

Why Situationism? Why Sanguinetti Breakout Area? *Nyau*

Because of the gift. This is the economy I grew up with in Malawi. Malawi is the poorest country on earth. I don't see that as a negative. Malawi remains pre-emption. The country is naturally placed to resist capital. We have Nyau in Malawi, a whole culture set around not the commodity but the gift. Philosophers and anthropologists, from Emerson to Derrida, have explored how difficult it is to give a gift. Nietzsche muses, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, that one needs tremendous skill to give a gift. Emerson has observed that the gift has an effect of leaving the donee feeling inferior, and that an unreciprocated gift breeds resentment.

But what is a gift? It's more than a present for sure. Bataille regards the gift as 'excess' — the squandering of excess time and resources. To give a gift is to be like a God — the generous selfless sun above. For Bataille, that is why the gift giver has an air of superiority before the donee. Hyde observes how the gift has an effect of connecting people in contrast to the commodity that separates. The gift will make society breathe and create intimacies. A society that does not give a gift is a bloated society.

In my tribe, the Chewa, excess time and resources are not sold, instead it is squandered in 'useless' activities, such as the arts, funerals, initiations etc — all led by *Nyau* masks. The role of the Nyau mask is thus to orchestrate the giving of gifts — the squandering of surplus time and wealth — in play — *Gule Wamkulu*, literally the 'Great Play'. *Gule Wamkulu* is really the creation of 'Situations', where a gift can be given, without incurring a debt. Play mitigates petty exchanges that the giving of gift may inspire in sober situations. At a Nyau festival, and in play, one might give and receive a gift without guilt or feeling indebted. In the frenzy of the Nyau festival one might give as generously as the sun — indifferently.

Nyau is what took me to the Situationists. It appeared to me that this movement had understood the meaning of the gift. From the onset of the group's founding in 1957 it embraced an unrestricted economic model in open defiance to prevailing capital and values of accumulation. The Situationists advocated the potlatch as the best way of approaching creativity and indeed life itself. Everything was to be given away indifferently, and they shared everything. They developed different playful creative devices in which the gift could be given without incurring a debt — detournment, psychogeography and unitary urbanism.

The Situationists spoke in a language familiar to me growing up in the gift giving societies of Malawi such as my tribe the Chewa. My PhD since 2011 has explored how the problematic of the gift animates various aspects of my art practice. I have employed Situationism as a model to translate the gift giving aspects of my tribe into aspects of my contemporary art practice. Unitary Urbanism, where a city is designed for play rather than utility is akin to the Chewa Nyau City, *mzinda*; detournment is really the Chewa *mdulo*, a ritual transgression of canon and normal

order to open up new perspectives and passions in life. My proposal for a summer fellowship at Yale was to study Psychogeography in William Blake and Romantic British art. It appeared to me Psychogeography with its concerns on how the environment may affect the psychology of the individual is a modern form of masking, even with the fact the method may function as a form of psychotherapy. Nyau masquerading and derive are certainly cathartic. I have employed Psychogeography to make sense of the new environments I have travelled to around the world since I left Malawi 15 years ago.

From this practice I have developed *Nyau Cinema*, site specific performances captured on and made in conversation with the medium of film. I approach Nyau Cinema making as a form of masking where instead of wearing a mask one responds to the environment with the idea of film in mind. There is plenty of Psychogeography depicted in William Blake and Romantic Art and my aim at Yale was to study that and see it could inspire my Nyau film practice.

I did study Blake and made films at Yale, but in my search for Situationist material within the university's library I came across Sanguinetti — first one photograph then a whole archive. The controversial circumstances of how the work was purchased inspired my approach to the archive.

Sanguinetti it appeared had capitulated in his later years. Here was one of the staunch advocates of the gift economy selling his papers at Christies to the highest bidder — Yale University's Beinecke Library. I set about detourning the archive. I still believe in the gift. I employed the Situationist detourning technique of the 'graffiti photo' to detourne not only Sanguinetti's papers, through creative play, but also the academic architecture of the Beinecke Library. Sanguinetti's papers were lifted up and photographed. I was not the first one to approach academia as a form of play and gift giving through this act of detournment. The Dutch philosopher Huizinga has traced the origin of the academy in play, citing the playful attitude of the Sophists towards knowledge as prototype.

When Okwui Enwezor saw my Nyau Cinema in Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg and invited me to propose work for Venice Biennale 2015, I decided to take Sanguinetti's papers back to Italy. It was a conceptual taking of the archive back to Italy — an extension of the detourning of the archive that I had begun in the Beinecke Library. I had remembered how the French government had to intervene to stop Yale from taking Guy Debord's archive to America — before the University finally succeeded in acquiring Situationist material though one of the last members of Situationists International, Sanguinetti.

Maybe Sanguinetti had needed the money. Taking the archive back to Italy would be my gift to Sanguinetti. I installed the work in the Arsenale using aspects of Guy Debord's little known board game he invented, after disbanding SI to allow for a more inclusive and strategic approach to subversion and situations — the Game of War — and also incorporated an angry letter of protest of the sale of the archive from Sanguinetti's translator Bill Brown. Like De Certeau or Lefebvre I believed that within

the liminal spaces of the commercial world it was still possible to give a gift.

Sanguinetti Breakout Area is made up of disagreeing parties but within the heat of exchange and betrayals the Situationist gift could be passed on— from Guy Debord to Sanguinetti, from Sanguinetti to Bill Brown, from Bill Brown to Samson Kambalu, from Samson Kambalu to Venice and to the world. Thus although within the detournement of Sanguinetti's archive there is satire and parody arising from his seeming betrayal of the Situationist movement, *Sanguinetti Breakout Area* is actually also an optimistic work that seeks to sustain ideas of living the real life through the economy of the gift which the Situationists advocated and which I certainly would like to support coming from prestation societies of Malawi.

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