ABSTRACT OF: *Paradise Fallen: Islands, Archipelagos and Xenoepistemics*

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*Paradise Fallen* is an installation that draws on theoretical and literary research and interdisciplinary art-making practices, largely produced during residencies in two settings. The camera and associated technical and ideological apparatus are more than simply the media used to make the work but are also points of departure in exploring forms of knowledge production. In this work, the creative process relies on theoretical and political explorations of the sites where the works were produced. Issues ranging from colonialism and slavery to globalization and climate change come to inform the process and realization of this installation. The paper elaborates on narratives, concepts and politics that emerge through the figure of the island, especially in relation to the creative practice.

*Paradise Fallen* offers up as xenoepistemics [1] or what might be considered a queering of phenomenology [2]. Xenoepistemics contains a challenge to embrace knowledge that is nonlinear, estranged, foreign or other. Queer phenomenology asks for approaches or orientations to the sensible world that value deviations or nonnormative positions. These concepts embolden and enrich my exploration of the creative process vis-à-vis the sites that I have photographed and filmed.

In this way, the creative practice draws on literary and cultural theory to extend conventional historiography and oceanography. This includes understanding movement and flows of people and goods in relation to their historical underpinnings as well as varied and heterogenous contemporary forms: global commerce, tourism, forced migrations, exile and even slavery.

*Paradise Fallen* is derived from residencies on Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean and the peninsula and islands of Dakar, Senegal, in the Atlantic. The major work was a large-scale projection, *Île Aux Serpents* (25 minutes looped), initially screened in Dakar and installed more elaborately for Watershed at the multidisciplinary space *feem of colour*. The large installation was empty but for one long bench. The projection and audio worked to immerse the viewer in the landscape. The installation housing the film effectively bracketed the viewer from the outside world, dropping them into the cinematography of the island world to encounter physical and metaphysical terrors that lurk beneath and within any landscape. The paper explores the idea of the island (in general) as out of time and space by engaging with social theory and literature.

*Paradise Fallen* is an interdisciplinary work tied to the histories of these sites. A crucial component of colonialism and slavery was mastering the ocean. While the ocean is linked to stories of these sites. A crucial component of colonialism and slavery was mastering the ocean. While the ocean is linked to terrors that lurk beneath and within any landscape. The paper elaborates on narratives, concepts and politics that emerge through the figure of the island, especially in relation to the creative practice.

In this sense, I approach the island as a figure or narrative device that provokes the bipolar enactment of disorder/breakdown/obliteration and reconstitution of western society. The island is marked more by its connections with the outside than by its insularity [4]. The ambition for the treatment of landscape is to insist that the island landscape—more than a mise-en-scène in which narrative unfolds—drives the narrative (perhaps as a character would), and the writing, cinematography, editing and installation of the work invoke the complex associations of islands. Within the context of the history and contemporary economy of islands as locations for flows of people, currency, products and ideas, the film and the installation treat the island as *site*, always in excess of its cinematic potential. Rather than explore the juxtapositions of imaginary islands and contemporary places, between colonial history and modern economies, the work is crafted in a filmic nonnime and nonplace. Even though the collection of works that constitute *Paradise Fallen* are initiated in two settings, the intent is for the view to traverse historical epochs and multiple spaces.

Within the work, water also operates in multiple ways, particularly in the film *Île Aux Serpents*. Dakar is at sea level, and water enters as an unavoidable phenomenon as a base for colonial sea exploration and subsequent colonial links. But water is also a medium through which to reflect on how representational strategies operate as intermediaries between desire and its objects. From a cinematographic point of view, the atmosphere in Dakar is infused with this water. Much of the film relies on time-lapse photography and most footage was taken in front of large bodies of water.

In addition to *Île Aux Serpents*, the work includes one sculptural eight-channel work (60-second video fragment, looped) containing images of a palm tree—manipulated to be in the negative—bristling in the wind and one single-channel monitor piece (14:39, looped) that scrolled the text of a manifesto written in Dakar. The installation also includes two large-scale drawings (140 × 140 and 140 × 5 m) and a stack of photo litho prints of a film still from *Île Aux Serpents*, printed with a poem from Danai Mupotsa’s anthology *Feeling and Ugly* [5].

I aimed to use the dislocating strategy within the cinematography to create an illusion of being in a nonspecific place in a nonspecific time, to immersively draw the viewer in. This determined edit lengths: The image is held longer than conventional durations in commercial cinema or television, to hold the viewer within a landscape. There is a relationship developed here between image, screen, site, camera and the viewer, who receives the images thousands of kilometers and many years away from the scene. The gambit of *Paradise Fallen* is to play with the impossibilities of return, to revisit to the scene of the (a) crime.

**References and Notes**

Based on a paper presented at the 2018 Watershed: Art, Science, and Elemental Politics program at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, September 2018. The full paper is available with the online supplemental materials.


