Decolonial countervisuality¹

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In 2018, the Centre for Art on Migration Politics (CAMP), situated in the Trampoline House, a community space for refugees, asylum seekers and citizens in Copenhagen, hosted an exhibition entitled *Decolonizing Appearance* with the visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff as guest curator. As in Mirzoeff's book from 2011, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, to which I will return at length later in this chapter, key questions regarding appearance framed CAMP's exhibition. One video work created by Trinidadian-Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers (*The Gaze*) is striking: on a split screen, the audience sees a group of people on the right-hand side: 15 brown and black people, including the artist herself, all kneeling Colin Kaepernick style to protest the oppression of minorities in the United States.² Barefooted and all dressed in black on a black background, the performers of *The Gaze* are facing the viewer. But due to the long, high-angle shot of this group photo, the faces are blurred. On the left side of the split screen, every single individual from the group photo appears close-up for 20 seconds on a black background, maintaining direct eye contact with the viewer. Even though the impression of the video is of a rather static situation on a split screen, smaller processes unlock the static nature of the situation: the closed eyes open slowly; silence is replaced by an electronic sound-cloud by Lamin Fofana—dream-like and ominous; the division between the screens is transcended, as one person walks from right to left to say the often quoted, familiar sentence 'I am here because you were there', vaguely echoed, pointing to the constructions of African-Caribbean and African-American people by colonial empires, as well as connecting migration to colonialism directly (Kushnick 1993; Mignolo 2011). The sentence is uttered and the performer looks at us—the viewers—for two minutes. In this way, both space and time interconnect and expand (Figure 14.1).

The two shot angles position the viewer in two different ways. The high-angle shot perspective puts the viewer in the position of a CCTV camera placed above the scene for the purpose of surveillance. The close-up shots place the viewer as an equal, horizontal onlooker. The scenes represented in both cases—the kneeling crowd and the individual looking at you directly in the eye—are themselves a direct expression of resistance to a dominant white

Figure 14.1 *The Gaze*, Jeannette Ehlers (2018). All performers are looking back at the hegemonic gaze to draw it into the field of vision. Film still from *The Gaze*. The image is acquired through VISDA, Visual Rights Denmark in 2021.

gaze. Either they are a visible protest against the inclination of the white gaze to ostracize, marginalize and subjugate the race-gender-religious-ethnic others who are performing the kneeling gesture. Or they are a direct challenge to this white gaze by simply looking back, dragging the gaze into the field of vision, thus being excluded from a safe space of voyeurism. In this way, the white gaze is doubly decolonized: through collective protests by black subjects claiming the right to visibility and exerting the right to challenge the dominance of the white gaze. *The Gaze* is also curated as an interactive work, with refugee asylum seekers from the infamous Danish deportation centre Sjølsmark as performers. In this way, the work is embodied by implicated subjects that take part in the distributed decolonizing enunciation of the whole work.

The decolonial option (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) has actualized the need to revisit visual culture theory because visibility and its relationship with knowledge has been central to the legitimization of Western hegemony since the beginning of modernity. Mirzoeff (2011) sees visibility and its different modalities as powerful tools in the hands of authority and political regimes to name, categorize and define the real. He claims (with Spivak [1999] amongst others) that in modernity and the epoch of historical colonialism, there is a convergence of visibility and the right to look producing a world-generating optic of modernity *as* a generalized Western gaze (Mirzoeff 2011, 8). To decolonize that gaze would entail the right for all to look in order to end the Western/Eurocentric dominance in economics, politics and culture. As decoloniality indicates the end of coloniality as a systemic and structural inequity, we are dealing here with something that is not yet the case, exactly as the term ‘decolonial re-emergence’ (Knudsen 2018) promises: coming from the future and connecting to a past that haunts the present, it is about creating spaces where it is possible for everybody to look and appear outside coloniality. These spaces prefigure a decolonized future and allow people to appear and exist beyond the colonial matrices of representation. They include more than multiple spatio-temporalities: ‘If appearance is decolonized, it prefigures in the present a poetry from the future that others might aspire

towards' (Mirzoeff 2018, 11). They also install a subjunctive mode in the world we know: 'People act as if they were free, as if what happens there happens' (11).

Prefigured spaces offer a preview of decoloniality, according to Mirzoeff, as a glimpse of a future yet to come. What I offer in this chapter are examples of decolonial countervisuality in the form of prefigured spaces as a resistant mode in interactive and participatory artworks—*The Gaze* being one, the documentary *Faire-part* another. The analysis of *Faire-part* is polyphonic, evolving out of a focus group discussion involving experts and practitioners in the fields of art, heritage activism and African-European relations. My main argument is that previews of decoloniality—co-creating them or experiencing the spectacle of them—are key events in order to imagine more equal societies and to secure long-term investment in lasting structural changes to systemic inequalities. I will, however, begin my reflections with Frantz Fanon's theory of the white gaze and the potential for resisting it, as well as subsequent important contributions to this line of thought, before moving on to consider *The Right to Look* and its ambitious history of visuality and countervisuality from the seventeenth century onwards, with a view to adding substance to Mirzoeff's rather vague unfolding of countervisuality from the polyphonic reading of *Faire-part*.

White gazes and visceral-affective responses

The white structural and racist gaze is attacked in two ways in *The Gaze*: through collective protest and through an individual reclaiming of the right to look back thus challenging the hegemony of the white gaze. One of the key texts to understand the dynamics between gazing and embodiment is still Franz Fanon's *Peau Noires, Masques Blancs* (1952). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to deal with this seminal work in any depth, I will take up the intercorporeal encounter between a black man and a little white child in the train staged by Fanon and subsequently referred to by numerous postcolonial and decolonial scholars (Homi Bhabha, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Neetu Khanna, just to mention a few), as both a violent encounter with colonial power and difference and a scene of emotive contagion and transmission between two trembling bodies, complicating a simple binary opposition (Khanna 2020, 7).

The encounter, seen and felt from the perspective of the black man, has three phases that follow the triple visual existence sensed by Fanon: (1) 'Mama, look a Negro' (Fanon 1952, 90) says the child, a comment that is perceived by the black man as a 'simple' or almost neutral (in the jargon of the past) observation. A body takes up space and appears in the field of vision under the gaze of the other. This means that all bodies are visible to an imagined all-seeing eye. It also means that all bodies are dependent on the visual recognition and acknowledgement of others in order to come into existence. That is why the black man in the scene smiles and feels empowered

by this remark. (2) The little boy proceeds: 'Mama, look at the Negro, I am afraid', which immediately evokes a desire to laugh in the black man, although this visceral reaction is blocked by violent nausea. In this sequence, the black man is confronted with the emotional reaction of the child, whose perspective apparently is unequivocally directed to the bodily scheme of skin and race and its resonance in the white child's body. The resonance in the child's body is clearly a reaction of 'away-ness' from the socially marked body in question (Ahmed [2004] 2014). But despite the difference in semantics, the affective attunement in the two bodies is similar in intensity (Massumi 2009). (3) The scene ends like this: the black man trembles because he is cold; the little boy trembles with fear because he believes the black man is trembling with rage and flings himself into his mother's arms crying: 'Mama, the Negro is going to eat me up' (Fanon 1952, 92). Trembling with shame and self-hatred (also due to the anthropophagus allusions), the black man is denied positive existence and self-expression through the white racialized gaze and finds no adequate symbolic expression of his visceral-affective reactions to his own annihilation. The ultimate consequence of the white gaze is to deny him existence, as it is repeated over and over again in racist attacks—by official authorities—on black citizens.

What Franz Fanon discovers during this intermezzo is that the generalized, neutral other for whom all bodies are equal seems to be missing for all black bodies. Scholars of visual culture and cultural studies have subsequently worked out visual theories that show that any intercorporeal encounter is dependent on how bodies are mediated and framed in a particular society.

Critical race theory scholar Sarah Ahmed argues that there is no generalizable other that serves to establish the illusion of bodily integrity. The body is imagined to be related to and separated from particular bodily others. Difference is not found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies in two different categories: the familiar (assimilable, touchable) others, and the strange (unassimilable, untouchable) others (Ahmed 2000, 44). Thus, when Fanon claims that 'the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man' (Fanon 1952, 131), he is pointing to the inevitable position of unfamiliarity that black bodies assume when the white gaze represents familiarity (imagined as non-racialized). When everyone assumes the burden of particular body images, this includes taking on the social antagonisms and conflicts that distinguish bodies from each other. What Ahmed adds to the theory of intercorporeal encounters between white and black individuals is that these encounters are always mediated by any given society's matrices of that relation, which—in principle—nuances the relationship. More importantly, however, Sarah Ahmed, in particular, underlines that dominant hegemonic majorities are established based on familiarity between their members, while the category of unfamiliar others are the ones any particular society ostracize: a group that in principle is expandable, which feminist and decolonial scholar Madina Tlostanova has supported through the discursive framing of so-called 'problem bodies' (Tlostanova 2018) that affect

large groups of people in contemporary European societies: refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, Roma, Muslims and Eastern Europeans.

The merit of Neetu Khanna's book *The Visceral Logics of Decolonization* (2020) is that it focuses on how the involved bodies react viscerally and affectively to the encounter. In Fanon, the black man laughs, feels nauseous, vomits, cries and trembles in reaction to the labelling imposed by the child. The interesting thing, as Khanna argues, is that these socio-physical reactions to the scene point to visceral similarities and contagious transmissions between the two bodies involved in the meeting: both are trembling but for different reasons. The exit that the black man in the scene chooses is verbal: he attacks the mother of the child and tells her that she 'can kiss this Negro's ass', while she blushes and feels visibly ashamed (Khanna 2020, 132). In this way, he provides a violent answer to the racial violence in the scene. The complex intertwining of power asymmetry and affective attunement—meaning that they are both intensely affectively invested in and reacting to the encounter—between the two bodies has a more general point ascribed to it: colonial (fear) and revolutionary affect (anger) derive from the same emotive energy. Although one can acknowledge that anger is a completely legitimate emotional reaction to the genocidal and devastating consequences of colonialism—which are still unacknowledged by many European nations—the inspiring thought in Khanna is her will to transcend the binary logic of destroying or being destroyed in the intercorporeal encounter.

The question this chapter poses is what a shareable affect or emotion could be for those choosing the decolonial option? The crucial question is: how is it possible to form political movements and protests despite structural inequalities, different memories and intergenerational heritage that install incommensurable differences (Tuck and Yang 2012, 35) between the social actors who claim the same decolonial vision? Some would say that such an endeavour is impossible from the very start. In the later analysis of *Faire-part*, the emotion of hope—experienced from different unequal positions—is used to qualify a possible common attunement in decolonial work. I try to connect the concept of hope to the visual previews of decoloniality mentioned above that, according to Mirzoeff, are glimpses of a future yet to come. Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos uses the principle of hope from German philosopher Ernst Bloch to flesh out his 'sociology of emergence' and to conceive a future that is open and not yet determined (de Sousa Santos 2011). One needs to distinguish hope from utopian, ideological thinking, from specific directions of desire or horizons of expectation. Sousa Santos distinguishes between a sociology of absence in which criticism is oriented towards the forgotten, the repressed and the marginalized. This way of thinking is temporarily oriented towards the past and the present. By contrast, the 'sociology of emergence' is oriented towards what is not there yet but nevertheless connected to possibilities in the present. The 'now' expands symbolically, because the always uncertain future is concretized in the present and is always dependent on what the social actors in any present are capable of doing.

The affect of hope here becomes a social resource in the present regardless of the future prospects of any concrete project. Hopeful actions create associations between potential futures and a here-and-now that could be rethought from the perspective of the future (Miyazaki 2004, 157). By ‘pre-experiencing’ what has not yet happened and what might not happen, subjects form an image of the potential future independently from how realistic this future is (Pedersen 2012, 144). Thus, something new is added that decisively breaks the linear thinking of the present as a consequence of the past. It is in the exact moment of the opened present that the moment of hope reveals itself, which ties hope to the not yet known or the not yet present, the very principle of openness to the world.

Visuality and countervisuality

Before adding more substance to the political dynamic of countervisuality on the basis of previewing glimpses of the future in contemporary art projects, let us look briefly at the three regimes of visuality that Mirzoeff presents in *The Right to Look*. The connection that many decolonial scholars make between modernity and coloniality (Mbembe 2003; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2007)—notwithstanding the tendency to unify modernity as a monolith, which has met some criticism (Cooper 2005, Jay 1993)—is echoed in visual culture theory because visuality has been central to the legitimization of Western hegemony since the beginning of modernity. Vision constitutes an epoch’s field of vision and the entire sum of discourses that make up visuality (Foster 1988); perception is part of visuality and is therefore orchestrated by a politics of vision (Bryson 1988, 107). In Mirzoeff’s works, the visual dynamic between oppositions is called visuality and countervisuality, constituting three distinctive modalities organizing the field of vision historically: the plantation complex, the imperial complex and the military-industrial complex.

The plantation complex (1660–1860) had its origins in a Foucauldian sense in a ‘new colonial order of things’ and was sustained in the construction of the sight from above, indicating what was visible to the overseer on the plantation, and was a combination of violent enforcement and visualized surveillance (Mirzoeff 2011, 50). Countervisuality in this regime is thus the active refusal of visuality’s claims to authority. Empowered by images of decentralized collective agency and the irreducible autonomy of all persons, countervisuality takes many shapes throughout history: from slave revolts, to general strikes, and representational forms of protest (caricatures, posters, revolutionary paintings, antiracist and antifascist films) to alternative ways of imagining and modes of becoming that challenge authoritative regimes (Milbrandt 2012, 460).

With the imperial complex (1860–1945), the locally based production of crops and the violent regime of exploitation of enslaved labour, grew into a more abstract and intensified global spatio-temporal biopolitical segregation,

demonstrating the incommensurable hierarchy between civilized ('modern') and Indigenous ('living in the past') in colonies and metropolises on the basis of race. The imperial complex was facilitated by the Christian missionaries and the close relationship between the plundering of both natural and cultural resources and accumulating them in colonial metropolises led to increasing resistance to modern imperialism by nineteenth-century working-class and radical intellectuals. The visual expression of this countervisuality is people gathering in the streets to protest collectively.

The visibility of the military-industrial complex (1945–present) is expressed through techniques of managing populations and installing regimes of separation. Counterinsurgency—which is hegemonic visibility fighting back against any attacks on its hegemony—takes the shape of building walls, creating camps, promoting domestic segregation and superseding the spectacle of the nuclear war by information warfare in the form of fake news or other digital, softer tactics of cultural infiltration. What does countervisuality look like in the military-industrial complex of permanent surveillance? The answer that Mirzoeff offers to this question is rather vague: a new reclaimed and rediscovered everyday life and practices of the everyday 'that is not found but made' (Mirzoeff 2011, 309). My intention in presenting a multifocal analysis of the documentary film *Faire-part* from 2019 is not only to analytically demonstrate how *Faire-part* can be read as a decolonial piece of art but also to literally perform a collaborative project that although modest opens the future in the present along the lines of hope.

When we consider contemporary ways of decolonizing colonial legacies in public spaces globally, it becomes apparent that many forms of institutionalized responses and informal decolonial resistance, actions and insurgencies in cities find themselves within Mirzoeff's general modes: the installation of alternative heroes/heroines to replace obsolete colonial relics such as Christopher Columbus statues around the globe, collective protests against racism and all kinds of representational forms of criticism that disturb the authority of a visual regime. As a politicized form of colonial heritage action, removal has been used to reclaim the right to contest heritage selections (presences and absences) in cities (Kølvraa 2018). The active removal of statues we have witnessed in many cities, as part of the anti-racist protests after the murder of George Floyd, exemplified by the toppling of the statue of slave-trader Edward Colston in Bristol on 7 June 2020, is a strong mobilizing action in a public space because it offers an opportunity to witness and play an active role in making history by providing a countervisual response to the white gaze that annihilates—literally—black citizens. There is no doubt that such actions may be justified (Mbembe 2016) and considered necessary steps on the way to decolonizing spaces, institutions and minds. But despite their mobilizing, affective energy, such actions are only the beginning of a long and steep path. What I hope to achieve in the last part of this chapter is to acknowledge and advance towards a more decolonial future: a collaborative colonial heritage modality based on united social resources in the present.

***Faire-part* as countervisual documentary**

Faire-part is a 58-minute documentary released in 2019 and made by two Congolese cineastes and residents, Nizar Saleh and Paul Shemisi, and two Belgian cineastes and residents of Brussels, Anne Reijners and Rob Jacobs. It plays out in Kinshasa, showing how everyday resistance to visible and invisible traces of colonial legacies happens in artistic performances in the city's many neighbourhoods. *Faire-part* invites the viewer to eight street performances taking place in various parts of Kinshasa that deal either directly with colonial issues: the colonial past and Congo's constant struggle against old and new colonial powers pillaging resources, and the countervisual celebration of other heroes such as Patrice Emery Lumumba from DRC's (Democratic Republic of the Congo) new history as a young nation; or more derived problems such as the upcycling of garbage into new resources and the role of technology as well as prostitution, rape culture and violence against women. Genre-wise it uses very intelligently a performative mode of expression (Bruzzi 2000) that includes and shows the production processes of the documentary itself.

A participatory method

In order to practise—methodologically—what my text talks about and what *Faire-part* actually represents, namely decolonial countervisuality, I needed to include multiple ways of seeing in the analysis of *Faire-part*. Acknowledging different ecologies of knowledge (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; de Sousa Santos 2007; Tihuwai Smith 2012), and at the same time feeling the strong urge to break the monopoly of academic institutions on research, I chose a participatory research method to involve research partners not affiliated to research institutions in their professional lives (Bergold and Thomas 2012; Cooke and Kothari 2001). I resorted to forming a focus group for the creation of a 'communicative space' (Bergold and Thomas 2012) that allows openness, dissenting views and conflicts to appear and contribute to the process of knowledge production. This means that the rest of the chapter is multivocal: it includes different voices on the documentary to include 'a parallax of perspectives' and 'different angles of vision', thereby improving the analysis of the film (Swartz 2011, 49). The focus group members are experts in the fields of heritage activism, art and decoloniality. We—to include myself as an egalitarian partner in the focus group—live in Aarhus and Brussels, and the gender bias of our group—solely women—is a reverse mirroring of *Faire-part*, which is strongly male dominated, in particular when it comes to the performance art from Kinshasa.

The members were Belgian-Congolese Benjamine Laini Lusulusa, also known as Lili Angelou, a decolonial activist and critical counsellor and a new member of the *Faire-part* collective; Stephanie Collingwoode Williams, an anthropologist, social worker and trainer who is Belgian-Ghanaian;

Belgian-Congolese Sorana Munsya, a psychologist who works with African art; and me, a Danish cultural studies scholar who works with difficult heritage, art and decoloniality. In terms of the values of participation that Christopher Kelty et al. (2015) have summarized in their seven dimensions of participation, our focus group had high scores: we could all learn from the experience; we were all able to exert resource control and had high visibility in the project; and we all had a voice concerning the analysis of the film, which is why I try to level myself with the rest of the focus group members, although I am the bearer of the white gaze and the institutional academic racism that the other three focus members invoke and oppose, not least in calling our focus group ‘a white space’, indicating that my affiliation with a European university from the wealthy North ‘coloured’ the entire space (see below).

For the focus group discussion, I made a discussion guide to cover at least five analytical dimensions of the film: (1) How is Kinshasa represented in the documentary? (2) How are the site-specific artistic expressions and their dealing with colonial heritage represented? (3) What role does the genre—performative documentary—play in the enunciation of the film (for example, disclosure of the filming process)? (4) The film as intercultural encounter. (5) Positionality and countervisuality in the film. We met virtually for two hours in late August 2020. I had permission to record our conversation and subsequently wrote down our analysis, which my focus group co-members had the opportunity to read, comment on and over-write. Co-authorship of the entire chapter was also put on the table.

Considering my co-researchers as knowledgeable subjects with the same rights as professional researchers leads to questions about the material resources needed for participation. The three women were remunerated to participate in order to signal social recognition of the value of their contribution to the research process (Bergold and Thomas 2012, 10). Access to individuals who would be interested in discussing a documentary film with an unknown scholar from a small northern European country was more difficult than planned (what did I expect?). After several fruitless attempts through local specialists to make contact with associations dealing with colonial heritage issues, I used a personal contact to the decolonial artistic environment in Brussels to find at least one person who might be interested. This person then composed the focus group, and she is the reason the group could be formed. The other focus group members ‘did it for her’, as they explained to me during the session. They also unanimously declared European universities to be non-inclusive white spaces. What I encountered here was a clearly critical attitude towards the scientific institution that I am part of and an attitude that I could only try to nuance through creating a safe space for our conversation about the film. ECHOES, EU and H2020, which is the scientific institutional framework that I represent in this case, offered the three focus group members a collaborative project in which they served as active partners in the analysis of *Faire-part* (Simon 2010, 187). Although the focus group is framed

by me as an ECHOES member, the content of our analysis of the documentary emerges as a co-production between the four of us. It is beyond any doubt that the analysis of the documentary improved significantly due to the gazes and voices involved.

Multiperspectival analysis of *Faire-part* ***Who constitutes the focus group?***

Three important things happened in the focus group discussion that demonstrated not only the potential for commonality between the different perspectives represented in the group, but also the differences between the four of us. Everyone agreed that *Faire-part* is in itself a decolonial archive that is opening a future, not least because it closely connects the question of *Who we are* asked by the filmmakers to how it is possible to represent Kinshasa and its art scene (Benjamine³). Secondly, some concepts were rejected, for example, the concept of interculturality, which the three invited participants did not like because ‘interculturality is a trap, as it runs the risk of concealing the incommensurable hierarchy amongst cultures that it tries to overcome’ (Sorana). Thirdly, along with positive comments, severe criticism and scepticism were likewise expressed with regard to the sincerity of scholars engaged in decolonial agendas, and suspicion that these agendas were popular at the moment and therefore capable of attracting funding. Fourthly, an abundance of rich perspectives on the film were presented that showed differences in the ways the film was perceived and revealed that using a focus group was a good idea because it allowed a parallax of gazes and perspectives to be identified.

Common statement about *Faire-part*

The following statement was something the focus group could agree on:

Faire-part is a film about Kinshasa at some level but it is likewise a film about doing a film about Kinshasa and how the impossibility of a straightforwardly representational desire is expressed through a whole range of strategies to render visible ‘back-stage areas’ of this film production in order for audiences to assist in the film emerging. The audience is thus let into the editing process, to the rehearsing processes before a filmed event, to the creation and discussions around voice-over text and so on and so forth. The exposure of the production process, as a decolonial gesture, pluralizes the camera’s gaze and multiplies and diversifies authorship to the film. The end goal of this strategy stressing the embodied and subjective value of any perspective is also to show that the exposure of the authorial gazes and voices are necessary preconditions to mobilizing around any countervisual statement about the real.

Figure 14.2 *Faire-part*, Nizar Saleh, Paul Shemisi, Anne Reijners and Rob Jacobs (2019). We see here how the film crew (Anne Reijners and Rob Jacobs) on the left side of the image is part of the picture that is framed and seen from yet another angle, multiplying viewing positions. In the centre of the image, we see one of the street art performances entitled *Kongo Poker* consisting of a small pushcart, two performers crying out to invite audiences to play poker on the future of Congo. Film still from *Faire-part*, courtesy of the artists.

Favourite scenes

All four of us had favourite scenes and topics in the film to which we attributed particular value. For Stephanie, the key question—posed in the film during a discussion between Paul and Nizar—was: how is it possible to criticize Europe with a film that is financed by Europe? She believes that this question alone reveals the limits of any criticism of Europe, and this in itself renders true criticism impossible. Likewise, she pointed out that languages carry colonial memories, which explains why Paul feels that Kinois women keep themselves at a distance when he courts them in French. Being unable to speak Lingala, a language spoken in several countries in Central Africa, due to his upbringing in Gabon, Paul, like Nizar, who is half Indian and who complains about the racism of the Indian populations against darker-skinned people in Africa, is something of a stranger to the DRC: ‘They are part of it but not quite part’, as the title of the documentary also indicates, said Stephanie.

Benjamine had a quite complex performance as her favourite scene. Congolese artist Yanos Majesticos and Belgian cineaste and visual artist Rob Jacobs performed a symbolic gesture of restitution of a macabre piece of colonial heritage: a golden tooth from P.E. Lumumba’s mouth, the only thing remaining after the assassination and later maltreatment of Lumumba’s body by the Belgian-American forces who removed the hero of Congolese

independence and first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1961. The two performers—unequally positioned in relation to this legacy but equally dressed in shirts and shorts (colonial attire)—read aloud excerpts of the book *The Arena, the Story of Lumumba's Assassination*, written by the Belgian police officer Gerard Soete, who took part in the murder of Lumumba and kept his teeth as a souvenir. The text is full of graphic details about the disposal of Lumumba's body, which was sawn into pieces by Soete and immersed in sulphuric acid. The performance takes place right in front of the statue of Lumumba along Lumumba Boulevard, and the text excerpts are read aloud in both Dutch and Lingala by the two performers, who also exchange languages, allowing them to speak each other's language when describing this particular colonial legacy. In order to stress the colonial entanglement of the DRC and Belgium, the two performers rotate their heads like Siamese twins connected through their colonized minds. Benjamine reads this scene as a symbolic restitution of the hero's teeth, which were taken as trophies by the Belgian authorities but were reclaimed recently by Lumumba's relatives. The decolonial gesture of the performance is spectacular because it revitalizes the discussion of continued colonialism in the form of direct violent interventions in an independent state's sovereign right of self-determination (Figure 14.3).

Sorana's favourite point in *Faire-part*, which is a general point, is that the documentary unfolds a vision of decolonization quite close to Mirzoeff's definition above, underlining that decolonization is a way of imagining the future and the type of society we want to live in. And she adds: 'this future is

Figure 14.3 *Faire-part*, Nizar Saleh, Paul Shemisi, Anne Reijners and Rob Jacobs (2019). We see Congolese performance artist Yanos Majesticos and cineaste Rob Jacobs in a bodily entangled gesture during their performance on Lumumba, on Lumumba Boulevard. Film still from *Faire-part*, courtesy of the artists.

always connected to the past but without getting stuck with it', linking this feature of not getting stuck to the ephemeral character of live performances that appear as decolonial alternatives to the more 'solid' legacies in city spaces in the shape of monuments, statues, etc. Archiving the ephemeral is a recurrent problem, but *Faire-part* as a visual archive fulfils the documenting function quite well in this case, according to Sorana.

My own (Britta) favourite scene is when Paul films Anne with a hidden camera in his bag and discloses that this is something he feels forced to do occasionally as a filmmaker (filming people without their knowledge), as the Kinois are suspicious of potentially exploitative and surveillance uses of the camera even though he explains his artistic purposes. This is the first time the camera mode shifts from medium and close-up still shots to the more movable and slightly shaky images of a movable body camera. The reason I like this scene is that it shows how Paul from Kinshasa and Anne from Brussels both relate to filming differently because of the different implications of filming in their respective countries. Paul experiences scepticism towards the camera because the relationship between cameras and regimes of surveillance is automatically connected to colonial regimes of visibility in the Congolese context for a majority of the population. While Anne is speaking from a context in which discourses of the rights of individuals to manage their public appearance overshadow or repress the memory of colonial regimes of visibility for the majority of the population. This shows the insurmountable difference between the perspectives of the conqueror and the conquered in relation to filming and subjecting others to the filming process.

Differences and positionality

'The four filmmakers were born on two different sides of history, but they imagine a shared future. They feel close, they cannot understand themselves without each other. They cannot make this film without each other', declares the voice-over at the very end of the documentary (54:51). There is no doubt that the interdependency and hopeful collaboration based on a shared painful past is clearly expressed in the declared ethos of this artistic collective. The collective seem to have a long-term commitment—for instance, they work together in SOKL, an ongoing series of decolonial actions in public space, 20 of which took place in Antwerp in 2019,⁴ with plans to travel to other Belgian cities in the years to come. Film projects are also being carried out for the city museum of Antwerp and their ethnographic exhibition *100x Congo*, addressing issues of restitution. Thus, the long-term commitment to work together on decolonial issues is the loose structure of this artistic collective. But is this interdependency doomed to repeat old power structures?

In many of its scenes, the film reveals many incommensurable inequalities between the two Belgian and the two Congolese artists: financially (the funding for the current project is European), technologically (access to camera

and sound equipment is unequal), industrially/culturally (cultural and artistic richness on the ground in Kinshasa is not necessarily mirrored in a government-supported film industry in Congo as it is in Belgium), and in terms of physical safety (the Belgian guests in Kinshasa sleep under a mosquito net, while Paul does his editing in the room where his three children are sleeping without a mosquito net). The documentary does not hide these structural differences and inequalities, which could lead to an ethics of incommensurability that Eve Tuck and Kayne Yang put forward that leaves no hope of reconciliation between former colonizers and former colonized (2012, 35). However, the collective also makes an attempt to challenge these structures of inequality: shooting the film in Kinshasa gives the two Belgian artists the opportunity to familiarize themselves with an entangled space. It is definitely the business of *Faire-part* to put the two Belgian filmmakers in the clear position of being a white foreign minority there, to reverse the former metropole-colony power relation. Nevertheless, although they are positioned differently from the outset, all the members of the collective seem to be both strangers to and familiar with Kinshasa.

Although the members of the collective embody colonialism as heritage differently—seen also in the car scene in which Rob rehearses the performance about Lumumba's remains and in which he does not remember the perpetrator's name correctly—the differences and similarities between the members of the collective are to some extent redistributed during the documentary. The mastering of local languages, music tastes and practices and knowledge of urban geography is not distributed according to a simple logic of a local-foreigner. The members are positioned differently on a structural basis, but the performative mode of the documentary allows them to embrace the fact that they are distant from what they are looking at. With the documentary as a contact zone both in its telling and showing mode (Ifversen 2018; Pratt 1991), this demonstrates that structural injustices may be slightly disturbed through persistent strategies of travelling to each other's worlds to lose your footing momentarily (Lugones 2003).

What does countervisuality look like in *Faire-part*?

Countervisuality is revealed most obviously in the fact that all the scenes in the film feature an embodied camera that is part of the field of vision in the documentary. No scene appears innocently as reality itself. It is clear that all the scenes have been framed by someone, and the effort made to show the embodied vision in every performance suggests a parallel between the artistic performances and the documentation of that same performance: they are interdependent and at the same time susceptible to both critical scrutiny and indulgent tolerance. The collective of *Faire-part* asks audiences to take both perspectives in their viewing of the documentary. Sorana and Benjamine pointed to the relationship between the artistic ephemeral performances and their decolonial endeavour and the documentary displaying sincerity and

modesty in its approach as hopeful and showing the path to new ways of archiving contemporary heritage forms.

Countervisuality is also revealed in the fact that the artistic performances take place with the whole city as a potential stage. Site-specific to the legacies, materialities and practices available at certain places in the urban space of Kinshasa, the tactics of resistance that the artistic performances present and their de-institutionalized appearances in public space as part of everyday life underline that these socio-political issues need to be present and discussed in everyday life—like here on the street—to have any impact (Stephanie). It might sound like a cliché that Kinshasa is a city in the making, but even so this seems like the most fitting way of explaining its creative energy, she argues. Kinshasa is a city that is one of the African continent's largest urban conglomerations today, home to a population of over 11 million inhabitants. Kinshasa's unbridled growth began in 1878 when Henry Morton Stanley set up four trading posts along the River Congo connecting what later became a flourishing urban conglomeration of Leopoldville-Kinshasa and its surrounding villages, forming a large market system where goats, fish, salt, enslaved individuals and European goods were traded by the local Teke and Humbu populations (De Boeck 2011, 265). In 1910, the riverbank was lined with at least 80 storehouses, belonging to several industrial enterprises and trading companies. In the first half of the twentieth century, Leopoldville—as Kinshasa was named before independence from Belgium in 1960—became a segregated city with a white heart called La Ville (the home of the city's European population) and a surrounding, peripheral African city, La Cité⁴⁵ (home to an increasing number of Congolese). This division, which is the legacy of racial segregation, continues to mark Kinshasa's urban landscape today (De Boeck 2011, 266).

During the city's postcolonial expansion from 1960 to 2010, a fascinating development from a decolonial perspective took place. The tangible divisions between the two main parts of the city and other empty no-man's lands forming divisive lines between the various living areas were the reason the city was scattered over such a vast distance; and the no-man's lands became re-ruralized, engendering a new type of agrarian urbanity (De Boeck 2011, 267). Unhindered by any kind of formal industrialization or economic development, and due to the lack of architecture and infrastructure, the city's resources developed into the bodies, movements, practices and discourses of urban dwellers (De Boeck 2011, 271; De Boeck and Plissart 2004). De Boeck describes how city dwellers are transformed into active participants of their own economic, social, political or religious agendas. They become entrepreneurs, mastering the skills of improvisation; and as we can see in *Faire-part*, this do-it-yourself aspect of the city is a fertile ground for unbridled, non-institutionalized artistic expressions. This strong, self-organized reclaiming of the cityscape is now threatened by the city governor's endeavours to cleanse the city of its irregular, anarchic and unruly housing constructions and activities. Subjecting Kinshasa to untamed neoliberal global modernity—as the

city governor wishes (like any city governor in today's world)—interferes (at least to some extent) with the everyday entrepreneurial spirit of the city's actors.

Without falling into the trap of praising irregular activities, a lack of infrastructure and the anarchic reclaiming of space (because that is what cities in northern Europe lack completely), it seems to me that this cityscape allows plenty of room for interventions and entrepreneurial initiatives. The portrait of Kinshasa avoids portraying Kinshasa as a 'poor' city, and the city is rendered without voyeurism or exoticism (Benjamine). Instead, it seems that the abundance of live performances at street level has always been part of Kinshasa's powerful socio-cultural resources. As *Faire-part* witnesses and documents, these performances that open up the everydayness of the cityscape towards old/new potentialities, the previews of decolonial futures take the form of 'critical utopias' (Hroch 2011). Adding to the very mobilizing previews of decolonial futures—for example, in toppling statues—we are reminded that any decolonizing endeavour is unending and has to be done over and over again (Sorana).

Final remarks

This chapter has used contemporary performance art and a collaborative experiment to investigate ways of practising decoloniality after choosing the decolonial option. Adopting Mirzoeff's idea of countervisuality as a preview of decoloniality, I discovered that countervisuality came through in strategies of dragging the onlooker into the field of vision. In *Faire-part*, we discovered that the exposure of authorial gazes and voices is necessary in order to display any degree of reality capable of mobilizing politically. *Faire-part* portrays the rich art scene in Kinshasa, a city full of decolonial activities and actions, a city whose inhabitants are fully aware of and interested in discovering the painful past. Kinshasa also presents abundant opportunities for self-organized reclaiming of the cityscape.

The focus group discussion and editing process involved in the analysis of *Faire-part* added significantly to the chapter in three ways: I was corrected immediately when a Eurocentric view—despite all the best of intentions—took over. We all discovered new forms of colonial heritage through the others' perspectives, and the result is something that we have produced and own in common. After all, a main part of the article is a collaborative effort that—even though this effort could have been expanded even further—tries to meet the just and fair requirement for a co-created future for all. *Faire-part* presents a long-term commitment for all the involved filmmakers to honour the truth about the cruelty of (unending) colonialism, learning and remembering together a painful past, a shared responsibility for documenting and decolonizing cities and minds and to travel to each other's worlds to learn. As *Faire-part*—from the French, meaning 'participating in'—offers a way of looking into the future together (Bangstad and Nilsen 2019) through collaborative

projects, this chapter intends to—both content-wise and formally—take yet another step, albeit a tiny one, but nonetheless a step in the same direction.

Notes

- 1 This work forms part of the ECHOES project which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770248.
- 2 This performative way of expressing protest against oppression of minorities has been spreading during the global insurgencies in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 25 May 2020.
- 3 The linguistic use of 'we', 'us', and the use of the focus group members' first names is deliberate and expresses the need for a slight change of tone in my—otherwise—academic text. The informal and collegial spirit of the focus group discussion that characterized our conversation, is thus documented in the use of the members first names.
- 4 SOKL, "Decolonial Actions." Accessed 7 March 2021. www.sokl.be.
- 5 La Cité and La Ville are both French names for a/the city.

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