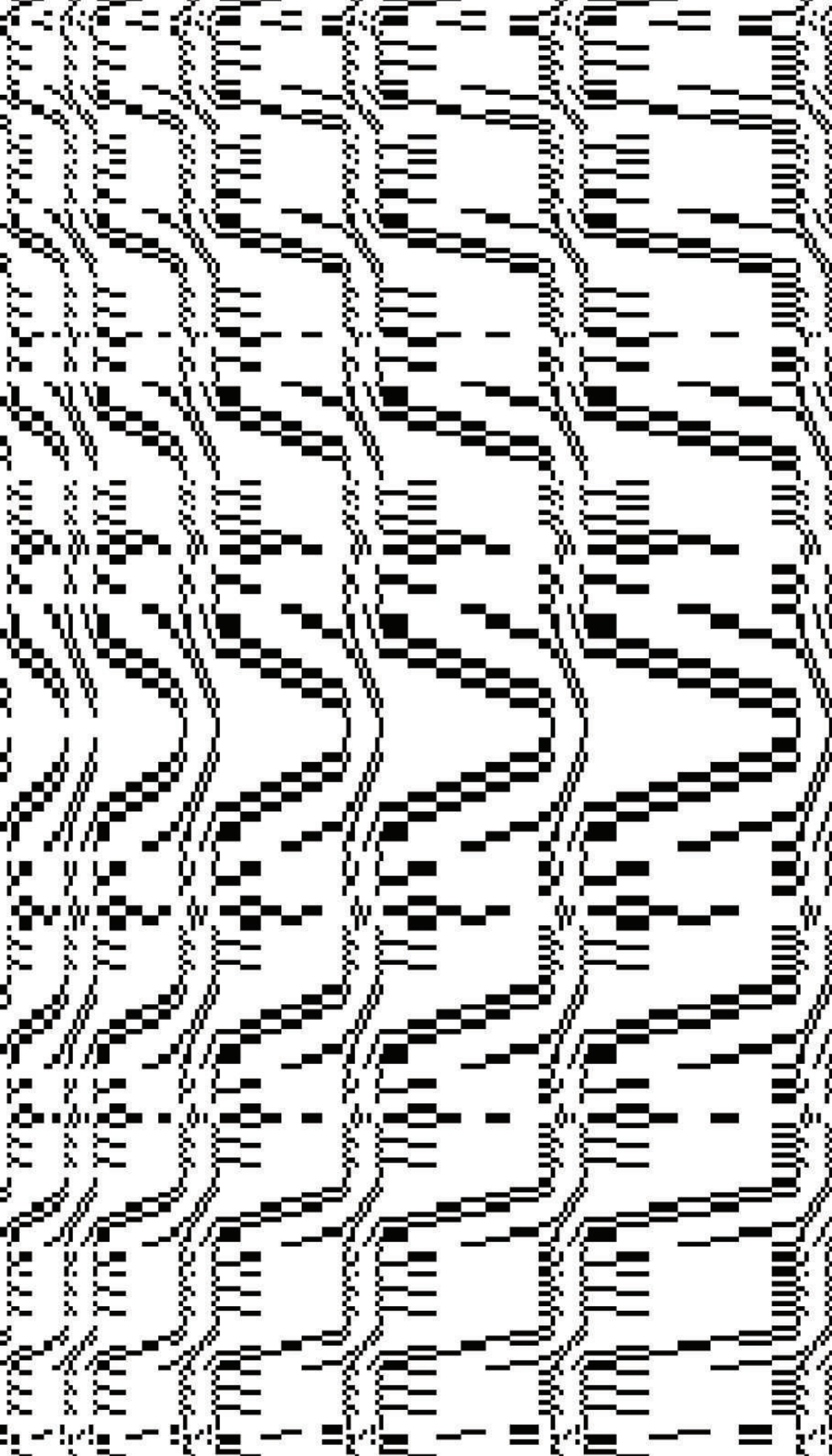

As archives that constantly reshuffle told and untold stories, Archive is an ensemble of practitioners and storytellers collaborating across different longitudes, and sharing multiple languages, ancestries, and sensitivities, moved by a communal need to imagine the world otherwise.

By creating cracks in dominant narratives, and generating ruptures in consolidated ontologies, Archive's commitment is deeply rooted in the critical effort to disrupt and overturn Eurocentric, patriarchal and colonial epistemological paradigms. Ours is a po-ethical attempt not to escape the world we live in but believe in "the other world within the world" (Harney and Moten), or "to end the world as we know it" (da Silva).

Through a collaborative and ensemble-oriented study, Archive un-weaves texts, opening them to synesthetic modalities by de-centralizing unilateral narratives, fixed performances, and sensorial primacies. Archives are conceived not only as repositories of knowledge/power, systems of thought and violence, but also as tools that continuously un-fix, de-archive, and re-archive through non-hegemonic and non-categorical models.

Since its inception in 2009, Archive has realized a manifold of books, journals, exhibitions, screenings, lectures, performances, readings, and has established convivial sites in different cities made of open libraries, residency programs for artists and writers, as well as moments of co-learning devised with various pedagogical institutions. Read more

Archive is Soukaina Aboulaoula, Aziza Ahmad, Janna Aldaraji, Malab Alneel, Mistura Allison, Leila Bencharnia, Yaiza Camps, Zasha Colah, Omar Gabriel Delnevo, Lilia Di Bella, Malin Dittmann, Anna Dubois Diop, Chiara Figone, Lara Fonderico, Aby Gaye, Miriam Gatt, Paz Guevara, Susanne Husse, Amelie Jakubek, Kennedy Jones, Yaniya Lee, Emanuela Maltese, Sara Marcon, Savanna Morgan, Beya Othmani, Rebeca Pak, Eugenia Sai, Raj Sandhu, Iman Salem, Francesca Verga.

Publishing Practices

Curatorial ensemble: Soukaina Aboulaoula, Mistura Allison, Paz Guevara, Chiara Figone, Beya Othmani

2023

Publishing Practices

Conceptual Notes

In the Inner Bark of Trees

We should listen ... to the conversation of the trees, to the conversation of the trees, and not only what they communicate to us, but also their dialogue with other trees, to also understand how they relate to each other (the daily life of the forest).
—Elicura Chihuailaf

Listen more often to things
rather than beings.
Hear the fire's voice,
Hear the voice of water.
In the wind hear the
sobbing of the trees,
It is our forefathers
breathing.
[...]
—*Breaths*, by Birago Diop

A polyvocal, multilinguistic, and transnational proposition, *In the Inner Bark of Trees* reflects the necessity of continuously challenging pathways to knowledge inheritance, production, and transmission. In presenting art libraries, texturalities, performances, and co-learning sessions that defy histories of oppression and colonialism, the project reunites publishing practices that seek to simultaneously unsettle knowledge systems from dominant symbolic culture and release themselves from the confines of the material medium of modern colonial libraries. Instead, it fosters the imagination not only of libraries that are no longer limited by the printing system or canonical classification but crafted and nurtured by the intergenerational techniques, modalities, and feelings needed to sustain the alternatives of insurgent practices.

The so-called print revolution around 1440 established a fundamental shift from orality to writing, sound to vision, which influenced the creation and spread of the book, as well as their systemic spatial distribution and setting. According to Walter J. Ong, this model has strongly "affected the development of modern capitalism, implemented Western European exploration of the globe," and shaped the way our consciousness works, as also proven by Marshall McLuhan's works (1962; 1964).[1] Hence, reformulating libraries beyond the printed model can certainly shed light on different sensibilities and re-establish a less compartmentalized knowledge production and diffusion. In the absence of closed physical libraries and book-objects requiring individual reading, silence, and a certain attitude, what is the feeling we can perceive?

Although the performative nature of alternative libraries and archives has been extensively discussed, the project aims to question and reclaim the very tools that allow not only the realization of spaces and modes of cultural production but also their maintenance and

[1] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 115.

Writing is one thing and knowledge is another. Writing is the photographing of knowledge, but it is not knowledge itself. Knowledge is a light which is within man.
It is the heritage of all the ancestors knew and have transmitted to us as seed, just as the mature baobab is contained in its seed.
—Tierno Bokar

circulation in a transnational context. By virtue of a virtual communication that flows like the vital lymph that passes through the inner bark of trees, the program will interconnect different libraries, cultural materials, and immaterial figurations.

A broad spectrum of performative, artistic, aural, and embodied practices are addressed within *In the Inner Bark of Trees* in conjunction with a larger research stream called *Publishing Practices*, which analyses other meanings and outcomes of publishing such as descent, belonging, and dissemination. By drawing inspiration from anti-disciplinary, collective, and anti-colonial perspectives, *Publishing Practices* is seeking alternative pathways to forms of knowing and sensing.

Libraries have been conventionally conceived as treasurable *lieux de mémoir* (Pierre Nora 1989:7), sites "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment." They have shaped our way of transmitting memory and molded fixed histories or forbidden histories—those that, as Toni Morrison taught us, we have to *pass on*, leave to future generations, but also those that should not be dwelled on, neglected, and ultimately never repeated. The selection of books, materials, and documents to record and make public throughout history, and particularly after the print revolution, has determined a model of knowledge production and diffusion based on ruptures, concealments, censorship, iterations aimed at consolidating a certain discourse, or complete omission.

By this, libraries have retraced the strategies of colonial and imperialist enterprises that, like Edward Said and Michel Foucault pointed out, were first and foremost textual enterprises predicated upon the knowledge/power binary dictum. Consequently, libraries, which house those textual enterprises, have become a dangerous center of control. In addition to preserving memories of an obliterated past that can inform our differentiated present and plural future, books also suffer from forgetfulness and destruction.

Fernando Baez, in his book *A Universal History of The Destruction of Books* (2005), documented instances of "bibliocaust," and speculated on the reasons why libraries and books have been overtime targets of premeditated destruction. He framed "bibliocaust" as an attempt to "annihilate a memory considered to be a direct or

indirect threat to another memory thought superior," adding that "all human beings divide the world into us and them."[2] That "us," of course, is exclusive. Applying this criterion of negating the other, censorship has always been imposed along with the denial of "the right to information."[3]

In 1591, when the army of Marrakech conquered Timbuktu, the libraries of the Songaï empire were looted. As a response, tens of thousands of books were allegedly hidden within family homes and then passed down through the generations. More recently, organizations such as the SAVAMA-DCI have hosted and represented private manuscript collections. When the city of Timbuktu was the target of an armed conflict in 2012, Abdel Haïdara, the director of SAVAMA-DCI, reportedly moved back around 30.000 manuscripts to their respective owner's homes and then proceeded to smuggling them to Bamako in order to save them.[4]

The story of the Timbuktu libraries makes us reflect on the potential of an informal care system versus a state centralized one, to enable quick action when collections are under such threat. How is it that political instability and conflicts managed to damage monumental collections such as the Iraq National Library, which was burned and looted during the Iraq war of 2003; or the National Library of Bosnia-Herzegovina which was completely destroyed during the Sarajevo siege of 1992? Can we then reconsider modes of organization and care of so-called cultural heritage?

The inner bark of trees tries to augment this question by relying on anticolonial struggle, rooted in the necessity to traverse the question of the "colonial library," an articulation made known by V.Y. Mudimbe but rooted in a longstanding anti-colonial critique that sought to decenter colonialist accounts of Africa and other colonized regions of the world. This library—constituted in the wake of the colonial project—still exerts a hold on systems of contemporary research by overshadowing the existence of other libraries, ways of thinking, and methods. African intellectuals have questioned the epistemological validity of dominant knowledge concerning African societies and critically deconstructed tools that are strongly marked by the Western history rereading of the colonial library and its forms of exclusion.

[2] Fernando Báez, *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books: From Ancient Sumer to Modern-day Iraq* (New York: Atlas, 2010), 14.

[3] Ibid, 20.

[4] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/23/book-rustlers-timbuktu-mali-ancient-manuscripts-saved

Algerian novelist Assia Djebar too pondered herself on the weights of colonial archives throughout her body of work. Her book *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* (1996) re-narrates the French invasion of Algeria using archives of letters written by French officers to reconstruct the events and lend an ear to what she calls the "immemorial whispers."[5] Djebar further advances that the conquest of the territory was followed by a profusion of *words*: "Words themselves become a decoration, flaunted by officers like the carnations they wear in their buttonholes; words will become their most effective weapons. Hordes of interpreters, geographers, ethnographers, linguists, botanists, diverse scholars and professional scribblers will swoop down on this new prey. The supererogatory protuberances of their publications will form a pyramid to hide the initial violence from view."[6] In fact, imperial project destruction was paralleled paradoxically with intensive textual production.

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay points out in her book *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* the imperial archive understood as an act of dislocation and destruction demands an act of reversal and *unlearning*. Azoulay further advances that "unlearning the archive as a place is instrumental in joining others who resisted against it in claiming that not everything should be archivable and that not all forms of relationship should be mediated by the archive."[7] The violent reverberations of the archives and publications invoked by Djebar and Azoulay, the "scandal of the archive," as Saidiya Hartman also puts it in her essay *Venus in two acts*,[8] makes us reflect on the invisible structuring mechanisms behind the act of archiving knowledge and the hegemonic systems of knowledge production epitomized by libraries and publishing systems.

To reclaim the colonial library as a site for renewed thinking about Africa in the World, beyond the limits of the geographical understanding of Africa, is crucial in order to break down hierarchized relations with the African continent, unsettle old archival tropes, establish a terrain upon which new forms of imaginations can take flight. Using this framework, how can we imagine libraries beyond their conception as power/knowledge repositories? What if libraries were viewed as counter-repositories informed by a different model of knowledge and cultural transmission? Could they also serve as places to think about the world through the

[5] In Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 69: "To read this writing, I have to turn my body upside down, plunge my face into the shadows, scrutinize the rock or chalk vault, let the immemorial whispers come up, bloody geology. What magma of sound rots there, what smell of putrefaction escapes from it? (...) Alone, bare, without a veil, I face the images of darkness. Outside the well of centuries past, how can we face the sounds of the past?".

[6] Assia Djebar, and Dorothy S. Blair, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (Portsmout NH: Heinemann, 1993), 45.

[7] Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential history : unlearning imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 59.

[8] In Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small. Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12:2 (2008), 5: "Scandal and excess inundate the archive: the raw numbers of the mortality account, the strategic evasion and indirection of the captain's log, the florid and sentimental letters dispatched from slave ports by homesick merchants, the incantatory stories of shocking violence penned by abolitionists, the fascinated eyewitness reports of mercenary soldiers eager to divulge "what decency forbids [them] to disclose," and the rituals of torture, the beatings, hangings, and amputations enshrined as law. The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past."

power of imagination revealed by other textual objects, not necessarily books? What about textures contained in carpets, for example? What kind of memory is sewed in them, and can be *passed on*? What about immaterial objects and fantasies, what role do they play in art libraries?

Imagination, here, plays a central role as it opens up rational methods of learning and knowing to the power of other possible wor(l)ds. As such, *In the Inner Bark of Trees* tries to embark on imaginative forms of archiving and editing that defy canonical and standardized notions of publishing and its main referents (libraries and books), and prompt ancestral techniques such as *textauralities*, a compound term for textile crafts interwoven into/as texts—as both the words *text* and *textile* share the same Latin root and derive from the verb *texere,* to weave—but also aural artifacts and oral texts, by both indicating a new source of knowledge not limited to the written book and its spatio-temporal dimension and a modality to fabricate a plot, a story, devoid of the page or hand's constraints and the linearity of vision. Books are therefore questioned—by reconsidering their full life cycle, and the relationship between the author, the publisher, the artist, the reader—or replaced by other objects of knowledge. Analogously, the bibliographic methodology is no longer tied to a universal reference system, and libraries become more places of activation and practices of multitemporal and multi-sensorial dimensions, where the dominance of the visual is displaced by a simultaneous co-presence of the five (six) senses. A weaved, stitched, folded, and seamed textile craft, for example, is a tactile, visual, olfactory, and aural text altogether. Touch (the haptic sense) is the most involved of all the senses, and the one complicating them. Even the eye and the ear are respectively touched by the wave refraction and sound vibrations before seeing and hearing.

Seaming, notes Catherine Dormor, is a concept between theory and practice precisely because it encompasses three aspects, passage, suturing, and trace, that "taken together, offer ways for thinking about and assembling fragments of narrative into intricate, intimate, and expansive constructions, constructions where theoretical and practice-based perspectives can converge."[9] This intricacy foregrounds non-linear textualities embroidered in textile crafts, complicated by fragments held together by a non-normative or phallocentric grammar.

[9] Catherine Dormor, "Writing Textile, Making Text: Cloth and Stitch as Agency for Disorderly Text," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* (2014), 3.

Rather, linguistic and semantic structures and rules are displaced by the assemblage and stitching of multiple points and voices: "piecing offers a way to bring different and differing voices together and alongside one another, the seams marking flexible points of juxtaposition and the seam allowances thickened, scarred spaces for mutual exchange, a space within the process of translation in which meaning becomes oblique, multiple and mutable."[10]

In the Inner Bark of Trees augments the written wor(l)d with the oral wor(l)d. Both modes are strongly implicated and they transmit stories through tools (voice and sound in orality) and weaved artifacts that are not per se books, but oral texts. As such, the term *soy* is used among the Dogon people in Mali to signify both the woven material and the spoken word.[11] Thinking of this relationship between text and textile evokes the gestures and the corporal performance that weave together both text and textile, and create language for many of those textiles are textures containing oral stories voiced by the storyteller. Malian author Amadou Hampaté Bâ extensively about African oral traditions through the figure of the *traditionalist*—more colloquially called *griot* or *griotte,* the story-teller, considered "the living memory of Africa"[12]—and the importance of its crafting and gestural language. In his foregrounding commentaries on Bambara cosmogony, he indeed explained how craftsmen's gestures are considered language in Bambara tradition: "The instruments or tools of a craft give material form to the sacred words; the apprentice's contact with the craft obliges him to live the word with every gesture he makes."[13] The self-reflexive practice of publishing must be indeed measured against recent critiques of scriptural epistemological systems that marginalize immaterial cultural forms, embodied and oral knowledge, among others, which are oftentimes overlooked. According to scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos, their role in social struggles is frequently underestimated by the written culture that prevails in our time and that often controls the normative protocols legalizing the exercise of capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal domination.[14]

The image of the griot is undoubtedly associated with that of the baobab tree. African storytelling, textile objects, musical instruments, and rhythmic sounds are in fact connected to the life cycle of a tree, whose fiber, seeds, and cortex give rise to and sustain the transmission of stories. In Senegal, griot remains were buried in

[10] Ibid., 8.

[11] Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 128.

[12] Ibid. 166.

[13] Amadou Hampaté Bâ, "The living tradition," in *General History of Africa* (1981), 184.

[14] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (2018), 61.

baobab trees until 1962. Abdoulaye Sene, a griot from the Serere Community, explained: "If griots are buried underground, it would be as though we were burying our history. We can't bury knowledge because it enlightens our future."[15]

[15] https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d67444f7741444e/share_p.html

The inner bark of a tree is the conduit through which food is passed to the rest of the tree, as a place of transmission and circulation, but also as the *bark* that quickly dies to become part of the outer bark and is hence (re) generative and not static. Consequently, the program more than focusing on the common association of trees and books, or trees and fibers used to create textile objects or cortex carved to obtain drums, prefers delving into the possible channels flowing through trees and its corpora of textauralities, and the conduits of feelings, sensibilities, and fantasies overflowing them, that is connecting all the elements of the natural world and the maternal lineages.

The tree is the basic (both fundamental and elemental) metaphor for life. The tree of life connects the present to its past ramifications with its roots in the underground while embracing what is to come with its branches and leaves into the air and nurtured by water. It is at the same time a constant, concrete, and virtual embodiment of life transmission, branching, and conservation. It also acts as a poetic publishing practice if, as mentioned above, we look at *publicare* as "populating, breeding and descent," and divest it from its biblical exegesis. The tree of life is not an allegory for paradise, as the one appearing in the biblical garden of Eden; its seeds and fibers inweave a non-Adamic ancestral plot and disrupt a patriarchal-dominated mode of narrating. Rather, they tend to follow a matriarchal tradition, not so much because female textile patterns often imitate the textures of trees textile, whether they use plant fibers or not, but mostly because through their weaving tradition, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters have informed another heritage that comes to symbolize life threading. The resemblance between the tree of life and the maternal placenta unveils a deep bond to earth, air, water, and fire, that is the descent, nourishment, aurality, and the touching warmth of another language.

[16] Hélène Cixous, *So Close* [2007], Peggy Kamuf (trans.), (Cambridge, MA : Polity Press, 2009).

As Cixous wrote in *So Close*, a written text whether it is a book or a piece of cloth or a seam touches your body, your own story, your own family tree.[16] She recounts her return to Algeria after a more-than thirty-year absence,

and the visit to her father's tomb beneath a cypress tree. The words, punctuation and intonation she writes about, in front of the tree, pierce and caress her flesh, revealing the interconnectedness of body, language and nature. Her mother's voice, surprised and infuriated by her journey to the "native land," makes contact too; it raises and falls as in a musical performance, and reminds us that music is about hapticality. Music is much as a text as a texture, it is a corpus of textaurality that touches. As Harney and Moten contend (2013) there was tremendous life and feeling in the holds of the slave ships leaving Africa and making the Crossing. In that sea-born laboratory and proximity of flesh on flesh, touch became love manifested outside the conventions of European grammar, categories, and borders. In it there was hapticality: "Hapticality, the capacity to feel though others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you."[17]

[17] Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons* (London: Minor Compositions, 2013), 98.

Inspired by all of this imaginative (feminist, decolonial, and anti-colonial) framework, *In the Inner Bark of Trees* will be envisioned as a four-week exchange program, including gatherings, workshops, performative readings, radio sessions, study days, and culminating in an exhibition. We will engage art libraries as haptic sites and "phoemic" channels of fantasy, performance, and transnational communication; as both physical spaces of encounter and theoretical articulations of the world, co-learning spaces of inhabiting, traversing, crossing in which trans-temporal and trans-generational thought can be fostered and emancipatory tools can be advanced. We will study as in an ensemble, a "black study," a form that following Stefano Harney's and Fred Moten's intuition, involve gatherings, communal work, and a more affective and aural knowledge, one resembling a musical jam session or the ways children imagine their toys: continually rehearsing or trying to play the toy in an unconventional way and with the awareness to be "never alone." It is an invitation to unpack, share, and inquire more broadly on the way library projects can reflect on experiences of resistance, create ground for transnational solidarity, and participate in the unwriting and unfixing of hegemonic systems of knowledge. Finally, it is an attempt "to introduce invention in our existence" (Fanon) and imagine another lineage and future of knowledge.

Archive Ensemble (Chiara Figone, Paz Guevara, Emanuela Maltese, Beya Othmani)

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