

Dictionary of Now

Taiye Selasi, David Theo Goldberg & Achille Mbembe: Violence

READING

Airport

Taiye Selasi

WELCOME

Bernd Scherer

(Director Haus der Kulturen der Welt)

LECTURE

Racial Politics as Civil War

David Theo Goldberg

LECTURE

The Violence of Borders

Achille Mbembe

DISCUSSION AND Q & A

Moderated by Bernd Scherer



The event will be held in English with simultaneous translation into German. Headphones are available in the foyer next to the lecture hall.

An additional live-stream of the event will be provided in the foyer next to the lecture hall.

Racial violence often masks itself in its various forms and appearances. It is deeply inscribed in social structures, language systems, governmental tools, or in the interpretation of history. The genealogy of racial violence is closely connected to structural constellations of modern capitalist nation states and based on historical legacies that perpetuate racial classification systems. Against the backdrop of historic developments, continuities, and ruptures, three leading figures of postcolonial thought, philosopher David Theo Goldberg, political scientist and philosopher Achille Mbembe, and author Taiye Selasi, will analyze the constant process of normalization of racial violence and the correlations between systemic violence and racist ideologies. How does one detect and address the production of contemporary racialities? How is violence rooted in practices and languages of postcolonial capitalist societies? What does the illusion of a “post-racial” age reveal about the effects and camouflage tactics of racist hierarchies of violence? How does one address racisms in different narrative forms?

A short story developed for the evening by Taiye Selasi on mechanisms of “othering” and bias as racist demarcation is the starting point of the discussion. Using narrative images, Selasi shows how racist aggression is articulated and how it interconnects individual and societal experiences of violence. The analyses by Goldberg and Mbembe reveal, on the one hand, the close interrelation of racism and social, technological, and geographical structures. On the other, they discuss the patterns of legitimation of violence and investigate the question of “legitimate” violence in the context of emancipatory movements such as Négritude or Black Lives Matter.

Airport
Taiye Selasi

We are gathered together in the departure lounge. We sit with suboptimal posture. We drink lukewarm water and watery coffee. Our fingers insist on distraction. If there is a method for eating a mediocre croissant without dusting one's fingers and clothes with its crumbs we don't know it; we aren't hungry but restless and bored, or we haven't been sated in months, maybe more.

The young man—twentysomething, slim, his head covered—has the most suboptimal posture of all. He could feel our eyes grazing his face like a breeze, just as light and as silent but violent somehow, and so slouched in his chair, which is shaped like a bucket like ours, with his shoulders to guard

him. Now he looks frightened, where before he looked lonesome, but even looking frightened he frightens us.

TAIYE SELASI is an author and photographer. She holds a BA in American Studies from Yale and an MPhil in International Relations from Oxford. In 2005 she published the seminal essay *Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)*, sparking a movement among transnational Africans. In 2013 Selasi's debut novel, The New York Times bestseller *Ghana Must Go*, was selected as one of the 10 Best Books of 2013 by the Wall Street Journal and The Economist. In the same year, Selasi was among the authors named on Granta magazine's once-in-a-decade list of Best Young British Novelists. Her 2015 TED talk, *Don't Ask Where I'm From; Ask Where I'm a Local*, has reached over two million viewers, redefining the way a global society conceives of personal identity.

Racial Politics as Civil War

David Theo Goldberg

Arguing that politics today is civil war by other means, David Theo Goldberg traces the racial constitution and articulations of their co-making. Racial politics today are constantly disposed to breaking out into violence. Here, civil war is less about the resort to arms than about contestations concerning different ways of being in the world, different modes of living and relating. In this, the racial inherits the historical work of the religious, secularizing its terms of articulation. These diverging commitments, conflictual in their very contrasts, veer into the violent when the one side insists on its incontestable righteousness, its mode of existence socially, economically, culturally, politically, legally as singularly legitimate. Goldberg outlines various contemporary examples of these expressions, as well as the ways in which the technologies of political walling are inscribed into racial landscapes of civil warring as an architectural politics of control. He concludes by contrasting the racial politics of civil warring with a counter-politics of coalitional heterogeneities.

DAVID THEO GOLDBERG is the Director of the system-wide University of California Humanities Research Institute, the Executive Director of the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, and Professor of Comparative Literature, Anthropology, and Criminology, Law and Society. He has published broadly on race and racism, on digital humanities, on social, political, and critical theory and postcolonial studies, as well as on humanities and the university. His most recent books include *Are We All Postracial Yet?* (2015) and *Between Humanities and the Digital* (co-edited, 2015). In the 1980s he produced and in one case co-directed award-winning independent films and music videos. Goldberg is a member of HKW's Program Advisory Board.

The Violence of Borders

Achille Mbembe

The government of human mobility might well be the most important problem to confront the world during the first half of the 21st-century. Worldwide, the combination of fast capitalism and the saturation of the everyday by digital and computational technologies have led to the acceleration of speed and the intensification of connections. Ours is in this regard an era of planetary entanglement. Yet wherever we look, the drive is decisively towards enclosure. Were this trend to persist, tomorrow's world will increasingly be a gated one, with myriad enclaves, *culs-de-sacs*, shifting, mobile and portable borders. In this lecture, Mbembe will examine the ways in which the capacity to decide who can move and who can settle where and under what conditions has moved to the core of contemporary struggles over sovereignty. He will also comment on the forms of molecular violence deriving from the new global security regime which underpins this trend. Finally he will reflect about what it would take to relaunch the utopia of a borderless world.

ACHILLE MBEMBE is Research Professor in History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He studied at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and at the Institut d'études politiques (Paris) and has taught at various institutions in the United States, including Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, the University of California at Irvine, Duke University, and Harvard University. He has published extensively on African history, politics, and decolonization, including *On the Postcolony* (2000) and *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (2010). His widely acclaimed book *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013; in German: *Kritik der schwarzen Vernunft*, in English: *Critique of Black Reason*) won the Geschwister Scholl-Preis (2015). His work has been translated into numerous languages and he has recently been elected as a member of the US Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In the last one hundred years the sciences—and the technologies they have generated—have shaped our conception of reality, our thought, and our language. In the framework of *100 Years of Now*, the *Dictionary of Now* reflects on language's capacity to both depict and create reality. The dictionary focuses on omnipresent terms that are central to the description of the deep-rooted changes of the present—but which in their current usage are no longer able to grasp them.

What varieties and shifts of meaning lie at the root of these terms, what readings and subtexts do they harbor? What social, political, and cultural processes of transformation are reflected through them? And how can they be sharpened and adjusted in order to generate scope for linguistic action? In a series of twelve discussions from 2015 to 2018, distinguished representatives from the sciences and the arts, from theory and praxis, question the established meanings of selected terms, updating them against the background of their respective expertise.

A publication to be released in 2018 will bring together the key words and participants from the individual discussions in the series, establishing connections and allowing new, dynamic constellations of knowledge production to emerge.

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