

AFTERWORD

In her magnificent book *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen*, Linda Heywood writes of an episode: In 1660, three years before her death, Queen Njinga Mabande, who also signed her name as “Queen Dona Ana” to Europeans, held a public meeting to defend her decision to destroy a reliquary that held the remains of her brother, her predecessor ruler.¹ The *misete* was an important symbol that until then had signaled her continued Mbundu/Imbangala ancestral beliefs, a most cherished object that represented her legitimacy with the Mbundu people. The Roman church demanded she give up the object, because it was preventing her from demonstrating her full conversion to Christianity. The *misete* is illustrated in the famous watercolors of the Capuchin missionary Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecucolo, who tells the story of the queen's transformation, a small box that bears the design patterns of Central Africa, including the *sona* drawing and logic practice. In two images, the box appears alongside implements of metalworking: an anvil, bellows, and blades, which all demonstrate the queen's power over both form and the elements. After local leaders hotly debated the proposed action of the queen, Njinga carried the *misete* to the newly constructed church, knelt in front of the crucifix, and surrendered it to the presiding priest. It was melted down and made into a lamp for the new church that she and her recruits built. The *misete* was old media; the lamp was new media. Both were present in the same time and made from the same mutable/recyclable material but embodied different epochs.

Media Primitivism has argued for an expansive understanding of medium and mediation in art, one that allows for multiple genealogies and epochs to

exist simultaneously in and around works of art. As a conclusion, I am sure that I am faced with the implications of what this treatment of African art means and whether it could be used in the analysis of all art; this has been the persistent question of global art history. I hope the book engages some of the accidental challenges of writing about the aesthetic, artistic, and/or representational practices with care to the notion of context and field, which, in this case, includes a constellation of genealogies and theories of art. I also hope that the conclusions I reached pertaining to the racializing mechanism at work in the theories and practices of medium/media/mediation should be recognized as operating in all of art history, not just in African art or art by or about people of color. African art history, as I argued in the introduction, includes concepts of fields and peoples, obscure aesthetic theories, embodied knowledges, recalcitrant esotericism; but it also includes the worlds that each work of art might create. Surely these worlds are not limited to the contours of Africa, but like all worlds created by art, they may remain obscured according to embodied subjectivities and habits of theory. Additionally, attention is often so fleeting and fragile that we miss entire lines of flight that we could have taken because our head was turned just this much. Attending to one thing over another in an economy of unlimited visual evidence is risky: evidence becomes a question, not a given.

The chapters of *Media Primitivism* are set in the twentieth century, but the intellectual history reaches back to the Enlightenment, the moment when fetish and fetishism become allegorical of difference. If we are once again revisiting the project of the Enlightenment, it is because of resurging and rampant racism, ecological collapse and the suppression of its reporting, femicide, the predatory and abusive use of digital and networked technology, and expectations of rapid and profitable conclusions to research, just to name several. Naturalized methods of distancing paradoxically license access to resource exploitation, and that basic architecture of thought and action has yet to be fundamentally revised. Distancing is behind the idea of a separate technology that is neutral and has nothing to do with our bodies or our communities; the same myth of neutrality that veils the demand on us humans to produce a tremendous amount of images and affects; the particular kind of technological witchcraft that drives people to resort to the most odious, inhuman methods of creating visual and verbal shock to produce just a spark of energy across networks.

It is tempting to render one's research allegorical of those problems, but it is equally tempting to leave them aside. The threat of global collapse that hangs over me as I write this book makes it extraordinarily difficult to continue to

imagine not just biodiversity but also cultural diversity, the existence of incommensurable and untranslatable cultures. I am completing the final edits to this book confined to my home along with the rest of the world, whom I watch on my screens, as we attempt to slow a viral pandemic that has halted most of the world's systems. In addition to thrusting upon us tremendous uncertainty and disconnectedness, the outbreak proves that there are no borders, neither national nor epidermal, that confine us from the human species—I understand “us” much differently than I did just weeks ago. And as we become more reliant on our devices to make those disembodied connections, I expect that attention extraction, as any biological extraction, will be recognized as needing to be collectively protected as a limited resource. It will be recognized as a problem of consciousness, as it threatens our individual and collective ability to be withdrawn. The artworks that I've immersed myself within in writing this book have modeled a different orientation to technology and to art, particularly the complementarity of the two and their combined techniques of knowledge.