

The importance of words and actions

Jean Fisher

“In this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth – even though it be covertly, and by snatches.”
Herman Melville¹

Debates on the relationship of artistic practice to the sociopolitical sphere have gained momentum as the more negative effects of globalisation have visibly extended what Walter Benjamin called “states of emergency” beyond their *apparent* earlier confinement to colonial geographies and into the dark and dissimulating heart of the western world. When Benjamin coined this phrase, however, he also noted that these states were not the exception but the rule.² And, indeed, as the democratic mask of globalised neoliberal capitalism has slipped, so it is now clear that most of us are vulnerable to economic, political and military forces that undermine the concept of the nation-state as a benign agent of the social contract and expose its capacity to treat its own citizens as the enemy, increasingly bereft of legal or political agency. This state of affairs had, of course, long been experienced by peoples under hegemonic colonial rule and post-independence state violence; and it is from a deeply felt engagement with the visual and verbal representations that sustained social injustices in these geographies that, I suggest, the work of Maria Thereza Alves gains its resonance.

In retrospect it is not surprising to find that artists and scholars from the geographies of the global South, long subjected to oppressive regimes, were engaged in sociopolitical counter-hegemonic tactics of resistance whilst Northern artists were merely tinkering around the edges with the “institutional critique” of an elitist Euro-American art system. From the late 1960s throughout the 1980s, there were few Latin American and Caribbean countries (or Arab states, for that matter) that had not been forced into repressive dictatorships by the combined interference of the world’s financial organisations and the United States’ covert CIA operations or blatant military invasion. Amongst Southern artistic responses to the repression of the nineteen seventies one can cite a tendency to act

through collectives, which provided modest support; whilst artists in Brazil – Maria Thereza Alves’ place of departure – produced additional interventionary tactics: most well known in the West are Cildo Meireles’s *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, and Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica’s interactive sculptures that sought to redefine the relationship between art and society as an embodied experience. To an extent, however, these artists emerged from a background outlined by Oswald de Andrade’s “Anthropophagic Manifesto” (1928), which redefined Brazilian culture in terms of native “cannibalism”, which, for Andrade, was the form of appropriation by which Brazilian national culture would find its own identity against the historical imports of the European. One notes here, however, a parallel *criollo* misinterpretation and misuse of indigenous cultures whilst ignoring the state and corporate violence enacted upon them. Although Alves was educated and lived during much of the 1980s in New York,³ and although she may well eschew any concept of national identity as a fabricated and dangerously divisive form of exclusivity, one might suggest that her work inherits this Southern sensitivity to sociopolitical injustices. However, she understands their roots not in the de-colonising struggle between European settlers and imperialists, but in the actual and linguistic violence against indigenous peoples, an understanding that she carries over into Europe with her archival research into the concealed histories and the prejudices embedded in language that form or deform local experience and identities.

The art practice of Maria Thereza Alves does not lend itself to easy categorisation. For the most part, she eschews the concept of art as a discrete object, which, whatever its author’s initial intention, is too readily commodified by the wealthy élite as an asset to trade in the auction houses. With Alves’ work we have to ask different questions about art’s purpose; we therefore have to abandon the notion of aesthetic objects and look to the productive effects of imagination, process and social or inter-subjective relations. One can perhaps suggest that Alves’s work proposes an “aesthetics of resistance” against the norms of western art alongside the “world of lies”, as Melville put it, peddled by the hypocrisy of the political classes everywhere. Such an

art practice is bound to the political insofar as it is deeply implicated in the conditions of life, but realistically knows it cannot claim to impact on politics as such. Its sphere of action is therefore the “local”, listening and seeing beyond the surface appearance of things, identifying other ways of seeing and reading towards reclaiming the power to act in and against the limits imposed by power and its mediated versions of reality. The form her work takes is therefore an *art engagé*, in which participation, both at the point of initiation of a project and during its execution, has been a central aspect of her practice to date.

To reclaim agency demands a *proactive* subject armed with knowledge. The problem is that the subject is not only oppressed by power but is itself its product, suggesting that the subject is always somehow complicit in its subjugation. So how to imagine a politically viable agency capable of overcoming this impasse? In the colonial scenario, Frantz Fanon insisted that it was impossible to do so by a *nostalgic* retreat into some lost or fragmented pre-colonial past. As Fanon said, one had to recognise the dynamics of repression and reconfigure social narratives from the conditions of the present. One might add, considering the centrality of archival research to Alves’ work, that one must first understand how the past is selectively used by the powerful to write its own version of history. To reclaim agency meant turning language towards re-imagining an existence not defined by trauma and victimhood, a role Fanon assigned to the intellectual and storyteller.⁴ Edward Said likewise suggested that the intellectual had a responsibility to ‘speak truth to power’, to give voice to injustice, which was best done by the ‘amateur’ uncontaminated by the institutional pressures to which academics were inevitably subjected.⁵ Such a description fits the unaffiliated or “nomadic” artist like Alves, whose “home” is located in the processes by which the *work* of art comes into being. We therefore arrive at another issue raised by Said that is pertinent to Alves’ working process, namely, the space of exile. In his essay ‘Reflections on Exile’, after disparaging some of the least attractive tendencies of the exiled subject, he comes to Adorno’s commentary in *Minima Moralia*, in which, as Said relates, “he argued that everything that one says or thinks, as well as every object one possesses, is ultimately mere commodity. Language is jargon; objects are for sale. To refuse this state of affairs is the exile’s intellectual mission.” Exiles cross boundaries, break barriers of thought and experience; and “seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision.”⁶ This form of being, simultaneously *outside and belonging* to the world, is how I understand Alves’ position: a “storyteller” and “exile”, who adopts the procedures of the investigative scientist, anthropologist or ethnographer, not,

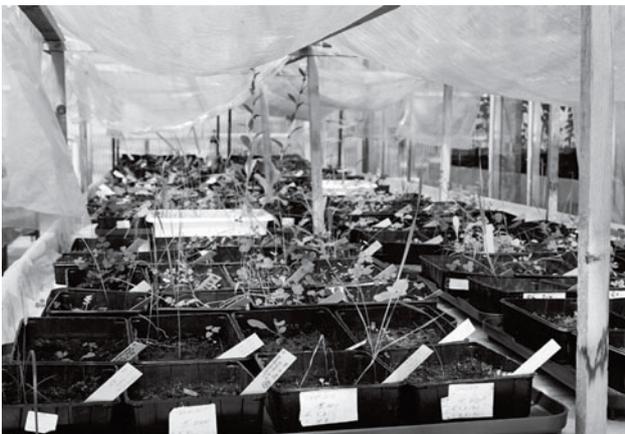
however, to produce a reverse anthropology in which the “native” looks at the “European” using the latter’s criteria, but to disclose the distortions of language and history by which hegemony exerts its control.

Seeds of Change is an extensive project that Alves researched and conducted in several port cities across Europe and Scandinavia. In one sense it is an extension of her earlier active engagement in ecological issues: she was a founding member of the Brazilian Green Party (*Partido Verde*), which was constituted in 1986 after the military dictatorship and committed to furthering social democracy and sustainable development. *Seeds of Change* is not an artwork in the conventional sense, nor does it possess an outcome that could be anticipated in advance; it is better described as an experimental, multidisciplinary collaboration by Alves with various environmental scientists, botanists, engineers, local authorities and communities, in which Alves applies an artistic imagination to specific contexts in order to disclose hitherto concealed sociocultural histories. The “point of departure” of the work was the observation that the ships that plied the trans-Atlantic colonial trade routes deposited ballast in their ports of call: ballast was loaded onto ships to control stability and later off-loaded – as Alves found, in legal and illegal sites – in order to lighten the ship to receive further cargo. Ballast would, however, consist of whatever natural aggregate material was available, with the result that plant seeds from the collection site were transported to the ports of deposit, where they may germinate, remain dormant for several years, or be dispersed even further afield.

Alves’ process was firstly to research shipping and municipal archives and maps to identify ballast sites. She would then take core soil samples from these sites and observe what “exotics” germinated under controlled conditions. The next phase of the project was to engage the local community in constructing a “ballast flora garden”, which, certainly in the case of Bristol and Liverpool as the most notorious slave and immigrant ports, would be likely to reflect the triangular trans-Atlantic slave trade. In Bristol, Alves indeed found an Argentinean and a Portuguese plant, which linked the Bristol-based adventurer Sebastian Cabot with the Anglo-Portuguese slave trade in Brazil, which, as Alves relates, even well into the twentieth century had repercussions on the sense of security of the local people of the Mato Grosso. If this part of the project was curtailed in Marseilles due to a change in local politics, the idea was received with enthusiasm in Bristol, whilst in Reposaari, Finland, Alves discovered that the local population already valued and nurtured the “exotics” that had sprung up in their midst to the extent that they functioned as a form of social currency.



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1
Seeds of Change: Liverpool (detail), 2004. An early flora mentions the non-native plants found growing on the “ballast-made roads at Claughton and Birkenhead.

2
Seeds of Change: Reposari (detail), 2001. Germinating ballast samples.

Ballast flora are of course “illegal immigrants”, and *Seeds of Change* presents an elegant allegory for complex human identities that expose Europe, not as a discrete set of monocultures but as the result of ongoing intercultural exchanges that undermine fantasies of national identity – a relatively recent construct born during the political and colonially inscribed upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Benedict Anderson’s seminal book *Imagined Communities* makes clear.⁷ As Alves notes, given that the process of exotic seed dissemination has continued for several centuries, both through inadvertent immigration and deliberate introduction by plant collectors, in places like the British Isles plants introduced centuries ago are now regarded as “indigenous”.⁸ But as her earlier work *Wake* (2000-01), a project for Berlin sponsored by the DAAD, revealed, plants are also emotively bound up with nationalist symbolism, despite the fact that they persistently fail to respect national borders. As *Wake* demonstrated, Bismarck’s attempts to define a national flora, like Nazi Germany’s later disastrous attempt to define an authentic German *volk*, were doomed to failure.

With a few rare exceptions, plants tend to stay within their species categories, unless genetically modified by humans, although they may naturally adapt to differing environmental conditions. Humans, of course, are a single species despite the rhetoric of “race”; there may be ethnic or cultural differences, but these do not preclude interethnic mixing. One might be wary of calling this “hybridity”, if only because this word tends to sediment onto “things” when cultural exchange is a fluid *process*. Rather, Gramsci’s notion of “war of position” often best describes the relation between minority and majority cultures, where differences are negotiated either as a matter of political expediency, or in acknowledgement that there is something useful in the “foreign” to be incorporated into existing cultural traditions. Likewise, in discussions of the relation between the “global” and the “local” in art practices, Gerardo Mosquera disputes the notion that this leads to the global homogenisation of art practices, arguing that the local “resignifies” the global to suit its own concepts and needs.⁹ From this perspective we may see Alves’ work as a “war of position”, exploring the various negotiations that take place in intercultural exchanges.

Three of Alves’ works in particular narrate different perspectives on the complexities of intercultural negotiation: *Oculesics: An Investigation of Cross-cultural Eye Contact* (2008), *Iracema de Questembert*, 2009, and *Orée*, 2011. *Oculesics* presents the viewer with the alternating images of two men: one, a “typical” white Northern European dressed in a suit, stares unblinkingly at the camera, whilst the other, dressed casually and whom we take to be an Arab possibly



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3
Oculesics: An Investigation of Cross-Cultural Eye Contact, 2008.
 Video, 11 minutes.

4
Fair Trade Head, 2008.
 Color photographs (diptych),
 text (French or English),
 lambda prints, oak frame,
 glass 100×100 cm (each).

from North Africa, occasionally glances at the camera, but whose gaze mostly drifts elsewhere. Meanwhile the text captions, which appear to be ‘voiced’ from a female perspective and derive from Alves’ associates in the art world, relate differing responses to these gazes although they not do necessarily coincide with each face: the steady frontal stare was “predatory”, “disconcerting”, “encouraged” or “didn’t encourage” conversation; whereas the Arab man’s gaze signalled “inattention” and “disrespect”. It is not until the end of the video that we learn that the European world regards its own tradition of maintaining eye contact as a ‘universal’ sign of politeness, ignorant of the fact that most other peoples interpret this as aggressive and disrespectful.

Alves’, *Fair Trade Head* (2009) made for the “Museum of European Normality”, is also concerned with European disrespect for other cultures and peoples, which is nowhere more grotesquely illustrated than by the nineteenth century habit of collecting “native” body parts. Ethnographic museums in many ex-imperial countries have returned these human remains to their communities for proper burial, but the French Ministry of Culture at first blocked the return of a Maori person’s tattooed head by Rouen’s Museum of Natural History on the extraordinary grounds that this was an “art object” and part of French “national heritage”. Alves notes a similar reluctance by the Musée de Quai Branly in her video *Iracema de Questembert*. Alves’ ironic proposal in *Fair Trade Head* is a tattooed white female head as a reciprocal “gift”.

It may be remembered that the remains of Saartjie Baartman (known as the “Hottentot Venus”) were only returned by France to South Africa during 2002 at the specific request of Nelson Mandela. Baartman was paraded in European freak shows during the early nineteenth century, because her steatopygic buttocks and genitals excited attention. Sander L. Gilman plausibly shows how popular images of Baartman merged with those of white prostitutes showing exaggerated buttocks, as signs of an “intrinsic” excessive and corrupting female sexuality.¹⁰ It is to this history of the displayed female body, the fetishisation of which seemed to increase during the height of nineteenth century imperialism,¹¹ that Alves’ video *Beyond the Painting* (2012) alludes. The artist invited several “Caucasian” women, most of whom were not professional models, to choose and present poses from historical paintings of the nude. Each woman enters the frame and adopts the pose in a scene of simple black drapery; she holds the pose, candidly addresses the camera and exits the frame. Most of these poses are recognisable – examples from Boucher, Goya, Ingres, Delacroix and Manet, amongst others, are all presented – but they are no less discomfoting for all their familiarity when one knows

that most of the original sitters were either the mistresses of the wealthy élite, prostitutes by economic necessity, or the objects of an artist's colonial fantasies. The Renaissance established the lexicon of poses for the female nude genre, which, whilst initially depicting proactive women like Diana the Huntress, became increasingly addressed to the lascivious gaze of the male observer until all pretence to classical myth was abandoned in Boucher's sexually posed *Miss Murphy*, 1752. This gaze gained added frisson with "Orientalist" fantasies of the "Turkish" or "Arab" seraglio introduced with European military campaigns in North Africa and the Middle East – an allusion that Alves does not ignore in her inclusion of the prostrate woman posed in Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827 – or later, with Gauguin's nubile Tahitian girls. The female viewer might despair at the extent to which these poses have become naturalised within western depictions of the female body, and the amnesia about the realities from which they derived. Nonetheless, it is the spell of the exotic fantasy that Alves breaks by presenting the everydayness of the model's work, reminding us that these women were real people.

Iracema de Questembert, however, provides a counterpoint to what might seem to be *Beyond the Painting's* depressing visual history of female objectification. The video presents a fictional account of an indigenous Brazilian woman, Iracema, who inherits her father's wealthy French estate. We see her move from her forested home, passing the logging trucks, the farmland clearances and the mining companies, on her journey to France to take up her inheritance, where racial bigotry is figured in her encounters with the lawyers, who, with 'false manners like anthropologists and missionaries', try to persuade her to return. She does not; instead, she takes up the life of an artist in the intercultural milieu of French 'primitivist' modernism and founds an Institute for Science and Art. As she says, from the gracious cultural perspective of indigenous America, she is 'returning the gift of inheritance by accepting it'—and also by passing it on. *Iracema de Questembert* circulates around a critique of what commonly constitutes a national belonging and identity, questioning what "Frenchness" means for both the peoples in the country's colonised "departments" around the world and for their reception inside France. The name "Iracema" refers to a fictional founding myth of Brazilian national identity formed by the union of a native woman, Iracema, and a Portuguese coloniser, Martim. This sexualised myth, in which the native woman is both vilified as a traitorous whore and valorised as the mother of the (settler) nation, is a common trope in the Americas and was a way of legitimising colonialism – one recalls the similar

narratives of Malinche and Cortés in Mexico and Pocahontas and John Rolfe/John Smith in the Virginias. On the surface, therefore, it would seem that Iracema's "assimilation" into French society is an example of cultural "hybridity", but Alves' story is not so simple. Iracema's cultural integrity is maintained in terms of ethical responsibility and adaptation – as, for instance, indigenous dishes adapted to available local ingredients. "Adapting" is not quite the same as "hybridising"; it implies a movement of change, whereas hybridity, as already mentioned, identifies "things". In the end, we discover that Iracema is not the descendent of an interethnic liaison, and is French not by "ethnicity" but by choice; and perhaps the most significant statement of the work is: "Home, where is that? If home is not found in the intellectual life of friends and discussion, it is only a tomb."

Alves returns to the issue of intercultural exchange in *Orée*, which explores an aspect of the linguistic traditions of La Réunion, a department of France located in the Indian Ocean. Seemingly uninhabited, the island was undoubtedly known to Arab and Swahili sailors trading between Africa and India; but by 1665 it had been officially claimed and settled by French colonisers with their African slaves and indentured workers from India and South-East Asia. La Réunion therefore presents a specific colonial history of multiethnic cultural exchange, whose common language is creolised French. In *Orée*, a fixed camera is positioned in a tropical forest touched only by a faint breeze, whilst two female voiceovers individually narrate a text delivered in tones that are alternately seductive, sing-song, or indignant, ending in the exclamation, "...bois de négresse!" The French and creole text describes the names of indigenous plants used by local people as food, medicine, spices and teas – knowledge developed by ancestors who escaped into the forests to avoid slavery. Given that no indigenous names could have been installed on an uninhabited island, plant names reflect the ethnic diversity and socio-political history of La Réunion's colonial relations: "bois de négresse" is, it seems, regarded as an imitation of a tree named "bois mazelle" (mademoiselle), reflecting the hierarchical value assigned to enslaved black women and privileged white women on the island.

The "importance of words" is again a central issue in Alves' collaboration with Shirley Krenak (the actor who plays Iracema) and Jürgen Bock of Maumaus, Escola de Artes Visuales, Lisbon, in the translation and production of *Dicionário: Krenak-Português/Português-Krenak*, 2010. During the filming of *Iracema de Questembert* in Minas Gerais, Shirley, with her brothers Douglas and Tam Krenak, approached Alves with a proposition: to translate a late nineteenth



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FAIR TRADE HEAD

A tattooed Maori head in the collection of the Museum of Natural History in Rouen, France, was to be returned to the Maori community of New Zealand as an attempt to rebalance the grotesque historical situation of trade in human body parts which were collected by Europeans in the 19th century. "It was an ethical gesture based on respect for world cultures and dignity that every human being deserves", the mayor of Rouen has said.

The Ministry of Culture in France has responded by blocking the process of the return of the Maori head and is bringing judicial proceedings against the mayor of Rouen for attempting to "illegally remove an artefact from the French cultural patrimony".

A dissenting French government official says, "This object reflects the barbaric trafficking in body parts, the belief that another race was inferior to ours".

Cultural authorities have pointed out that most bones and body parts were acquired illicitly and through the most horrific practices. Tattooed Maori warriors were sometimes in danger of being killed so that their heads could be sold. Some Maori slaves were forcibly tattooed and then decapitated.

The French Minister of Culture's current policy supports the trade in human bones and defends colonial practices by declaring the Maori head as an art object and not a body part and at the same time overrides ethical considerations in order to "guarantee the integrity of our national heritage".

Dr. Tapsell, a Maori, replies that the Maori head has nothing to do with France's national heritage.

Fair Trade Head enables the fair exchange of heads between indigenous groups whose descendants are being denied the return of their ancestor's body parts with citizens of countries who are holding these body parts.

Emilie from Lille is the first European to participate in the *Fair Trade Head* exchange program by donating her head as a symbolic proxy of the Maori head held by her government, France.

Emilie's head will be held in a "keeping place for remains" and will return to her descendants in France when the French government assumes its ethical responsibility by returning the Maori's head to his descendants in New Zealand.

Europeans (particularly the English, French, Germans, Spanish and Portuguese) wishing to participate in *Fair Trade Head* can contact for further information zerynthia@zerynthia.it



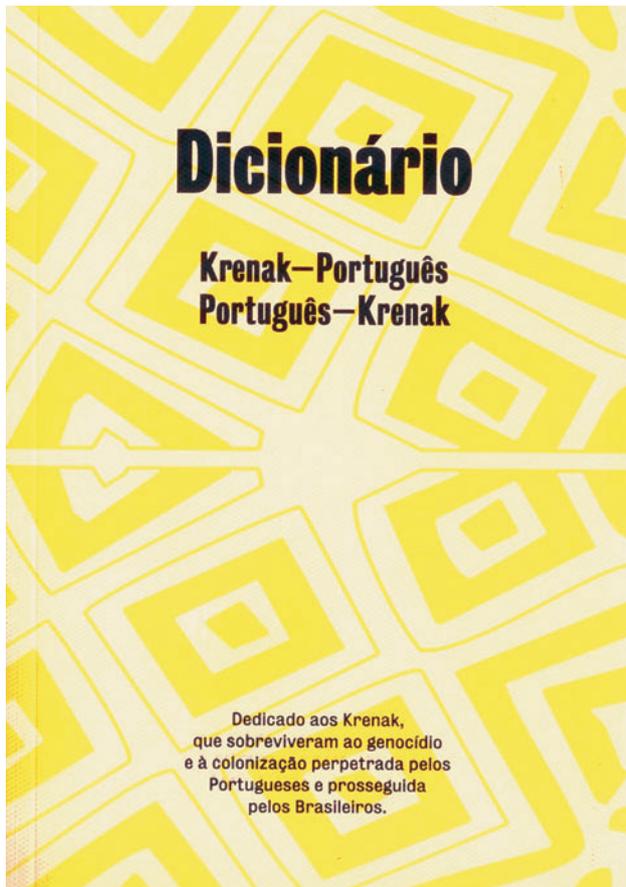
Cocaria, Cochlearia, Cochleria, Conclellia, Coclaria, Coq claria, Coq lariat, Coq l'aria, Coqueulariat, Coquel'aria, Foulsapate marron, Bois de source, Bois d'effort, Bois Z'evy, Mapoua, Bois de gaulette, Bois de punaise, Catafaye, Liane caustique, Bois de joli cœur, Ah, hummm, Perce-cœur, percicœur, persicaire, persicœur, persil cœur, Pas mon cœur, Tacamaca, Tacamahaca, Tacamaque, Tatamaka, Takamaka, Bois d'Adam, Gros lingue, Patate cochon, Croc de chien, Y a aussi natte cochon, Bois à gratter, Bois de poupart, Patte poule, Patte poule effort, Pied de poule, Patte poule sans piquant, Mais il y a aussi un autre complètement différent, Patte poule piquant, Liane sans fin, Bois de Judas, Mafatamboa, Plant la tension, Change-écorce, Sans écorce, Fandamane, Fondamane, Mahot tantan, Natte bâtard, Benjoin, Bois de fer, Bois fer bâtard, Langue à poivre, Bois de lait, Liane foutafout, Le Bois d'ousteau, Le Bois losto, Le Bois lousteau, Losto, Losteau, Bois d'osto, Bois de va quoi, Bois pian, Bois pion, Bois sente, Fahon, Fam, Bois de senteur, Bois de chanteur, Bois d'éponge, Bois plat, Bois pintade, Pied à eau, Bois de chaplet, Liane marabit, Liane papangue, Bois savon, Bois de merle, Liane zigzag, Porché, Malbrouc, Bois de sourichaude, Souris-chaude, Chourichaude, Cherichod, Chérie chaude, Seri-chaude, Sorichaude, Sourisod, Bois Amer, Fanjan, Bois mazelle c'est le vrai?, Mais le faux bois mazelle s'appelle Bois de négresse, Cocaria, Cochlearia, Cochleria, Conclellia, Coclaria, Coq claria, Coq lariat, Coq l'aria, Coqueulariat, Coquel'aria, Foulsapate marron, Foulsapate marron, Foulsapate marron, Bois de source, Bois d'effort, Bois Z'evy, Mapou, Bois de gaulette, Bois de punaise, Catafaye, Liane caustique, Bois de joli cœur, Ah, hummm, Perce-cœur, percicœur, persicaire, persicœur, persil cœur, Mais pas mon cœur, Tacamaca, Tacamahaca, Tacamaque, Tatamaka, Takamaka, Bois d'Adam, Gros lingue, Patate cochon, Croc de chien, Et aussi natte cochon, Bois à gratter, Bois de poupart, Patte poule, Patte poule effort, Pied de poule, Patte poule sans piquant, Mais il y a aussi un autre complètement différent, Patte poule piquant, Liane sans fin, Bois de Judas, Mafatamboa, Plant la tension, Change-écorce, Sans écorce, Fandamane, Fondamane, Mahot tantan, Natte bâtard, Benjoin, Bois de fer, Bois fer bâtard, Langue à poivre, Bois de lait, Liane foutafout, Liane foutafout, Liane foutafout, Le Bois d'ousteau, Le Bois losto, Le Bois lousteau, Losto, Losteau, Bois d'osto, Bois de va quoi, Bois pian, Bois pion, Bois sente, Fahon, Fam, Bois de senteur, Bois de chanteur, Bois éponge, Bois plat, Bois pintade, Pied à eau, Bois de chaplet, Liane marabit, Bois de liège, Bois de sagaye, Bois de requin, Bois de millet, Bois de moment, Liane papangue, Bois savon, Bois de merle, Liane zigzag, Porché, Malbrouc, Bois de sourichaude, Souris-chaude, Chourichaude, Cherichod, Chérie chaude, Seri-chaude, Sorichaude, Sourisod, Bois Amer, Fanjan, Bois mazelle c'est le vrai?, Mais le faux bois mazelle s'appelle Bois de négresse? Bois de négresse.

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Orée, 2011.
Installation, sound, video, 6'36"
2 photographs, variable
dimension.

century German dictionary of the Krenak language into Portuguese. Alves in turn approached Bock, who enthusiastically supported the project, and enabled the translated dictionary to be incorporated into Alves' exhibition in Maumaus, *On the Importance of Words, A Sacred Mountain (stolen), and the Morality of Nations* (2010). The significance of this project cannot be overstated; after hundreds of years of physical and cultural genocide, dispossession of land, constant relocation and official denial of existence, initiated by the colonial Portuguese and continued by the Brazilian government and corporate interests, the Krenak population had been reduced to around six hundred souls. Nonetheless, they were fiercely intent on cultural survival; and to this end the translation of the old German dictionary,¹² distributed to every surviving member of the Krenak, would enable them to reclaim a language that had all but been lost through systematic deculturation. The dictionary project is a rare example of an artistic intervention resulting in a positive outcome for the community in question: insofar as language describes the meaning of the world for its users, there is no more significant route to agency than its reclamation.

One might conclude by suggesting that *Orée*, despite the apparent cultural specificity of its context, functions as an appropriate allegory of Alves' search for Melville's "sacred white doe of truth" among the forest of visual and verbal signs that entangle us in dissimulation about the real state of affairs—political and ecological—of our relations to the world. If Alves has focused her attention primarily on the indigenous or local situation it is not simply because it is a discursive terrain with which she is familiar, but because it is here, first, in lived realities, that the proliferating effects of political injustices, born of abstract ideologies and vested corporate interests that respect neither sustainable ways of life nor the finitude of the earth's resources, are most keenly and impotently felt. It is, then, to solicit in the viewer a more creative way of thinking about how we inhabit and understand the world as an irrevocably shared inheritance that Alves' work is directed. As Jean-Luc Nancy has said: "I is always and already 'us'... there is no meaning if meaning is not shared."¹³



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- 1 Herman Melville, 'Hawthorne and his Mosses', *The Literary World*, August 17 and 24, 1850. <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/nh/hahm.html>
- 2 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 257.
- 3 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, [1961], trans. Constance Farrington, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 193.
- 4 Edward W. Said, "Speaking truth to power" in *Representations of the Intellectual*, London: Vintage, 1994, p. 65.
- 5 This was a time nonetheless of expanding postcolonial studies and insistent critique of the mainstream art world by ethnic "others".
- 6 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1983.
- 7 Maria Thereza Alves, "Seeds of Change", in *Plot*, (eds) Simon Read and Jean Fisher, London: Middlesex University, p. 44.
- 8 Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile", in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, London: Granta, 2001, pp. 184-186.
- 9 Gerardo Mosquera, "Alien-Own, Own-Alien", in (ed) Nikos Papastergiadis, *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference*, London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003, pp. 18-29.
- 10 Sander L Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature", in (ed) Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *"Race", Writing, and Difference*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986, pp. 223-261.
- 11 The era coincides with the fashionable bustle of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, which also exaggerated the buttocks. It is considered to be a covert "contained" sign of male ascription of dangerous excess to female sexuality.
- 12 The obsessive documentation of indigenous cultures by European colonisers, to "prove" their "primitiveness" and justify the "civilising mission", sometimes *does* present an archive for the reclamation of buried histories. As Alves' work demonstrates, *reinterpreting* archival data from its misuse in colonial ideologies is an essential part of this process. However, Alves' logical proposal that the Krenak data be incorporated into a website for local and scholarly research, has so far – at the time of writing – met with no interest from Brazilian educational institutions.
- 13 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 2.

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On the Importance of Words, A Sacred Mountain (stolen), and the Morality of Nations, (solo), Lumiar Cité, Lisboa, 2009. This work consisted of the video *Iracema (de Questembert)*, the process of translating the Krenak/German-German/Krenak Dictionary into Krenak/Portuguese-Portuguese/Krenak Dictionary, a petition for the return of the Sacred Mountain to the Krenak people and a video proposal by Shirley and Tam Krenak on the History of the Krenak. This installation traveled to the São Paulo Biennale where the Dictionary was printed.