

KUNSTHALLE BERN

NTU, Nolan Oswald Dennis, Tabita Rezaire and Bogosi Sekhukhuni

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Umhlaba uyalingana

Within collective thought - a synthesis¹

Collectives² and collectivising conjure up association - sharing, care, horizontality, commons, community, solidarity, affective labour and more care. For now, in the Western world, collectivising is a tactic to push back on climate change, capitalism and sexism, part of the long trajectory of collective action across queer, anti-racist, feminist movements, labour unions, protest actions, even the deposing of fascism or aristocratic rule.

For the Majority world, collectives and collectivising amongst people and beyond the human has been a practice for as far as most of us know, farther than anti-apartheid, anti-colonial movements, farther than all forms of liberation struggles against dominant structures. Our experiences of collectives are social, economic, and beyond time. It is part of the complex web of being in the world, one that is inextricable and perhaps indigestible, it is not binary nor is it transparent.³ The collective also includes the undead (those living in us through the knowledges we use in our practices) and crosses between the now⁴ and many pasts and futures. Being in collective involves affective labour for those near and far both in distance and time. The labour we put in to participating in a sociality that is not immediately remunerated and or incalculable stretches the capitalist notion of work beyond the imaginations of managerialism and developmentalism. Collective work is beyond your time horizon.

To be in collective is not oppositional to the individual or their progress - in my view, to be in collective is to work against determinism, the linear directional progression from which the

¹ Listen to Miles Davis' 1975 album *Agharta*. Nolan Oswald Dennis' work in this exhibition is using this album as a sauce/source/reference/influence.

² I use it here for expediency and it includes all manner of work that is done by more than one person.

³ Collective work is often associated with women but this is a cis-heteropatriarchal view which fixes masculinity as logical, reasoning, and excluding emotion. At another time I will write a text on the issue of separation of labour into gender roles and offer another view of communities who conceive of labour differently. The notion of transparency and binary logic of the western system is influenced by Édouard Glissant', 1997. *Poetics of relation*. University of Michigan Press.

⁴ I use the following formulation of the "now" by Michelle Wright in her book *Physics of Blackness* (2015). She writes that

"Epiphenomenal" time denotes the current moment, a moment that is *not* directly borne out of another (i.e., causally created)...Epiphenomenal time does not preclude any and all causality: only a *direct*, or *linear*, causality. In other words, the current moment, or "now," can certainly correlate with other moments, but one cannot argue that it is always already the effect of a specific, previous moment. Read together, they underscore the depth and breadth with which these notions of spacetime pervade Western expressions of collective identity, most especially Blackness.

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investment logic demands dividends or liquidation. To be in collective is slow, tedious, repetitive work demanding much much more time to settle differing tempos, viewpoints and affinities. Institution building is collective work. All work is collective. Life is collective. Not only in the entanglement and interconnectedness of living where there are dizzying crisscrosses of materials, labour, movements, energies, and time to produce this single moment where you are reading this text in this very specific context of this exhibition. Every encounter is collectively produced.

Nolan Oswald Dennis, Tabita Rezaire and Bogosi Sekhukhuni founded NTU as “an agency concerned with the spiritual futures of technology” in Johannesburg in 2015.⁵ This exhibition puts together works made collectively by NTU and each of their solo practices in view.

NTU’s installation *Nervous Conditioner* “was specifically conceived as a safe place for people of color to discuss, share and organize, free of the white-supremacist-patriarchal-hetero-normative suppression”.⁶ Relations between Dennis, Rezaire and Sekhukhuni are what constitutes NTU now, a friendship that sustains beyond producing artworks. It is affective labour that recedes from view and continues unidentifiable in their lives and practice.

Dennis’ expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctica disorganises and rearranges what is seemingly common-sense by encoding it with other systems of thought - earth sciences, black liberation theory and the poetics of African decolonial systems. Rezaire’s healing practice uses digital, corporeal and ancestral memory - weaving contemporary and ancient knowledges, they work with the now of our times, the now of futures and the now of ancestors. Sekhukhuni digests the sun springing from scientist Alexander L. Chizhevsky’s research on the relationship between the solar cycle and human behaviour to biomechanical design on a planet that is heating up.

This exhibition seeks to question or stretch what we consider solo and collective practice, to put them together, to see the crisscrossing zone of influence from which both the collective and the individuals that constitute it take shape. Is it not a sedimentation, a densification, a condensation of influences over time that is authored by a person in a moment? The provocation is not to claim that there is no individuality but rather propose that individuality itself is an assemblage or convergence of moments (interactions, influences) that are authored in time.

⁵ In relation to this exhibition NTU, Nolan Oswald Dennis, Tabita Rezaire and Bogosi Sekhukhuni are also exhibiting their works at Van Abbemuseum’s exhibition on collective practice titled *Positions #7: Everything worthwhile is done with other people* (May 13, 2023 - Sep 24, 2023) curated by Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide with Nick Aikens.

⁶ From NTU’s portfolio