

Not in the Title too | Anticipating

Sam Hopkins

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(Concept Note written in 2013)

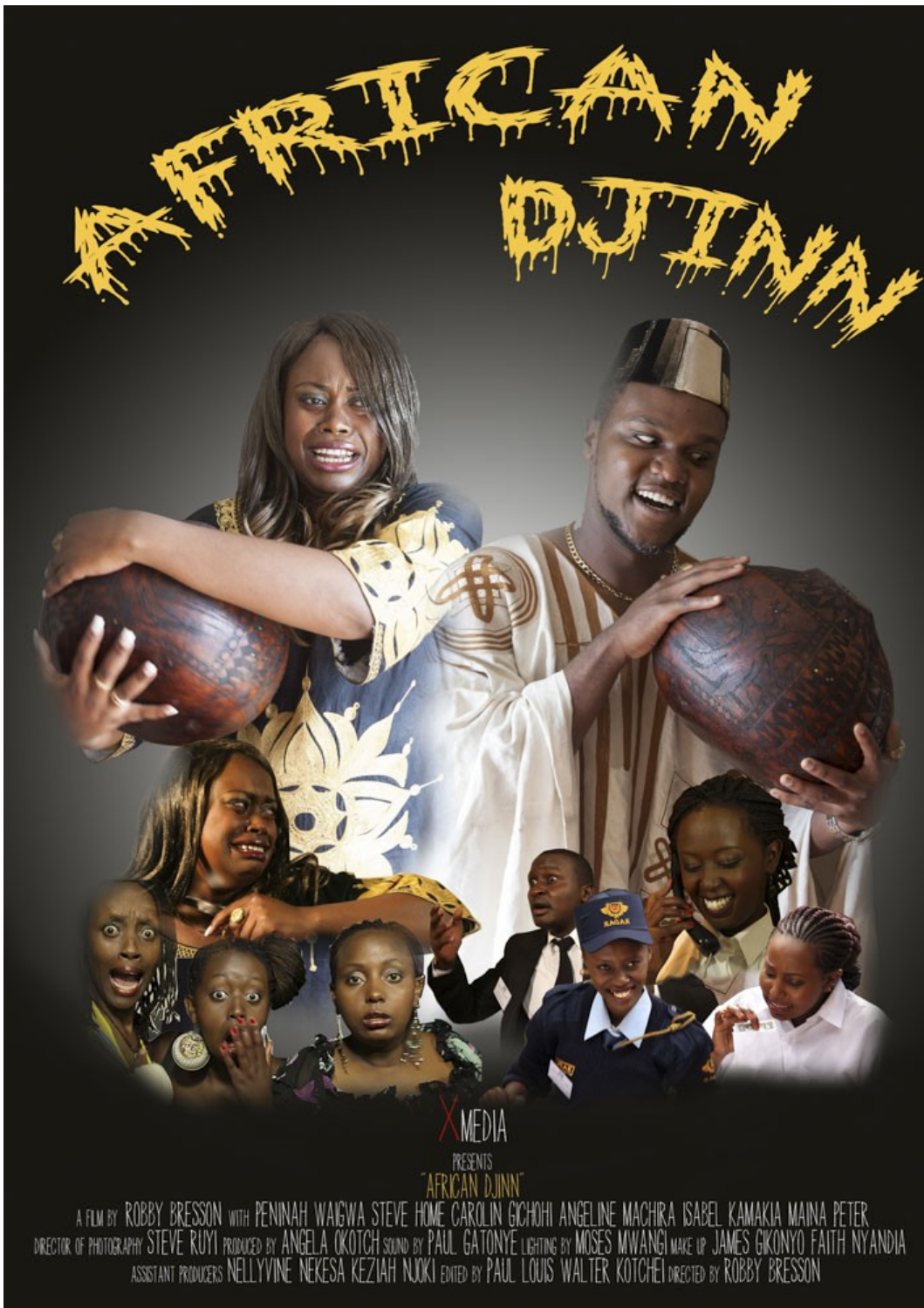
I am not sure whether it is perfectionism or laziness, but I am always reluctant to say that a work is finished, complete and cannot be further developed. When the opportunity emerged to show Not in the Title (1) again for this exhibition in Bordeaux, I was both immediately interested and determined not to simply 'exhibit' a replica of the work again. There were elements of the work that I believed could be more successfully resolved but, perhaps more even more importantly, I think the exciting part about the project is the experimentation, the process and the unknown results. When Not in the Title becomes fixed and static then for me it would lose something.

Alongside my intention of exploring the construction of authenticity in this archive of Nollywood videos, I am of course also interested in questioning how new cultural production can enter the now sacred space of the archive. If I was to abandon this 'process' element of Not in the Title, then the project itself becomes complicit in making these borders rigid rather than semi-permeable. In this context I think the idea of 'an iteration' can be useful; that a work can have several versions which are contingent on the time and place in which it is produced/exhibited. A work is thus not fixed in form, but rather in the set of ideas and intentions that it performs.

Initially, my idea was to go to Bordeaux, to work with actors/amateur actors there and create a new series of fake trailers to integrate into the already generated material of real and fake trailers. Taking the archive of Nollywood videos outside of Bayreuth, working with a different set of people in a different place would naturally generate very different dimensions of the work. The trailers would of course be new, but so too would be the studio where we would shoot these new trailers, the community that would evolve around the project and ultimately the way the project would be presented, how it would be installed etc etc.

However, when I started thinking about this approach, it did not really excite me. On one level, it would contain all of these new

elements, but on another level, it simply felt a bit too 'copy and paste' and, tellingly, I struggled to motivate myself with this idea. Around this time I was in Nairobi, Kenya; a country where I grew up, a city that I call home. Some friends of mine happened to go downtown to one of the "Riverwood" film studios, Kenya's version of Nollywood, so-called because most of the production houses are based on River Road. And then it occurred to me, and of course the minute I thought about it I was amazed that I had not thought about it earlier. Why not produce a series of fake Nollywood trailers in Nairobi?



Not in the Title too_01_African Djinn_Poster_2013_(c)Bauer-1

Taking an archive of Nollywood films to Nairobi and working with local actors to make fake trailers to integrate into this archive seems to maintain the core concerns of Not in the Title, but this context somehow completely reconfigures the work. If the earlier idea seemed to me like a replication, this felt like iteration. Nigerian films are very popular in Kenya but so are stereotypes about Nigerians, in fact there is of course a strong connection between these two phenomena. When the representation of a country

is so heavily mediated by television and film, as opposed to interaction with individuals from that country, then distortions in that image will happen.

I write this text before working on the Nairobi version of Not in the Title (working title "Not in the Title too") so I should make it clear that all I can do here is speculate. It is also quite possible that this idea will simply not function and the situation in Nairobi will suggest a completely new and unanticipated iteration of the project. But from where I am right now, the idea of creating a situation whereby a group of Kenyan actors would act Nigerian actors for some fake trailers would be a great way to interrogate a whole set of expectations, judgements and perhaps prejudice about Nigerians. This could lead to a whole discussion about what it means to be African, about how Kenyans build their identity, about notions of ethnicity, etc etc.

Thus, the project could become a trigger for some of those big questions, usually referred to in Capitals, or as issues, but hopefully in a subtle way. Ideally, the project can use this, perhaps slightly silly idea, of faking trailers as a way to sneak some more serious questions in the back door. Potentially, by initiating the exact same situation in Nairobi as I did in Bayreuth, creating a situation where 'participants' can fake Nigerian movie trailers, a totally different work could emerge. Whereas in Bayreuth the project had a somewhat academic, intellectual discourse, in Nairobi it would seem to touch on mainstream, widely-accessible issues. There is of course, always the strong possibility that none of this will work, but at this stage of hypothesising, the possibilities do seem exciting.

Finally, it is also interesting that this approach to Not in the Title performs an infiltration of a Nigerian form, the Nollywood movie, by Kenyan artists/actors. Within the context of the Iwalewa-Haus this seems somehow fitting. Whilst formerly the Iwalewa-Haus evidenced a particular interest in West African, and specifically Yoruba culture, over the last decade this sphere of interest has shifted significantly eastwards, with a certain emphasis on the broader visual culture of East Africa.



Not in the Title too_03_African Djinn_Making Of_Still_2013_(c)Hopkins-4

Bearing in mind that Not in the Title is, in essence, a project about questioning the construction of a canon of culture, it seems apt that the very space that both triggered and commissioned this project is itself able to find the flexibility to avoid the petrification that cultural institutions are prone to.

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1. Not in the Title (2011) was a project and installation developed as part of an artist residency at the Iwalewa Haus in 2011. The project took as its starting point the 'archive' of Nigerian videos in the house, collected by Onoo Onokome and Tobias Wendl in the 1990s. With the intention to interrogate the way in which this archive was constructed and selected, Not in the Title presented film trailers, selected from this archive, alongside film trailers which were made in the Iwalewa Haus during the residency. There was no indication which trailers were 'real' and which were 'fake'. The installation itself foregrounded this idea of 'falsification' presenting a 'green screen' studio where the trailers were filmed, a backstage room where the actors prepared themselves alongside a 'foyer' area, wallpapered with real and fake video covers and a 'cinema' where the real and fake trailers were shown. The strategy of mixing real and fake cultural production to induce a state of limbo regarding the authenticity of the trailers (and hence a suspicious, critical and engaged viewer) was not entirely successful.