

On social practices which Donna Haraway calls “Teddy Bear Patriarchy”_

Jelena Jureša and Asa Mendelsohn

...in relation to civilizational 'decadence', which translated into the politics of eugenics and the art of taxidermy, exhibited in anthropological and museums of natural history.¹

Jelena Jureša's video installation *Aphasia* consists of three chapters, each focusing on the absurdity arising from the collective silence surrounding crime and the compartmentalization of historical events, tracing the line between Belgian colonialism, Austrian antisemitism and the war in Yugoslavia. The film borrows the term 'aphasia' not exclusively from medical vocabulary—where it refers to trouble finding words or losing the ability to speak—but also from the writing of scholar Ann L. Stoler, who coined the term 'colonial aphasia', referring to the occlusion of knowledge in addition to collective amnesia, and the difficulty of generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words, or concepts with appropriate things². *Aphasia* brings together compartmentalised historical events, through the history of racism and eugenics, focusing on the blind spots of history and the difficulty of speaking about the troubled past. The film charts the line starting with museum dioramas through photography to film, and sees them as deeply interwoven with imperialism and colonialism, used in order to produce a template for the blooming science of biological or physical anthropology.

The first chapter of the film is voiced by a male Narrator, middle-aged, high British, a pianist, conductor and composer.

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HoGent

NARRATOR

(Instructive, peaceably measured—
as if a reasonably liberal, well-informed voice of authority.)

The diorama is a landscape designed to contain, confine and conserve,
as well as
to exhibit.³

The diorama is a landscape designed according to visual relations of
power and
dominant ways of seeing.⁴ The racial division of labor, the familial
progress from
youthful native to adult white man...⁵

NARRATOR

(Instructive, still measured—
a poetics of detachment is gradually outweighed by detail.)

Take the Number 44 tram line through the shady, pleasant Forêt de Soignes on the outskirts of Brussels to the borough of Tervuren. In the eighth century, Saint Hubert, the patron saint of hunters, lived here and pursued game in these woods. Today, grandly overlooking a park, in an enormous Louis XV-style palace built by King Leopold II of Belgium, is the Royal Museum for Central Africa. On a typical day it will be swarming with hundreds of visitors ... schoolchildren filling in blank spots in workbooks ... elderly tourists arriving in air-conditioned buses.⁶

The Forêt de Soignes — the Sonian Forest.

Have you been there?

Sunlight dances down between the fingers of beeches and oaks. Some of these trees are more than two hundred years old, dating back from the Austrian empire. Elderly tourists get off their buses, carefully—keeping one hand on the rail. They walk up the promenade beneath the imperial light, the dappled sun.



Picture this, it is an enchanting frame: the elderly tourists hold the light within them as they make their way up the museum steps.

Inside, life and death are arranged beneath skylights: the African buffalo, the white and black rhinos, the lion, the zebra, the mountain nyala, the okapi, the lesser kudu all find their place in the harmony of nature.

Each diorama has at least one animal that catches the viewer's gaze and holds it in communion. The animal is vigilant, ready to sound an alarm at the intrusion of man, but ready also to hold forever the gaze of meeting, the moment of truth, the original encounter.⁷

The elderly tourists and schoolchildren look up from the glassy eyes of a black rhino or okapi: close-set chocolatey eyes sloping above a furry muzzle. Truth, or indifference. An encounter so soft it could smother you.

They gaze up the marble walls, the warm muted sunlight, the soft reflections, pearly white tones: peaceful, composed, illuminated—*brightest Africa*.⁸ Beneath the museum skylights, the velvet creases of the okapi's forehead turn gold.

Brief pause.

NARRATOR

(Treating each statement as if it were a complete truth, gradually giving audience reason to distrust him.)

Here is a richness.

Taxidermy is a chain of labor building to this golden moment, tucked within the smooth logic of the diorama: the hunter and his assistants, the convoy, multiple drivers, likely a cook; there were butchers and artisans,



there were scientists with very royal training.

The allure of richness has been there from the beginning.

Cobalt, copper, diamond, tantalum, tin.

Yes, there's been rubber, there's been gold.

There have been miners, there have been slaves.

The diorama is held together by preservatives of varying chemical compositions. Adhesives, stitches.

Taxidermy, the arrangement of skins: a science dedicated to the prevention of biological decay.

With mounting excitement:

Ooohhh the ookapi! His smooth legs, his athletic proportions.

Yes, you cry out, *This IS HOW IT IS IN NATURE!*

Someone explains, *We've come a long way from the early days of the art, when animal skins were stuffed with sawdust and rags in inelegant, unnatural forms. Yes! You say, We've come a long way from the days of violent and racist resource extraction, eugenics, abuses of power!*

YES!

—*Restitution!*

Brief pause, coolly collected:

The sunlight strokes the face of the okapi, of elderly tourists and attentive

schoolchildren. A preservative stronger than formaldehyde. Amnesia.

The museum acknowledges our colonial past with a firm hand on your shoulder: *Yes, we have come a long way.*



Most dioramas are made up of only a few animals, usually including a large and vigilant male, a female or two, and one baby. Perhaps there are some other animals—a male adolescent maybe, never an aged or deformed beast ... A life has to be intelligible *as a life* ... in order to become recognizable.⁹

Narrator suddenly produces the sound of an extended animal cry—viewer should not be able to tell whether the Narrator’s voice has produced this sound, or if it’s come from somewhere else.

Brief pause, then the sound of the Narrator clearing his throat, signaling a transition.

NARRATOR

(Voice expresses vague concern and drama, with increasing intensity, and, gradually, impatience with the details of his own narration. The beginning of an aphasic episode.)

The imperial light.

The 21st of June, 1914, a Bohemian estate. Chlumetz. Archduke Franz Ferdinand notices movement out the window of his car. He swings open the door and swiftly cocks his gun.

Narrator mimics the sound of a gun being cocked with his mouth.

Number 274,511 in the game books: one cat.

It is not recorded whether an assistant to Franz Ferdinand then collects the body of the cat before they drive off. Perhaps it stays lying there, a small furry pile, sleek fur golden in the sun: its small shadow, a pool of blood.

The Archduke sets off for Bosnia.



Narrator mimics the sound of a gun being cocked with his mouth.

The golden imperial light...

A week later it is a bright, sunny day, ten forty-five in the morning on June 28th. One sees a few Bosnians, some Austrian military personnel, and the assassin being apprehended. Perhaps you've been to the army museum and seen the tunic of the Archduke's uniform, soaked with blood from the bullet wound... Photographed for the press after being stripped from the body of the heir to the throne and transferred by rail to the capital of the empire, where it can be viewed to this day, together with his feather bushed hat and trousers, in a black-framed reliquary.¹⁰

Stripped - from - the - body—

Do you remember about the uniform? It had to be cut off him, because of all the blood. The Archduke's aides had sewn the outer lapel to the inner front of the garment, to help cover his belly before the Sarajevo public. Soaked with blood, it comes off like a wet carcass. Like skin you might sew back together again.

Do you remember dying Franz and dying Sophie, that he was shot in the neck and she in the abdomen?

Frantically, baritone:

Sopher! Sopher! Sterbe nicht! Bleibe am Leben für unsere Kinder!

Falsetto:

Sopher! Sopher! Sterbe nicht!



With regained obsessive attention, growing worked up, and as he keeps going, beginning to stutter:

Do you remember Gavriilo, sitting in a cafe beside the street of the Archduke's procession? Do you remember that photograph: sunken eyes, dark mustache... Imagine those eyes flashing beneath the imperial sun. Matched by the flashing of metal as the young man pulls out a pistol.

The pistol: it fits in his pocket, the compact FN Model 1910 pistol chambered for the .380 ACP cartridge. The cartridge was provided by the Black Hand, a secret military society formed in the Kingdom of Serbia. The pistol: a semi-automatic designed by the white hands of American firearms designer John Moses Browning. Manufactured by the Fabrique Nationale Herstal of Belgium.

National Factory Herstal, FN Herstal. Fabrique Nationale, FN: the largest exporter of military small arms in Europe.

Do you remember?

It was FN M19, FN M1910, serial number 1907. Number 1097. Number 1907-7-7-4. 19074. The act that precipitated the World War. The first World War.

Precipitate — *precipitation*? In-*nnn*-stigation.

I'm talking about small arms. Small - arms. Small - military - arms. Arrrrms... *arms*...

I am talking about *hunters*! Hunter his highness, Archduke "hunter" Ferdinand collecting hundreds of thousands of bodies: 274,511 trophies. 274,511 notes marked in his game books, bright books with spines stacked up in a row on the shelves of the museum archive. Ferdinand had to build a museum to hold them all.



All those spines, passed between gloved hands, gingerly protecting their corners. All those trophy bodies.

Rhythmically:

Black - hands - gloved - hands - white - hands - hands severed from their arms.

With increasing intensity, shifting:

Ooooh did Belgium have arms! Belgium had so many arms!

Guns, pistols, shotguns, submachine guns, rifles, machine guns, helicopter and aircraft weapon systems. Miscellaneous. Bicycles. Bicycles with rubber wheels.

Ohh POOR little *Belgium*.

Ruuubber... You know that feeling, the smooth rubber—*ruuuubber*—of freshly inflated wheels, a fine road bicycle that you spin out into the country air. Breathe deeply! Breathe, breathe... This air... Spinning out across the backroads of Flanders, your body supported by its own grace, your bicycle. *Flanders fields!* Breathe, breathe, those beautiful poppies saw sunset glow, *glow, glow*, that beautiful rubber...

We are digging a grave in the sky.¹¹

F-N-
Fabrique Nationallllle...
Small arms to Nigeria
Saudi Arabia
Yemen



Suddenly singing, *gravely*, baritone:

We are digging a grave in the sky
We are digging a grave in the sky...

Brief pause.

NARRATOR

(Re-setting, re-establishing hierarchical logic of storytelling,
and of his own positionality)

To this day one sees in Belgium a distinctive ugliness...¹²

The past ... is simply too painful and ... too inconceivable to be
experienced fully and henceforth to be remembered at all...¹³

King Leopold's colonial adventure—his systematic exploitation of the
Congo—slave labor on a massive scale. The Congolese Holocaust is one
of the most forgotten mass killings of modern times ... a footnote in the
margins of history.¹⁴

Schoolchildren marking notes in workbooks, elderly tourists holding on
to a stair railing, gazing up into the chocolatey eyes of the okapi. Guns
cocked in white hands, severed hands.

Whispering, sing-song, falsetto:

He needed to build a museum to hold them all.

Returning to “natural” pitch, logical tone, persistent:

A conscious forgetting, denial or even self-censorship—renovation—
restitution.

Brief pause.



NARRATOR

(Calmly)

“Aphasia” means, etymologically, a loss of speech, yet it is not speech as such which is lost but language itself...¹⁵

There are many different forms of aphasia:

It has been estimated that one person in three hundred may have a lasting aphasia from brain damage, whether as the consequence of a stroke, a head injury, a tumor, or a degenerative brain disease ... There are also transient forms of aphasia, lasting only a few minutes...¹⁶

In its mildest forms, expressive aphasia is characterized by a difficulty finding words or a tendency to use the wrong words, without compromise of the overall structure of sentences. Nouns, including proper names, tend to be especially affected.¹⁷

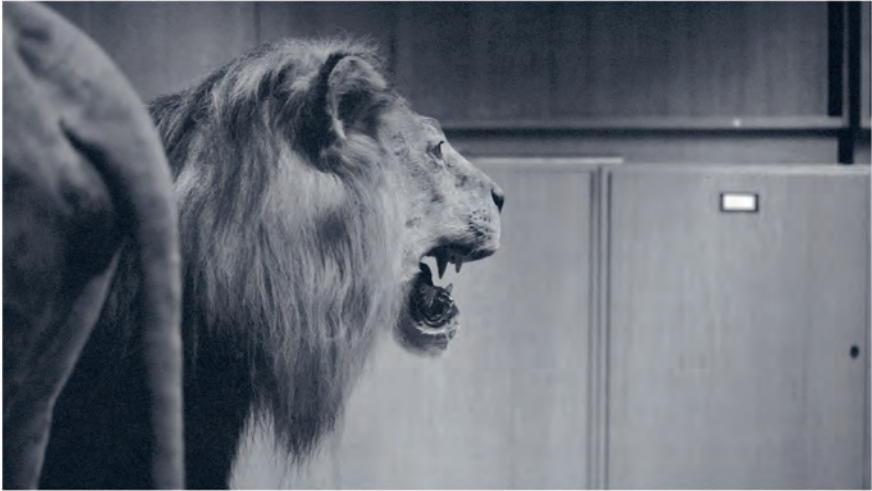
In more severe forms ... a person is unable to generate full, grammatically complete sentences and is reduced to brief, impoverished, “telegraphic” utterances; if the aphasia is very severe, the person is all but mute, though capable of occasional ejaculations (such as “Damn!” or “Fine!”).¹⁸

NARRATOR

(Fluidly, with mounting intensity,
speech flowering with brusque musicality)

“Fine!” ... “Thank you, Mama” ... “Tutta la verità, tutta la verità”¹⁹

Your golden hair Margarete
Your ashen hair Sulamith²⁰



Colonial aphasia²¹ is a political disorder ... a troubled psychic space.
Some psychologists refer to aphasia as a “comprehension deficit,” others
as a partial “knowledge loss.”²²

Classification

Organization

We are digging a grave in the sky
We are digging a grave in the sky
Wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften
Wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften
Dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

“Tutta la verità, tutta la verità!”

Falsetto:

“Tutta la verità, tutta la verità!”

Screaming:

The rubber!

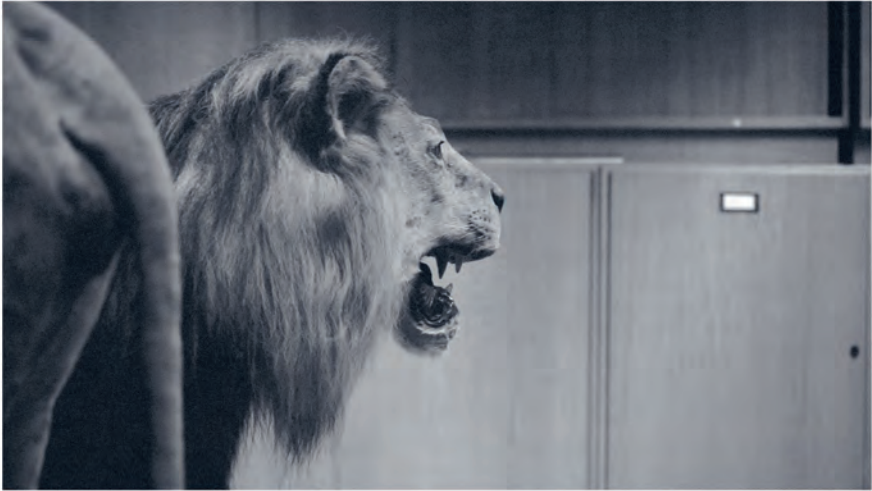
The fields of Flanders!

Yemen.

The DCR.

BREATHE...!

Brief pause.



NARRATOR

(with cool detachment)

Life has been narrowed down completely, reduced to gestures.²³

The white patch had become a place of darkness.²⁴

As if recalling from childhood, in earnest:

Now when I was a little chap, I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet — the biggest, the most blank, so to speak — that I had a hankering after.

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery — a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.²⁵

NARRATOR

(With mounting intensity,
tone shifting wildly between statements)

"Sometimes, I think it is I who have suffered most."²⁶

I see everything from above. The desolate field extends all around where once fifty thousand soldiers and ten thousand horses met their end within a few hours. The night after the battle, the air must have been filled with death rattles and groans.²⁷



I see silent brown soil, a silent street corner in Sarajevo, the gray shadow of a cargo ship, the gray wings of a plane.

I am even higher!

From above, the Congo is a cool white spot on the map.

A small gloved hand with no body.

Falsetto:

“Tutta la verità, tutta la verità!”

Screaming:

“Tutta la verità, tutta la verità!”

Frenetic, delivered as a series of interjections, building to a sequence of screams, alternating between falsetto and baritone.

The convoy of Archduke “hunter” Ferdinand, an army of shadows, bodies groomed to extinction.

They are *animals!*

The subaltern cannot speak. Representation has not withered away.²⁸

No no no no no... Do not make ASSUMPTIONS!

“*Can* the subaltern speak?”²⁹

With what VOICE?

Breathe!



With what voice-consciousness...?

With what VOICE?

Who has the freedom to forget? Who is... *des-per-ate*?

Maybe everyone, at least a little, if you listen hard enough...³⁰

Mockingly, as if performing a voice of authority and reason:

The need to restore historical density to the inflow, display, and diaspora of objects in Tervuren collections clashes with a powerful and competing trend now visible both in Belgium and abroad: the emphasis on Africa as a continent, a geographic shape on a map rather than a series of countries with particular contexts and colonial legacies.³¹

Produces a non-human scream.

How do you film enemies?³²

How do you film the ghost of the hunter, Archduke hunter?

How do you fit all of his corpses in the frame?

First you ask the museum for permission!

Produces a non-human scream—louder, rapid sustained notes. Screaming alternately becomes and dissolves words, as if in a trance:

Classification, symbolization, discrimination...³³

We are digging a grave in the sky,

Wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften

Your golden hair Margarete



Organization, polarization, preparation...³⁴

Not, *can you speak?*, but, *why didn't anybody **listen?***

Dein goldenes Haar Margarete

Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

Persecution, extermination, denial³⁵

“Tutta la verità”

“Tutta la verità”

“Tutta la verità”

“Tutta la *verità*”



Film stills

APHASIA, Jelena Jureša, 2019

BWANA KITOKO
André Cauvin, 1955
VRT-beeldarchief

TERVUREN, MUSÉE DU CONGO BELGE
Hélène Schirren, 1939-40
Collection Royal Museum for Central Africa

¹ Haraway, Donna. "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936." *Social Text*, 11 (1984): 20-64.

² Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial aphasia: Race and disabled histories in France." *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (2011): 121-156.

³ Perera, Suvendrini. "Dead Exposures: Trophy Bodies and Violent Visibilities of the Nonhuman." *borderlands e-journal*, 13:1 (2014): 1-26, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ Haraway, p. 24.

⁶ Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's ghost: a story of greed, terror, and heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, p. 292.

⁷ Haraway, p. 25.

⁸ After Carl Akeley, taxidermist, sculptor, biologist, nature photographer and naturalist at the American Museum of Natural History, who dreamed of "Brightest Africa".

⁹ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2016, p. 7.

¹⁰ Sebald, Winfried G. *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. by Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1999, p. 96.

¹¹ After "Death Fugue" by Paul Celan.

¹² Sebald, p. 112.

¹³ Van den Braembussche, Antoon. "The silence of Belgium: Taboo and trauma in Belgian memory." *Yale French Studies*, 102 (2002): 34-52, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁵ Oliver Sacks, *The mind's eye*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011, p. 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁰ After "Death Fugue" by Paul Celan.

²¹ Stoler, An L. "Colonial aphasia: Race and disabled histories in France." *Public Culture*, 23:1, 121-156.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²³ Mehmedinović, Semezdin. *Sarajevo Blues*, trans. by Ammiel Alcalay. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1998, p. 71.

²⁴ Sebald, p. 117.

²⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of darkness*. London: Penguin Books, 1995, p.5.

²⁶ Hochschild, p. 295.

²⁷ Sebald, p. 125.

²⁸ Spivak, Gayatri C. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 271-313, p. 308.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Gilroy, Paul. *Between Camps: Nations, Culture and the Allure of Race*. London: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 25.

Gilroy ascribes a sense of desperation to the cultural tendency to moralise 'remembering' as something noble, as if it were always possible. He writes that "Remembering [National Socialism] has been integral to the politics of 'race' for more than fifty years, but a further cultural and ethical transition represented by war-crimes trials, financial reparations, and a host of national apologies is irreversibly under way. It aims to place this raciological catastrophe securely in an irrevocable past, what Jean Améry called 'the cold storage of history,' designed more to be cited or passed en route to other happier destinations rather than deliberately summoned up, inhabited, or mourned in an open-ended manner."

³¹ Silverman, Debora L. “Diasporas of Art: History, the Tervuren Royal Museum for Central Africa, and the Politics of Memory in Belgium, 1885–2014.” *The Journal of Modern History*, 87:3 (2015): 615-667, p. 648.

³² Beckermann, Ruth. “East of War. Shooting Journal by Ruth Beckermann, 1995.” (s.d.) [Accessed: May 22, 2018]. <https://www.ruthbeckermann.com/home.php?il=53>

³³ Stanton, George H. “The Ten Stages of Genocide.” *Genocide Watch: The International Alliance to End Genocide*, 2013. http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/Ten_Stages_of_Genocide_by_Gregory_Stanton.pdf

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.