

may 2019

dear friend,

thank you for meeting me here. for receiving this signal. e-mail is one of the last digital spaces almost outside of attention-driven algorithms.

i'm compiling research, writing, and materials into a series of texts on haunt, diaspora, colonialism, museums, care, restitution, and healing – the unavoidable concerns of our time.

i thought to reach out to you while i'm wading through this. in 2016, i moved to france to do research only to learn the [archive was colonized by mold](#). i spent the year looking at plant specimens in a colonial museum, documenting how a 19th century french scientist became a celebrated expert of madagascar [without ever setting foot on the island](#).¹ 2017 was full of death and mourning. in 2018, a global health conference in benin brought me the “door of no return” and face-on with the [diaspora tourism industry](#). that was the same summer i left an anti-black decolonial workshop in the czech republic and [a ghost presented](#) in my absence. this past november, i paid respects to a friend in northern madagascar who came back from the dead. just before that, i collected my [grandma's anti-freemasonry manifesto](#) from her house in florida to print her words in south africa.

¹seeds and plants from madagascar disperse almost as widely as apocryphal scientific “facts” about it

i'm also writing to you because i sense we are doing or thinking or feeling or knowing something related?

“We think it's [problematic](#) that people are said to be dead or half dead and then brought back to life,”

Mkhwanazi-Xaluva said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

here in johannesburg, a preacher recently resurrected a [dead man on camera](#).² my white landlady is out front selling stale popcorn to people sitting in rush hour traffic. a [former dj is president](#) of madagascar (again) and notre dame is burning.

²[seeing is believing](#)

the powers that be fear losing their [material monopolies](#) and control of how we understand time. it makes sense then, that [imperial museums are being contested](#) again for their collections and displays of stolen art, artifacts, and human remains.

[many of these museums don't even know what they have](#). what is displayed is a mere fraction of the stockpiling taking place in the museum warehouses. according to my research, not one museum of natural history in france has a reliable inventory of its storage facilities. i'm not bothered by the [failed encyclopedic project](#), but it's worth mentioning the whole point of these museums in the first place was to account for, quantify, and name the natural world...

now, the french president is in favor of restituting art and artifacts to africa. he says it is about returning history to africa, [as if history is literally in museums](#), as if the time-space of an entire continent is empty without the pillaged artifacts.³ as if to return artifacts is to bestow time back to formerly colonized people. as if a large part of the world has been [frozen in time](#) and is now being gifted a defroster to allow for a neo-revisionist colonial time-keeping.

³but if we are to look so materially as to what's been/ being stolen, we'd also need to look at architecture, infrastructure, and the entire nation-state complex

in my first two letters, i want to tell you what i've learned about [technologies of time-space control](#) used by museums of natural history – [namely, herbarium specimens and taxidermy](#).

can the perpetually preserved ever rest in peace?



(ask [“what time is it?”](#) the next time you're in a museum that relentlessly presents shifty ahistorical anachronisms).⁴

⁴[cotton specimens](#) in marseille's museum of natural history without any mention of slavery, or even plantations

six years ago, i arrived in madagascar as a scientist being trained in exactly this kind of mastery of history, to possess [exclusive knowledge](#) about the natural world. i am grateful to every ancestor in my network because i was swiftly [re-rooted/routed](#) to a different set of attentions, sensibilities, and attunements.

take this letter as an invitation and initiation. i hope you will write to me. drop me a pin. let me know where you are, geo-spatially, mentally, spiritually, materially.

my hope is to dissolve and diffuse research and be more honest about the process, even if only in resistance to colonial science's ethics of custodianship.

hold out/onto this with me.

more soon,
chanelle
johannesburg, south africa

here's some links if you want to continue reading

this one about ghosts – <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/digitizing-dead-celebrities>

about diaspora tourism – <https://thefunambulist.net/articles/37377>

moldy archives – <https://www.humanxnature.com/faq.html>