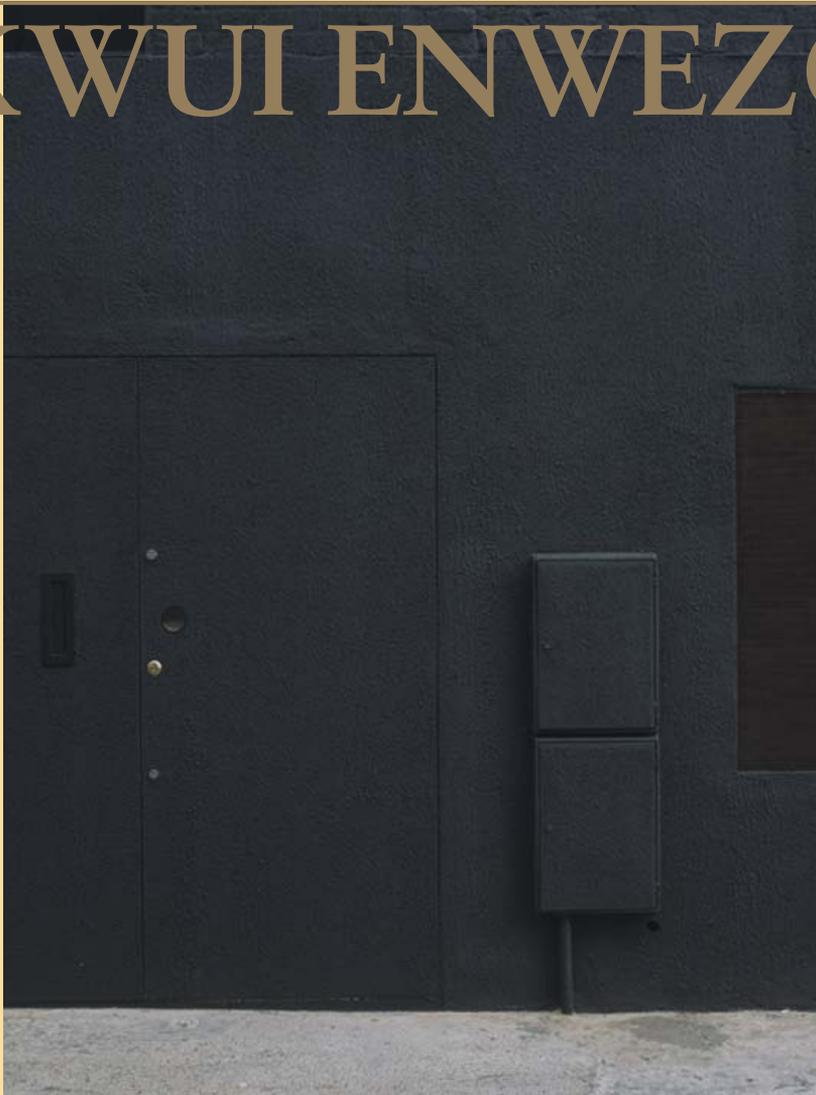


GESTURES OF AFFILIATION OKWUI ENWEZOR



(Fig 02) DIRTY HOUSE
London, UK, 2001-2002
Detail of street facade



(Fig 01) ELEKTRA HOUSE
London, UK, 1998-2000
Street view with Elektra House on right

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship—a living, microcultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons. . . Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists, as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat . . .
And in this inert town, this squalling throng so astonishingly
detoured from its cry as this town has been
from its movement, from its meaning,
not even worried, detoured from its true cry,
the only cry you would have wanted to hear because
you feel it alone belongs to this town;
because you feel it lives in it in some deep refuge
and pride in this inert town, this throng detoured
from its cry of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred,
this throng so strangely chattering and mute.

Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Nativeland*

ON POSTCOLONIAL REALISM

Since founding his office in 2000, David Adjaye has made an inexorable and visible shift in the language and philosophy of his architectural vision. As his practice has advanced to larger and more complex projects across several continents, so has the conceptual impetus to address important historical questions that have to do with social, political, and cultural issues that attach to architecture's metropolitan contexts. In the process Adjaye has had to clarify how aesthetic references derived especially from the meshing of modern architectural discourse and the idioms of African abstraction can infuse the formal and material language of his buildings with new vitality. Today Adjaye's designs encompass domestic, civic, and commercial structures, as well as experimental commissions that fuse art and architecture. His practice extends to the creation of master plans, urbanism, furniture design, and teaching. Of particular note is African Metropolitan Architecture, a decade-long research project to map the urban and architectural heritage of every capital city in fifty-four African countries.⁰¹ This vast, ongoing, and unprecedented endeavor presents a rich terrain of analytical possibility and a fruitful resource for understanding how the effects of modernism, colonialism, and postcolonialism, as well as the ideologies of nation building and modernization, have shaped African urban forms.⁰²

01. Due to the exigencies of conflict, Mogadishu, Somalia, and Juba, South Sudan, are yet to be studied.

02. For a comprehensive overview of this research, see David Adjaye and Peter Allison, *African Metropolitan Architecture* (Thames and Hudson, 2011).

More than any architect working today, Adjaye's practice is deeply inscribed in the spaces of postcolonial realism. Such realism abjures what the philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe refers to as "ethnological reason" in order to "imagine the possibility of a reversal of anthropology's perspective" by employing *logique métisse* (mestizo logic).⁰³ What may be the possible effects of Adjaye's work at this historical moment? As a young African practicing in a field dominated by older Europeans and Asians, Adjaye, like his colleagues from Iran, India, China, the Middle East, and other non-European locales, represents a shift in global networks of knowledge and the emergence of experts who defy traditional hegemonic structures of cultural capital. His work brings a needed African postcolonial and cosmopolitan voice into the discourse of contemporary architecture. Especially as African economies continue to expand at robust rates, the need for new infrastructural investments in the continent is also growing (just as happened in China fifteen years ago). Add to this the desire of African business, cultural, political, and intellectual leaders to rewrite the negative narratives that have consistently dismissed Africa and Africans as serious partners in the dialogue of modernization, and we have a clearer picture of the space in which Adjaye is currently working.

His practice has evolved organically, from making robust and sublime domestic buildings (often located in multicultural, cosmopolitan urban contexts) to producing larger buildings that aim to democratize the experience of public architecture and acknowledge the heterogeneity of contemporary urban identities. Adjaye's early projects were marked by their modesty, intimacy, and privacy. Each of these attributes was explored in relation to precision of scale, rigor of form, and integrity of material. Although the early commissions were, as domestic architecture, scaled for everyday living, because of their location in ethnically and economically mixed neighborhoods they required different kinds of architectural speculation to effectively situate their strong physicality and materiality within the existing cultural and social fabric.

A number of the domestic buildings, such as Elektra House and Dirty House^(Fig 01) were testing grounds for Adjaye's sculptural approach. Their solid forms have the scale and presence of small monuments. Elektra House and Dirty House have an unmistakable but enigmatic visual clarity that sets them apart from their surroundings. One can, for example, stand in front of Elektra House yet completely miss it.^(Fig 02) The house is all too visible; quietly withdrawn yet present in its location. Perhaps it can be overlooked because of pedestrians' expectations that a house will have a door and some windows facing the street, whereas Elektra House is a structure-cum-object with no door and no windows on this frontage—just a blank facade of darkened plywood panels that make it look boarded up. The structure (a kind of wooden Kaaba) resembles a sculpture more than a building for domestic living. To conjure such a form in a working class neighborhood of utilitarian brick houses was a bold thought experiment; it seems that Adjaye wanted to manifest an uncompromising directness and refusal of the quotidian. Making a plain, unadorned facade the central defining feature of Elektra House certainly accomplished this.

These domestic projects brought early critical notice to Adjaye's refined yet rough-hewn architectural language. But over the last decade his public and civic buildings' spirited response to their context and to cultural and political change have opened further opportunities, particularly in the rich cosmopolitan culture of places like London. Thinking of the composition of communities in London or New York inevitably brings up the issue of social space. As Henri

03. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Indiana University Press/James Currey, 1994). For further insight into Mudimbe's exploration of the idea of mixing, syncretism, and hybridity, see *ibid.*, pp. 38–70. Jean-Loup Amselle coined the term *logique métisse*;

Lefebvre taught us, the production of social space operates on a number of levels that are imbued with mental, physical, and symbolic attributes.⁰⁴ Crafting architecture in the spatially mobile conditions of contemporary cities is a different endeavor than doing so in largely monocultural contexts. Addressing mixed communities with mixed cultural legacies certainly prizes open doors into the burgeoning transnational social sphere. How do today's global cities and the shift to virtual space and digital communities produced by new technologies—and their open-ended conceptions of space—challenge modernist expectations of unitary forms of architecture? Similarly, how does the current climate encourage the development of aesthetically modular, recalcitrant, and complex designs? Architecture has only barely begun rethinking its relationship to the migrant identities and subjectivities of global cities in the way that late-nineteenth-century designs for workers' housing and twentieth-century social housing schemes did. Perhaps, in mixed communities of Muslims and non-Muslims, Hindus and Christians, atheists and believers, rich and poor, global urban architecture has to rethink its inherited traditions.

Adjaye has attended to these issues through nuanced representational design references. All of his work is grounded in a clear recognition of the interplay of the legacies of modernity and secularism in shaping living arrangements in modern cities. Included in these legacies are the histories of migration, the struggle for housing reform to accommodate the needs of migrants, and often the incorporation of new iconographies within postcolonial communities.⁰⁵ A number of his important public buildings have been remarkable, low-key civic structures whose central attributes emerge from the secular tradition of the democratic public sphere, which extends today to encompass the contemporary demands of civil society, civil rights, and democratic politics: the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo; the Idea Store Whitechapel and Idea Store Chrisp Street, both located in the East End of London; the Bernie Grant Arts Centre, London; the Stephen Lawrence Centre, London; Rivington Place, London; and the more recent Francis A. Gregory Library and William O. Lockridge Library, both in Washington, D.C.⁰⁶ These buildings constitute exercises in thinking the civic and inclusive function of architecture within global multicultural and transnational movements.

Significantly, with the libraries, Adjaye imagined elegant buildings that do not condescend to the community or the users of the spaces. He was careful to make rigorous, high-quality contemporary buildings but rejected complicated and overproduced designs that elevated iconicity over substance, or that aggrandized him as the creator but confounded, alienated, or excluded the users. Rather, he approached the design of these buildings with an eye toward integrating the structures into the socioeconomic and politico-cultural patterns of the municipal landscape and into the ongoing activities surrounding the buildings. For example, by eschewing a substantial setback from its busy sidewalk, the Idea Store Whitechapel seamlessly bridges the marketplace of

04. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

05. Born in Tanzania to Ghanaian parents who were diplomats, Adjaye grew up during the turbulent early decades of African decolonization and independence movements. His parents were members of the pioneer generation of postcolonial Africans and, due to his father's job as a diplomat, the family moved to Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia before finally settling in London in the late 1970s, just as British cities were being convulsed by urban riots and clashes between immigrants and the police. It might be useful in this sense to speculate on what effects (or lack thereof) Adjaye's own experience of migration has had on his architecture.

06. The writings of Jürgen Habermas on the question and evolution of the public sphere in Europe have been very influential, especially in its political, social, institutional, and civic elaboration. The congeries of private demands on public forms of representation and representability strongly affect how we may address the locus of civic architecture. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Polity Press, 1992).

commodities, represented by the bustling street-trading activities and lean-to shops, and that of knowledge and ideas, each of which exploits specific types of economic and social capital. (Fig 03) This is a Lefebvrian disguise par excellence, in the sense that the building positions itself between a mental space (a place of refuge and thinking) and a real space (a socially and economically vibrant street culture). It is as if the grammar of everyday life doubles itself into the folds of contemplative and subjective life. In so doing, designs such as the *Idea Stores* not only successfully explore the fundamental alignment between the civic and public situations produced by migrant experiences and the rich cultural contributions they make to London, they also brilliantly assert Adjaye's design language within the politics of form.

DIALECTICS OF CIVIC ARCHITECTURE

Although most critical writing on his practice has not taken full account of this, Adjaye's work is materially and conceptually dialectical. His buildings are also, especially in recent commissions, highly symbolic and dialogical propositions. Rather than grand statements or self-regarding creations, Adjaye's designs are made for and conceived around the core values of *res publica*, the commonwealth, and therefore as places to experience the democracy of knowledge. Moreover, especially in the case of buildings crafted in response to specific social demographics (Asian and African immigrants in East London, a primarily African American neighborhood in Washington, D.C.), his projects become, to borrow sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato's phrase, centers for the production of subjectivity.⁰⁷

The remainder of this essay will focus on three public buildings that respond to the necessity to inscribe new types of historical content into architecture itself: the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), in Washington, D.C.; the Cape Coast Slavery Museum in Ghana; and the Stephen Lawrence Centre in London. Each commemorates and responds to a desire to explore and script global multicultural and transnational experiences. These buildings may be approached as "gestures of affiliation": modes of belonging that reconceive the scattered trajectories of migrant lives and selves, within seemingly monolithic cultural landscapes. More importantly, the structures transparently manifest Adjaye's dialectical and dialogical architectural vision. The occasions for these buildings are the histories of African slavery, exile, and migration. They are about narratives of black lives and experiences in the global sphere. Or, as the eminent African American writer, political activist, cultural critic, and Pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois put it in the title of his classic 1903 book, they are about *The Souls of Black Folk*.⁰⁸

These three buildings share one feature: they address the renewal of historical exploration of African memories, from the scattered trajectories of exile, enslavement, and—to quote Paul Gilroy—the "projects for redemptive return to an African homeland." Such redemptive return obviously is based more on spiritual conceptions of cultural heritage and imaginative travel, on a desire to forge shared links, the reiteration of what remains of tenuous bonds, than of actual physical return. In other words, Adjaye's recent forays into architecture are an occasion for scripting the text of social memorialization, and they thus touch on how the making of memory and the construction of spaces bear on the relationship between the sacred and the secular, the

07. Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Semiotext(e), 2014).

08. W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (A. C. McClurg, 1903).



(Fig 03) IDEA STORE WHITECHAPEL
London, UK, 2001-2005
Street view with market stalls on right

public and the civic. The social production of memory requires texts, symbols, and spaces, for it is within these inscriptions that the purpose of the museum as a site of commemoration becomes sharply illuminated.

Lefebvre identified three forces in the production of space:

1. *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.
2. *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the "order" which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to frontal "relations."
3. Representational spaces, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).⁰⁹

This "conceptual triad" may in fact describe the dialectics of civic architecture. In particular, the architecture of museums designed to display artifacts documenting violence, displacement, and injustice demands not only new codes of space, but also new codes of representational spaces. It calls for, in addition to logics of building, logics of dwelling and thinking, to echo the title of Heidegger's classic essay.¹⁰ We might say that these spaces, by being repositories for diverse cultural artifacts, have to account for the production of the archive, the practice of commemoration, and relations of consecration. That is, how do cultures remember, commemorate, honor, and narrate their history, past, and aspirations?

These questions are central to the ways in which the NMAAHC and the Cape Coast Slavery Museum spaces will come to embody both the sacral principles of the shrine and the secular ambitions from which logics of civic identity are constituted. In this sense, the spatial practice of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., symbolizes the ground zero where America's lofty self-image and its actual checkered past have been neatly joined.^(Fig 04) For over two hundred years, the Mall has been a gathering place and the resolute (at times, too resolute) mechanism for embedding the evolving memories and accounts of the American republic in the nation's dramatization of its founding principles. The lack of strong visual acknowledgment of slavery and the enslaved within America's gallery of monuments and memorials has been a stain on the nation's image of itself. According to its official website:

09. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 33.

10. An important touchstone for architecture—and a classic philosophical work around which Lefebvre's conceptual triad is aligned—is, of course, Heidegger's seminal 1951 essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 145–61. Jacques Derrida's notion of domiciliation in relation to his theory of the archive brings further insight into the concept, which he connects to the Greek origin of the term archive: "As is the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (a word that is used in the singular as was the French archive, formerly employed as a masculine singular: un archive), the meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded . . . On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed . . . It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place." See Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 2.

[Its] origins are as old as the capital city itself. The open spaces and parklands envisioned by Pierre L'Enfant's plan, which was commissioned by President George Washington, created an ideal stage for national expressions of remembrance, observance, celebration, and expression of First Amendment rights. With everything from colossal monuments to commemorative gardens, from presidential inaugurations to civil rights demonstrations, NAMA [the National Mall and Memorial Parks] hosts history in the making. Numerous First Amendment activities and special events are held in the park each year. The park continues to evolve as Americans seek new ways to recognize our heritage.¹¹

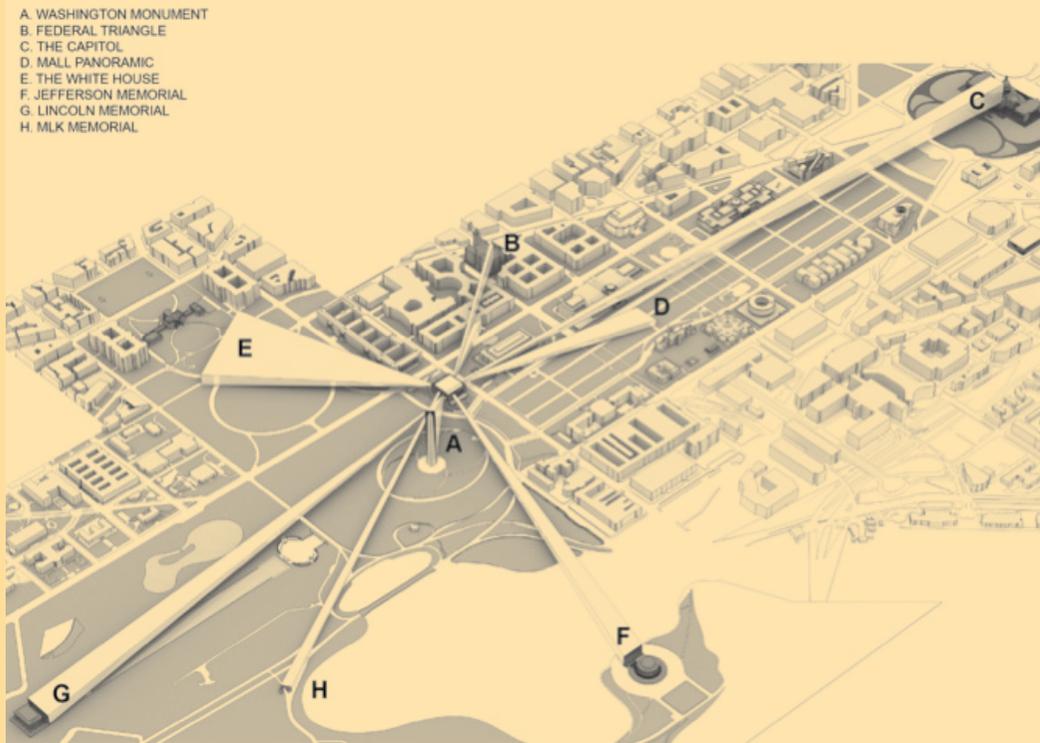
Set in this heavily symbolic and ideological public space where the American nation comes to recognize, remember, and celebrate (namely archive, commemorate, and consecrate) its textured history is Adjaye's NMAAHC, whose three-tiered structure was inspired by the geometric three-tiered crown surmounting the elaborate figurative veranda posts carved by the Yoruba sculptor Olowe of Ise at the turn of the twentieth century. Adjaye Associates' summary of the design concept states: "The design rests on three cornerstones: the 'corona' shape and form of the building; the extension of the building out into the landscape—the porch; and the bronze filigree envelope."¹² This is a building that powerfully foregrounds "codes of representational spaces," expressing formally what Lefebvre's conceptual triad describes analytically. And it elucidates the relations of social production that connect the spatial concepts of the archive, the mnemonic registers of commemoration, and the symbolic codes of consecration.

Although Adjaye's museum is neither a memorial nor a monument, its very construction unmistakably evokes these two increasingly controversial entities. Art historian Mark Godfrey has written persuasively on the difficulties and challenges posed by the making of monuments and memorials.¹³ Similar controversies have bedeviled important works of architectural memory such as Daniel Liebeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. It is important to bear in mind that memorials and monuments, rather than simply being devices to make memory, history, or structures of remembering, are fundamentally representational spaces designed to explore ruptures in memory, opacities of history, and fractures in remembering. Especially since no monument or memorial referencing slavery has ever been constructed within the gallery of American monuments and memorials that includes the Washington Monument, Thomas Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, D.C. War Memorial, World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and George Mason Memorial, Adjaye's museum takes on even greater significance—and a bigger burden. It must be both a secular space responding to the traditions of American democracy and a sacral space corresponding to African American yearning to belong to the republic.^(Fig 05)

11. "National Mall & Memorial Parks," last modified June 18, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/nama/historyculture/index.htm>.

12. For a description of the building see "Smithsonian NMAAHC," <http://www.adjaye.com/projects/civic-buildings/smithsonian-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-nmaaahc/>, accessed July 2, 2014.

13. Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (Yale University Press, 2007).



(Fig 04) NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
Washington DC, USA, 2009-2016
Schematic view showing position on the National Mall

The NMAAHC will join the monuments and memorials on the National Mall, the same hallowed national space that for centuries has excluded African memories. The question of African memories is fundamental. It is in exploring their social and historical meaning that a second question can be raised: what other relationship to Africa beyond the symbolic or structural can design inscribe in relation to the mnemonic? The complexity required to negotiate and navigate the sensitive history of slavery brings forth as well the continent's relationship to that history. To examine this point one must look past the monumental museum rising on the Washington Mall and cast eyes toward the African coast to the Cape Coast Slavery Museum in Cape Coast, Ghana. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the trade in Africans flourished, sending millions of men and women (the majority from West Africa and a sizeable number from Central Africa) to Europe, North and South America, and the Caribbean. The trauma of the Triangular Trade and the harrowing Middle Passage have had enduring social consequences and vividly stamped the cultural identity of the New World, where millions of slaves were taken. The Middle Passage has been an important leitmotif in this narrative, in the search for the broken links among diasporic Africans, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

It is in reflection of that search and the complex narratives accompanying and surrounding it that Adjaye's Cape Coast Slavery Museum is now being planned. The building is designed specifically to commemorate and inscribe Africa's participation in the Triangular Trade. In the museum's narrative, Africans are no longer treated solely as victims, but also as active agents in the catastrophe. Without eliding the complicity of African warrant chiefs and merchant elites in the trade, the museum will also present the vital link between Africa and peoples of African descent in Europe and the Americas to explore paths of understanding and reconciliation. The Cape Coast Slavery Museum will rise on one side adjacent to Cape Coast Castle, a slave fortress, one of the more than 140 that dot the continent's coast, and from which millions of Africans were shipped to the New World (Figs 06, 07, & 10). Adjaye's design imagines a dialogue between the ancient fortress and the new structure, delineated by an expansive ochre-colored esplanade that connects the two buildings and then leads down to the beach and stretches away to the sea. The challenge facing Adjaye in designing these two museum projects in Washington, D.C., and Cape Coast is how to reimagine the absence of commemorative structures that give physical sanctuary to the experiences, and how to incorporate the mnemonic expectations that will shadow the museums in the years to come. The Cape Coast Slavery Museum and the NMAAHC should be understood as two sides of one coin. The intersection of two narratives, as well as specific microhistories belonging to each national context, offers Adjaye the rare opportunity to construct a unique architectural object for each site.

In the United States such buildings commemorating the memories of African slaves and the contributions of their descendants to the making of the American republic have been desired, debated, and lobbied for since the Emancipation Proclamation was issued and the Civil War ended. One unsatisfactory result was the Emancipation Monument, also known as the Freedman's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln, located near the site of the NMAAHC in Lincoln Park in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C. (Fig 08) This bronze figurative sculpture by Thomas Ball depicts Lincoln, formally clothed in suit and tie, standing with his right hand on



(Fig 05) SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
Washington DC, USA, 2009-2016
Aerial view showing the museum to the right of the Washington Memorial

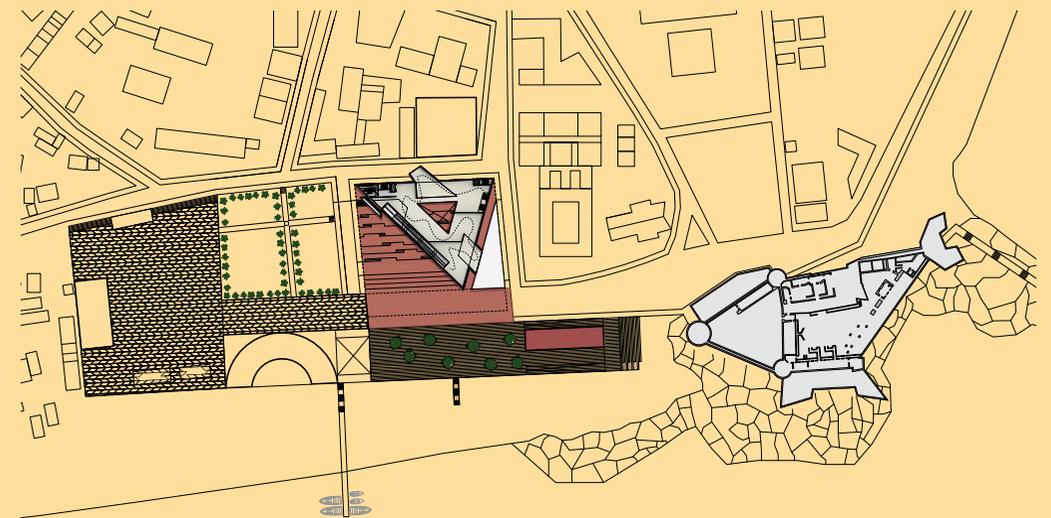
a rounded lectern, while his left hand waves gracefully, as if blessing the crouched figure of an African man kneeling at the base of his feet, with broken chains signifying the loosing of the bonds of slavery. This representation was very controversial at the time of its design because, although it purportedly commemorates the freeing of the slaves, it still depicts the African figure as inferior to his supposed liberator. Representations of slavery in American culture have been both uneven and fraught with disagreements. The recent Oscar-winning film *12 Years A Slave* (2013) by the British director Steve McQueen magisterially explores and examines the representations of bondage and freedom.¹⁴

MUSEAL¹⁵

Perhaps we should turn from the specific politics of representation, commemoration, and memorialization to inquire into the possible narratives that might come to the fore in the process of “musealizing” African memories. The epigraph from Paul Gilroy with which this essay begins offers a powerful image of the triangulation of Africa, Europe, and the Americas in the making of New World African identities. The term he uses for this triangulation is “double consciousness,” a concept borrowed from W. E. B. Du Bois, who had coined it to describe the historical experience of diasporic Africans in the Americas in a situation of active ongoing negotiation, absorption, and transculturation, by African Americans, of European and African cultures. This interaction, from the slave narrative to Negro spirituals and blues to jazz, contains elements of African and European forms and produced the hyphenated cultural identity of black peoples of the New World, and with that a “double consciousness.” Gilroy examines this idea by analyzing closely the literary, sonic, and political productions of diasporic Africans. The cultural and political maps he posits of the “Black Atlantic,” which encompasses Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean, emerge powerfully through his reading of the transitions of the Middle Passage, which in turn testifies to the historical awareness of the specters of slavery and how much it is bound up with the history of modernity and its multiple discontents. The ship in motion, ploughing through the rough, turbulent sea of the Atlantic is not only a vessel of grief filled with weary bodies and traumatized psyches, but also carries other cargoes: ideas, narratives, feelings, memories, and an assortment of cultural and spiritual content. Furthermore, the slave ship, as the central icon of the Middle Passage, symbolizes the dialectical relationship and transactional entanglement of the three continents in the making of diasporic African identities. The architecture of the ship evokes not just conveyance but confinement, a space of captivity that shattered the illusory hopes for a smooth return from European and American exile. (Fig 09)

14. Steve McQueen's film *12 Years a Slave* won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2014. The story of the film was based on the forgotten memoir, *Twelve Years A Slave* (Derby and Miller, 1853), by Solomon Northup (1808–1863), a freeborn African American man from New York who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in the South. Northup's memoir and the dozens of other slave narratives written from the eighteenth through nineteenth centuries have remained the fundamental historical texts that testify to the subjectivity of Africans in Europe and America.

15. For the use of this term, I am indebted to the influential work of Douglas Crimp on the concepts, histories, and theories of museums, especially the relationship that the concept of the museum establishes between the museal and the mausoleum. In his essay “On the Museum's Ruins,” Crimp in turn cites Theodor Adorno, who writes: “The German word *museal* [museumlike] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museums and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchers of works of art.” Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (MIT Press, 1995), p. 44.



(Fig 06) Castle Cape Coast
Ghana, 18th century
View of the ramparts overlooking the ocean

(Fig 07) CAPE COAST SLAVERY MUSEUM
Cape Coast, Ghana, 2012-ongoing
Site plan showing relationship to the slave museum



(Fig 09) Thomas Ball (American, 1819-1911)
The Emancipation Monument
Washington DC, USA, 1876

By contrast, Aimé Césaire, in his seminal epic poem (a fragment of which is cited above), brings an allegorical force and poetic concreteness to his representation of the Antillean slum, thus bringing forth the social and architectonic disambiguation of slavery. As Césaire’s fluorescent lines make clear, the chaos of the Antillean shantytown brought to its knees by poverty and disease—like the sardine-can architecture of the slave ship—is carried from the very beginning of the transatlantic slave trade on the African coast to the shores of American and Caribbean cities and towns. The ship itself allegorizes that principal dialectic of modernity, namely the negotiation of exile and return, enslavement and liberation, captivity and rebellion. It captures the entire human agency of African peoples in the ambivalent sea of modernity. Between sea and land, the oceanic journey spills its guts into spaces filled with ambivalence. How might this ambivalence be scripted? What kind of legibility might it author to describe the lives that Africans made in the Middle Passage, but also the lives that are being made and lived today? This is the challenge of the NMAAHC and the Cape Coast Slavery Museum, which explicitly deal with the legacy of slavery.

In the next five years, between 2016 and 2020, these buildings will face each other across the Atlantic. Not only do the NMAAHC and Cape Coast Slavery Museum mirror each other, they “focus attention on the middle passage,” on the quest for “a redemptive return to an African homeland,” and on a new symbolic and artifactual script that represents and reimagines African memories in the twenty-first century.¹⁶ It is indeed extremely fortuitous—appropriate, even—that these two buildings, each of which will contain and carry the weight and power of the testimonies of African slaves and their descendants, as well as the burden of the memories left behind, should be designed by Adjaye, an architect born on the African continent and whose family is rooted in Ghana. The two museums respond to more than the quest for redemptive return, they represent a new dialectical bridge between three continents and a dialogical stage from which to explore collective histories of trauma. The NMAAHC and Cape Coast Slavery Museum will stand for two kinds of social vision: the museum as secular shrine and civic sanctuary, and as commemorative totem and mnemonic artifact. In the absence of and failure to construct and constitute memorials and monuments that recognize the sheer scale of suffering and human loss of the slave trade and its legacies, these two buildings, facing each other across the dark, roiling core of the immense ocean—with the water’s glassy surface reflecting the fractures, ruptures, and cicatrices of this epic displacement—capture both the distance between Africa and Africans on the opposite shores and the spatial and temporal discontinuities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The two museums represent the Atlantic “as one single, complex unit of analysis . . . of the modern world.”¹⁷

Here we approach the juncture where the two museums disclose their entangled relation to modernity: with the slave ship as “a living, microcultural, micro-political system in motion” and the African body as commodity deeply embedded in the “economic and historical matrix in which plantation slavery—‘capitalism with its clothes off’—was one special moment.”¹⁸ Although the two museums are not memorials or monuments per se, they nevertheless respond to the civic absence of the transatlantic slave trade in global symbolic structures. The absence of commemorative structures that recognize the epic history of the transatlantic slave trade and its cultural and social consequences for Africans and the vast communities of its diaspora in Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean has long haunted both Africa and the West alike. In this sense, the choice of Adjaye as the architect of record in these evolving transactions is especially significant

16. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, 1993), p. 15.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

because it brings into high relief the special challenges an African architect faces when called to make buildings of such symbolic power, buildings that respond to the mnemonic violence of slavery without reducing it to a cloying spectacle.

Given this absence, as well as the silence that has concealed the histories and wounds of slavery on world historical memory—especially in a secular culture in which everything is memorialized and musealized—why are these two museums being constructed today, more than a century and a half after the international abolition of slavery and the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States? Surely the construction of the NMAAHC on the National Mall is an ameliorative gesture, emanating from a newfound spirit of civic inclusion. In Cape Coast, on the other hand, to make visible memories and illuminate historical experiences calls attention to African complicity in the slave trade. These narratives have been disremembered and suppressed for too long within Africa itself, where few traces of the fate of the dispossessed are visible. The Cape Coast Slavery Museum and similar spaces, such as the Door of No Return on Goreé Island in Senegal, offer Africans new opportunities for reconciliation and dialogue with the diaspora.¹⁹ (Fig 11)

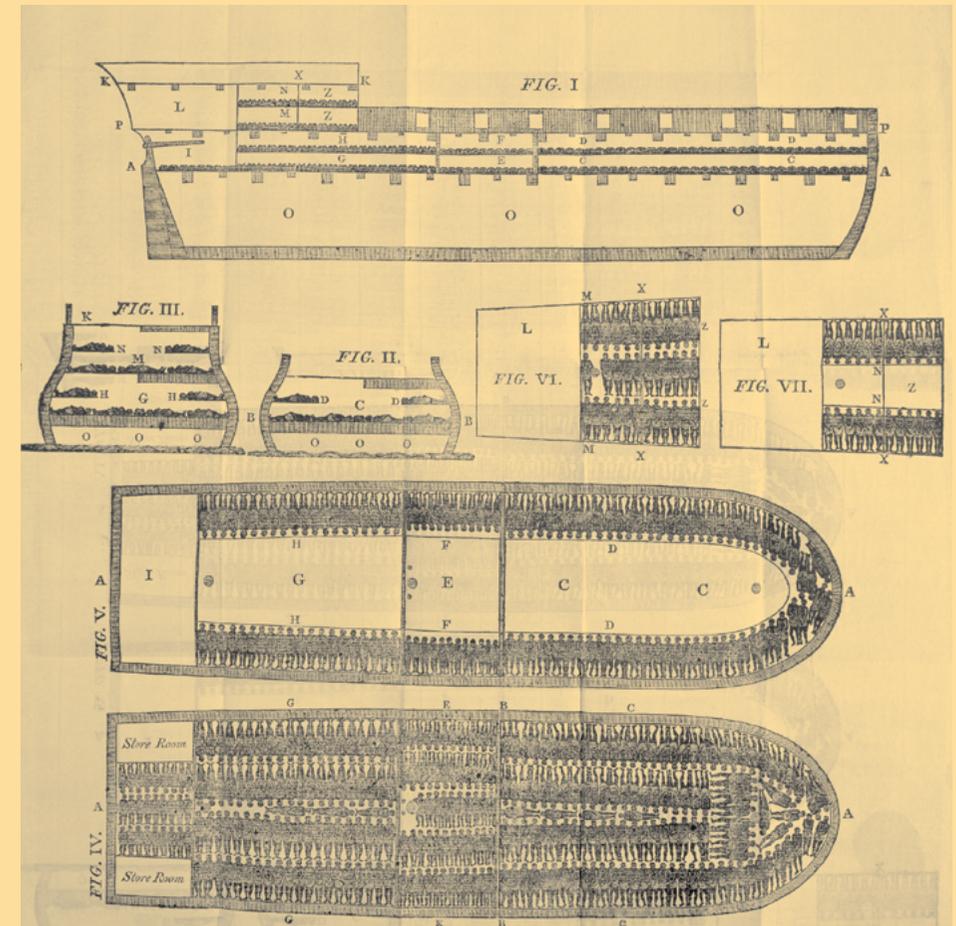
FROM DIASPORA TO COMMONWEALTH

In pointing to these issues, the principal focus of this essay is therefore not on architecture per se, but on the conditions and spaces of architecture. What are the occasions for the production of architecture? How can the making of architecture and the rhetoric of its production help us understand the relationship between secular culture and civic inclusiveness, and how architecture oscillates between artifact and symbol, structure and sign, along with its various techniques and technologies of immanence within political (democratic) and economic (capitalist) logics? One may ask of any building, but especially of public and civic architecture: what and how does it signify? What kinds of narratives does it construct? What kinds of spaces does it produce? What scripts of identity and identification, subjection and subjectivity does it reproduce and preserve? These questions take on even more urgency when addressed toward the function and signification of public buildings in the context of half a millennium of global migration, colonialism, exile, and diaspora.

Symptoms of this history of global migration include racism, xenophobia, exclusion, and the blocking and limitation of access for minorities and difference. When a new museum, public library, cultural center, or market is constructed in a city with a long history of settling, unsettling, and resettling, what sorts of civic and social constellations can be embedded in its functionality to ameliorate or at least acknowledge the socio-politico-cultural fissures that riddle the urban body politic? What kind of spaces, pace Lefebvre, does a public building, or more specifically civic architecture, produce, especially in communities that are in constant flux, or are permanently transitional? Lefebvre offers an important insight here, arguing that “if the gestures of ‘spiritual’ exchange—the exchange of symbols and signs, with their own peculiar delights, have produced spaces, the gestures of material exchange have been no less productive.”²⁰

19. Over the years many exhibitions, curators, historians, and artists have explored the histories of slavery in powerful and often illuminating ways. A recent exhibition of note on the theme of slavery was based on work by Ndidi Dike, a Nigerian painter and sculptor, and presented in Lagos, Nigeria, at the Centre for Contemporary Art. Entitled *Waka Into Bondage*, this exhibition made an active connection to the history of slavery in Africa, because Lagos was an important slave port from the seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries.

20. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 217.



(Fig 10) Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (British, 1787-1823), engraving of the 'Brookes', a British Slave ship showing places for transporting 454 slaves, 1787

The third building relevant to this discussion is the Stephen Lawrence Centre, constructed to honor the memory of a young Afro-Caribbean Briton who was murdered in a racist attack in 1993. Lawrence's murder galvanized the United Kingdom's African and Caribbean communities to demand greater police response to racially motivated crimes and to insist that municipalities and government agencies address ethnic and racial discrimination and the lack of social amenities and economic opportunities for young black people. Lawrence's murder and the police's initial reluctance to vigorously investigate the perpetrators also exposed the extent to which young black men were deeply vulnerable to juridical ambivalence to their safety and concerns. Rather, the entire legal and law enforcement apparatus consistently devoted and deployed its resources toward the criminalization of black men, a response that was exacerbated by the disproportionate and high-handed policing of minority communities.²¹ These issues relate to the larger question of how cities are constituted and how architecture imagines the relationship between members of diverse communities. The protests against Lawrence's murder raised and exposed the question of belonging, especially in relation to the uneven recognition of the social well-being of Britain's often-marginalized and excluded migrant communities. Adjaye's conception of the Stephen Lawrence Centre took all these issues into account to create a building that served both as a memorial and a place where life skills and programs on social justice, economic empowerment, and cultural and intellectual agency were the focus. Recognizing the importance of the commemorative function of the center as well as its practical goal to inspire young people across ethnic communities to take charge of their lives and futures, Adjaye Associates described the project this way:

The Stephen Lawrence Centre is both a memorial and a place of inspiration in honour of Stephen Lawrence, the architectural student murdered in 1993 . . . It offers services to the general population of the Lewisham area but has a unique contribution to make in relation to improving the life chances of black Caribbean and African young people. The Centre works closely with partners in the area to tackle underachievement and to increase young people's motivation to embrace education and overcome barriers to fulfillment. The Centre comprises meeting rooms, classrooms, IT labs, offices, and exhibition spaces.²²

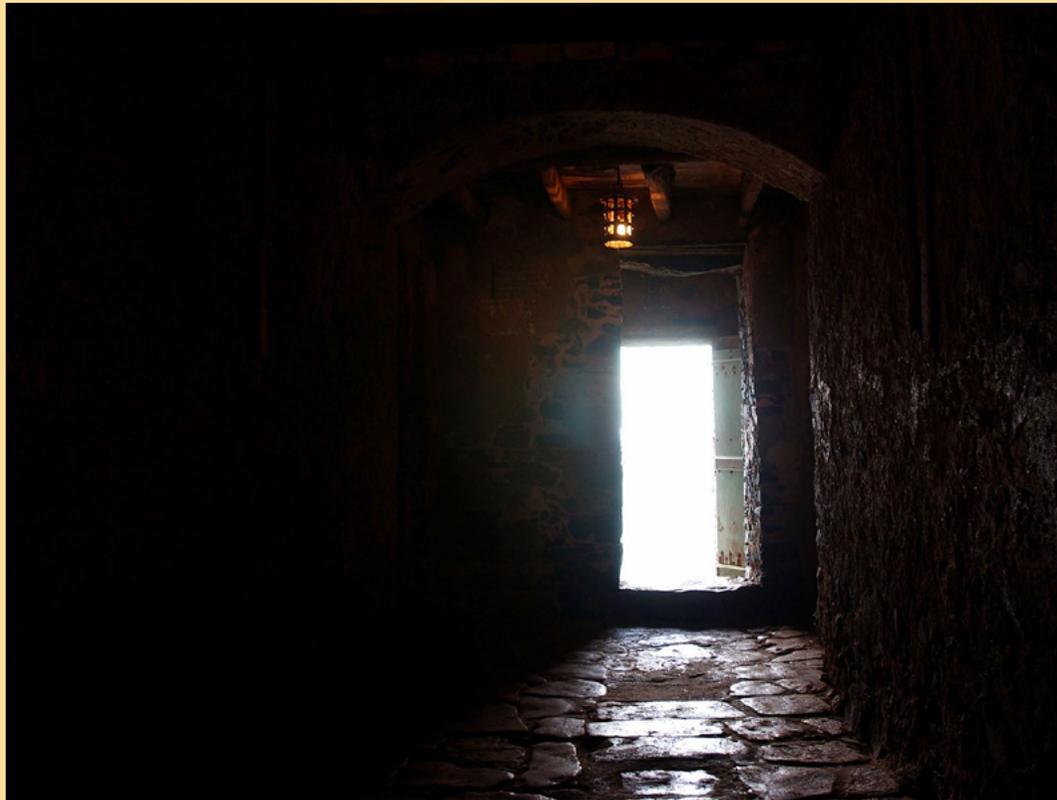
What needs to be underlined is the vital connection between these three buildings and the inclusion of African memories in the social landscape of global architectural concepts. The issue that must be faced in the massive expansion of global architecture is not simply the functionalist and theoretical modeling of discourses of architecture, but the political, social, and cultural visions of buildings. How can public and civic architecture go beyond engaging its users with amenities, and instead fundamentally realign and reorient the devices of power toward users' aspirations, toward creating a community, framing the conditions of shared citizenship, of *res publica*—the commonwealth of diverse social and cultural experiences? The postcolonial, cosmopolitan, and multicultural tilt of many cities exposes the inadequacy of much current public and civic architectural discourse to create spaces that explore and serve this rising global commonwealth. This inadequacy frequently becomes even more visible in museums, which too often appeal to the desires and aspirations of their patrons rather than identify with the multicultural and

21. See "Report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry," Sir William MacPherson, Feb. 1999, <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/sli-00.htm>.

22. See "Stephen Lawrence Centre," <http://www.adjaye.com/projects/civic-buildings/stephen-lawrence-centre/>, accessed June 30, 2014.



(Fig 08) CAPE COAST SLAVERY MUSEUM
Cape Coast, Ghana, 2012-ongoing
View from the shore showing the external
space protected by the museum



(Fig 11) The Door of No Return
Gorée Island, Senegal, c. 1776

transnational public sphere. But it may well be that it is in the process of producing public and civic architecture that the opportunity to examine the rift between migrants and indigenes emerges. These instances can offer moments to analyze the paradoxes of commemoration, foster the processes of re/membering, and bind old wounds to the tissue of historical experience and living memory. Gilroy's image of the slave ship offers a model of thinking diasporically in the present. It is due to multiple historical convergences that, as Adjaye attained the intellectual stature he had worked hard to achieve, he was entrusted with the design of some of the most significant and symbolically freighted buildings that deeply bind Africa and its vast but scattered diaspora in Europe and the Americas. At every opportunity, Adjaye has made the gestures of affiliation connecting these spaces powerfully resonant in buildings that are new and contemporary. The lessons of his architecture therefore do not lie merely in the formal ideas that constitute his architectural language, but also in their social and political significance. His distinctive use of form to create symbolic and representational experiences that connect the real and the imaginary is powerfully balanced by his subtle political imagination. Given his persistent quest to balance the artistic and the political, the aesthetic and the ethical, abstraction and representation, Adjaye has come to the conclusion that we can and should ask more of architecture.