

ALGO-RHYTHM

"Scintillating pixel data dust - used for algorithmic electioneering to enforce authoritarian, anti-democratic policies - an electrifying, genre defying hip hop musical against automated propaganda"

ZONTA Award - Jury Statement, 65th Kurzfilmfest Oberhausen

a film by

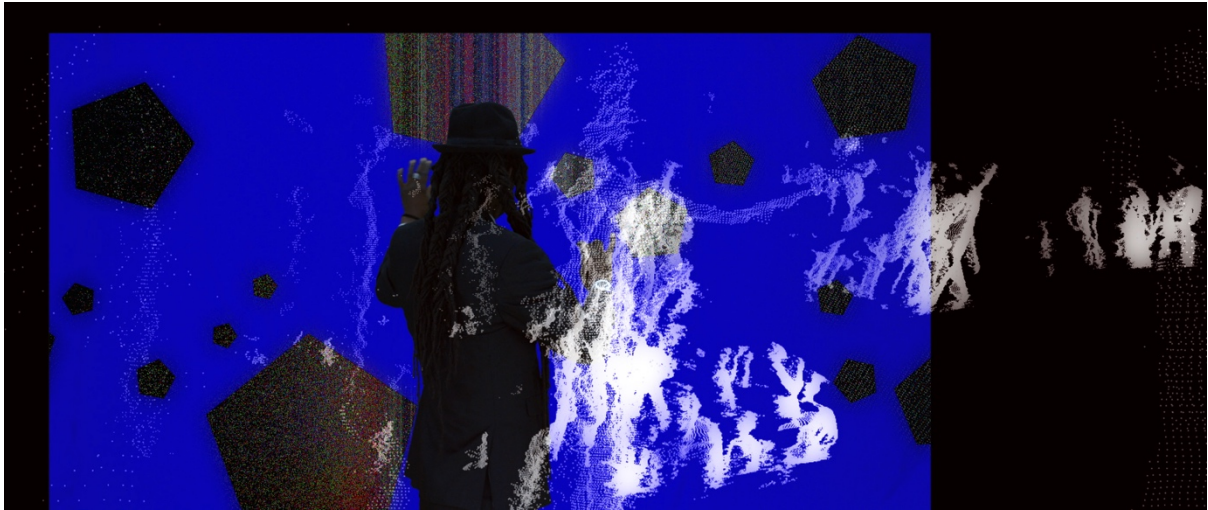
MANU LUKSCH

PRESS FOLDER

www.manuluchs.com/project/algo-rhythm

SYNOPSIS

Convenience, not choice. Efficiency, not freedom. Frictionless experience.



film still ALGO-RHYTHM

In marketing and the retail sector, data analytics is widely used to profile and micro-target consumers and to predict behaviour. The ultimate goal, apparently, is for humans to be able to outsource all decision-making to machine intelligence (make Google do it!). What is at stake within the political realm?

ALGO-RHYTHM, shot in Dakar with the participation of leading Senegalese musicians, poets and graffiti artists, probes the insidious but comprehensive threats to human rights and agency posed by the rise of the quantification and algorithmic management of daily life. Using hip-hop, drama, street art and data-driven filmmaking, the work explores how our embrace of the convenience of machine intelligence, refracted through the slick interface of smartphone apps, makes us vulnerable to manipulation by political actors. Recognising the urgent need for a new visual language to illuminate this concern, Manu Luksch collaborated closely with Jack Wolf and Mukul Patel to develop a hybrid narrative form that unites photogrammetry and volumetric filmmaking with traditional approaches. Through its auratic and poetic use of computational imaging technologies, *ALGO-RHYTHM* scrutinizes the limitations, errors and abuses of algorithmic representations.

FILM DESCRIPTION

The data analysis firm Cambridge Analytica recently set off multiple scandals. The firm was credited with an important role in the election outcome in the U.S. (presidential election 2016) and in England (Brexit referendum). Users of digital networks were deliberately targeted with disinformation and inflammatory propaganda on the basis of illegally gathered personal data. Surfacing in *ALGO-RHYTHM* is a firm called Data Analytica, which generalizes the corresponding principle: nowadays, elections are won by algorithmizing campaigns rather than buying votes. Manu Luksch situates this process in her film in a surprising location: Senegal is considered one of the most successful African democracies in which politically-engaged Hip Hop, in the role of watch dog, has had continued success in mobilizing resistance to the abuses of power.

In *ALGO-RHYTHM*, the West-African country becomes a perfect example of future confrontations regarding political representation and decision making. Two candidates for the office of president face Mr. X from Data Analytica, who is advertising his methods. The discourse occurs in the form of a rap or a rap battle. Luksch lets a political landscape arise that also includes traditional figures (a Griot woman) and the people. The form of the exchange is rhymed, language advanced by digitally syncopated beats. In the background of the image, what is being talked about is obvious the entire time: Mr. X, the Aladdin of data analysis lets reality crumble into data bytes. Manu Luksch acts out the data maneuver with aerial shots and other landscape images, which at a different level also take place with the networks (with the “drugs of the nation”): in a cloud of selection, photogrammetric and other information-logic-based picture image processes dismantle the old (political) world of analogue representation, that is, voting and representation of the political body. (*Bert Rehandl for sixpack film*)

Translation: Lisa Rosenblatt

INTERVIEW WITH MANU LUKSCH

Questions: Cornelia Prior

(excerpt. first published in Substrand 10/01/2019)

How do you chose your subject matters?

I am motivated by the questions I am asked by my surroundings. It begins when I stumble across something that's becoming part of our daily lives by promising convenience or efficiency, but which has a concealed mission or function. Questions and doubts grow, and there's a thread to unravel. Google search is an obvious example – it's now seen as a basic utility, but under the hood it's a tool of mass network surveillance. A smartphone is also a psychometric analysis device and health sensor that plays a huge role in the classification and commodification of personal data. A lot of my concerns revolve around how such technologies are interwoven with individual lives and material space, and how this impacts notions of freedom, autonomy, and privacy.

While you're in residence at Somerset House Studios you're producing a tactical fiction film — can you tell me more about the term tactical fiction.

'Tactical' thinking, the little sister of 'strategy' operates during the very situation it searches to affect, it employs the means available in that moment, translates the critique into intervention, reclaims participation and exercises direct democracy. Fictionalization of a situation provides the necessary distance from the all too familiar, and allows for thought experiments to be imaginatively scaled up and elaborated, eventually even provides the means for them to be reabsorbed back into real life.

What appeals to you about that?

Tactical fiction is a powerful artistic strategy for rethinking the status quo, inviting a wider audience into it. By creating myths and tales around existing objects, processes or environments, we can provoke and share visions of alternative futures. It's a great way for creatively challenging what we find less than perfect in our world, for combining the political

with the imaginary. We need to properly grasp our situation – the environment that we take for granted – and playing the concepts of ‘fiction’ and ‘document’ off against each other helps to do this. In my latest work, for example, I use this approach to highlight the contradictions of informational capitalism and expose its faultlines.

What is your latest project?

I’m working with hip hop artists in Senegal to develop a musical installation about algorithmic electioneering, such as the psychometric micro-targeting carried out by Cambridge Analytica during election campaigns in the US, Kenya and Nigeria, and the ‘Brexit’ referendum in Britain. Although Cambridge Analytica collapsed following public exposure of their practices in the mainstream media, and Facebook, which was also implicated, issued a pathetic apology, there hasn’t been a drastic change in regulation or oversight, and elections around the world are still vulnerable to such interference.

I sought a collaboration with rappers because of the tradition of performing political critique from the earliest days of hip hop, and even further back, to the traditional Senegalese recitation of Tassou (which also features in the work).

In the 2011 elections in Senegal, then president Abdoulaye Wade wanted to extend his term by changing the constitution that sets a limit of two presidential terms. The hip hop community were crucial in the formation of the political movement Y’En A Marre (“Fed Up”), taking the message to the streets and mobilising resistance.

And now that Wade isn’t president...?

There has already been protest in advance of the 2019 election, because of a new law that requires candidates to collect supporting signatures of one percent of registered voters in each of Senegal’s regions, which forecloses the opportunity for minor candidates to run, let alone win.

These musicians act as a kind of unbribable watchdog, who don’t get co-opted but keep scrutinizing the process. They are very interested in understanding the latest methods on influencing voters’ decision making process considering the hijacked elections in other African countries like Kenya and Nigeria. Some see Cambridge Analytica’s meddling as a

new form of corporate colonialism, others raise the urgent question if this is even the end of democracy?

So your project comes out of a critique of the world of global capital and 'big data and is applied to the specific Senegalese context'?

Yes – ALGO-RHYTHM, which is part of a larger work, asks broad questions about the human impact of 'smart' tech: who owns the future? who predicts best? who knows us 'better than we know ourselves'? and how can we reclaim our psychological and emotional autonomy? But though the target audience is global, the characters, language, and locations will resonate particularly strongly in Senegal.

How did you meet the rappers?

I am currently on a Human Rights Fellowship with the Open Society Foundation, during which I'm exploring ethical issues raised by algorithmic decision making. The Foundation brought the Fellows to a meeting in Dakar for four days.

That's not long!

No, and I dislike going on long distance trips for such short periods. I planned to extend my stay and conduct some aspects of my research there, to avoid a Euro or US-centric narrative. A Senegalese filmmaker in London introduced me to Xuman, an incredibly original and well-respected voice in the hip hop scene of Dakar, and he very generously helped to put the cast together.

So I ended up in Dakar over Easter with my two children who were on holiday from school, my partner and collaborator Mukul, and other team members from Berlin.

That's quite a cool Easter holiday, did your kids enjoy it?

It was actually a really exhilarating adventure, from the start. We were staying on an idyllic island, three minutes by boat from mainland Dakar. But when we arrived, we couldn't find a pier – we had to roll up our trousers and walk through the crashing waves, holding our

children and hauling cameras, laptops and synthesizers above our heads, to clamber into a small wooden boat. And all of this with only the moon for light. Everyone was excited. My older son is 12 and is always making things. He ended up doing 3D photogrammetry scans of all the rappers for us!

That sounds extraordinary. I would have loved to have learnt about filmmaking when I was a kid.

Location scouting can be seen as an alternative form of sightseeing, I guess! {Laughter} I like my kids being involved even if it means sacrificing a tight production schedule. I like to pursue a way of life that's inclusive, encourages their curiosity and opens up formal learning to experiences outside the box. Life-long learning and questioning.

Also, you seem to target younger audiences with this piece of work...

Absolutely. I asked myself - can I craft an audio-visual language that extends this urgent debate about online disinformation, fake news, voter micro-targeting to young people? I have a lot of hope and trust in generation Z, who grew up with a complete digital footprint, to inspire and demand reform.



On location, *Dakar 2018*

CREW

DIRECTOR

PRODUCER

EDITING

PHOTOGRAMMETRY

Manu Luksch

SOUND

Mukul

Lyrics based on a text by Manu Luksch & Mukul Patel, co-written with Gunman Xuman and Keyti Cheikh Séne

WITH

Gunman Xuman, OMG, Lady Zee, Adja Fall, Illégal, Kruh Mandiou Mauri, MC Mo, Rhapsod and Madzoo

IMMERSIVE FX CONSULTANT & KINECT OP

Jack Wolf

CAMERA OP

DRONISTA

Malick Sy

ANIMATION

Georgi Stamenov

CODING

Federico Foderaro, Mukul Patel

PRODUCTION MANAGER (Senegal)

Baila Sy

SUPPORTED BY

Open Society Foundations, denkbar projektentwicklungs gmbh, Wien

DISTRIBUTION

SALES

sixpackfilm

TECHNICAL DATA

AT/GB 2019, DCP (24fps, SMPTE, CINEMASCOPE), Sound 5.1, color, 14 min

BIOGRAPHIES

MANU LUKSCH

Over the past 20 years, Manu Luksch has been researching the effects of emerging technologies on daily life, social relations, urban space, and political structures. Currently, as Resident Artist at Somerset House London, Open Society Fellow, she is investigating the rise of the 'Algorithmic City', with a focus on corporate-governmental relationships and the social effects of predictive analytics. Her films and art works are included, amongst other, in the Collection de Centre Pompidou, the BFI National Archive, and the Core Collection at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, and were awarded Best Feature Documentary, Moscow International Documentary Film Festival 2016; Best Film, Austrian Film Critics Awards 2017; Best Feature Documentary Soundtrack, DOK.fest Munich 2016; ELEVATE Artivism Award 2015; Marianne.von.Willemer Prize for Digital Art 2012, City of Linz /Ars Electronica Centre.

Films (Selection)

Dreams Rewired (2015, feature, co-directed with Martin Reinhart & Thomas Tode)

Third Quarterly Report (2016; double projection)

Unknown Territories (2014)

Sympathetic Nervous System (2009)

Faceless (2007)

Broadbandit Highway (2001)

Virtual Borders (2001, feature)

So Oder Anders (1996)

GUNMAN XUMAN

Makhtar Fall aka Gunman Xuman is a Senegalese Hip Hop Pioneer, social justice activist, and TV Co-Host of the popular Journal Rappe that innovatively raps the news and educate audiences on the social, environmental, political and other issues that affects Senegal, Africa and the world.

He started in the 90s as a leader of the group Pee Froiss along with Daddy Bibson, Sister Joyce, Sun Souley, Aladjiman, Kool Koc-Sis and Dj Gee Bayss. Born in Ivory Coast but raised in Senegal, Xuman started rhyming in the popular Dakar neighborhood of Fass in at an early age.

Xuman is one of the major actors of Senegalese hip-hop and has performed on the biggest stages like the Würzburg Festival, the Summer jam in Germany, Pireneos in Spain, Festival Boulevard of Casablanca, Ouaga Hip-Hop in Burkina Faso, Gabao Hip-Hop in Gabon, La Friche in Marseille, and festivals in Congo, Algeria, and more.

Since April 2013, Xuman and good friend Keyti launched Journal Rappe that has garnered both national and international praise. Through actively engaging youths and adults in music, Hip Hop, education and innovative approach to rap the news “Journal Rappe” has been highly effective in bringing attention to wide range of issues ranging from social, environmental, political, cultural, and more in Senegal and other countries. As a result of his work, Journal Rappe as an innovative concept to deliver the news and a platform for freedom of expression among youths is now taking roots in countries like Cote D’Ivoire, Mali, Madagascar, and as far as Jamaica in the Caribbean.

Discography Pee Froiss
Wala Wala Bok (1996)
Affaire Bou Graw (1997)
Ah Simm (1999)
F.R.O.I.S.S (2001)
Konkérants (2003)

OMG

Senegalese musician Oumy Gueye performs under the stage name OMG, singing and rapping across Afrobeat and World Music. Her first single *HEY GIRL* (2013) was followed by the 5-track EP *FEEM* ('Engaged and Entrepreneurial Women in Music', 2016), a duet with Mamy Victory. Also in 2016, OMG participated in FIMU (International Festival of University Music) in Belfort, France. *FEEM* was followed by the 7-track EP *Zik de FAM* ('Music from Modern African Woman'). OMG was one of 10 finalists of the Prix RFI Découverte in 2017 and 2018. She won 'Best Female Artist' at the Galsen Hip Hop Awards and 'Best Female Singer' at the Raya Music Awards 2018. Her most recent EP, *Melokaan*, was released in July 2019. Hits include: Lu Ci Sa Yoon, Waxoma Woon Lii, Boum Bam, Koti Koti and Lady Boss.



film still. ALGO-RHYTHM

LADY ZEE

Senegalese artist Lady Zee, aka Princesse Sérère Page, has been driven by a passion for soul, R&B, rap, and gospel music since childhood. A student of the Voice Music School and Language Centre, Dakar, she studied piano and song with Congolese artist Herman Mocc. Alongside a solo career launched with her first single *Fresh in the Game* (2011), she has been part of the women's hip hop collective GOTAL, whose *Jafté* (2018) was nominated for best EP at the Galsen Hip Hop Awards.

Lady Zee assisted Saintrick Mayitoukou in realising the 6th Cours Sainte Marie of Hann festival of music (2013) and participated in Fatou Kandé Senghor's mixed media project *I Be Lady O* alongside artists from Morocco, France, Cameroon and England (2018). She has collaborated with Xuman on the JT Rappé video segment 'Silence on coupe' and with Matador on his album *Reewga@l Nation*.

She balances her music-making with a diverse work life that includes directing communication for Genji Hip Hop, an association of women involved with urban cultures.

MUKUL PATEL

Mukul Patel plays predominantly with sound, text, and processes. As composer and sound artist, he has collaborated with artist filmmakers and many leading contemporary choreographers. As writer, his work ranges across territories and genres – a recent book on mathematics for children was shortlisted for the 2014 Royal Society Prize, and the script of DREAMS REWIRED is his second to be voiced by Tilda Swinton. His practice displays both analytic and synthetic approaches. When existing standards fail to accommodate a vision, he develops open, efficient solutions (for example, live immersive audio-visual environments, and stereoscopic film viewers). Mukul has run tactical media labs in arts faculties and taught space to architecture students. Major influences include the music of North India, 1960s–70s conceptual practice, and the OuLiPo.

Selected works:

TWELVETWENTYONE (music for Le Ballet National de l'Opéra de Lyon, chor. Russell Maliphant, 2019/2004)

DUBAI CREEK TOWER, audio infrastructure (for Billings Jackson Industrial Design, London). 2017/18

SPIRAL PASS (music for Bayerisches Staatsballett, Munich chor. Russell Maliphant, 2014)

STILL/CURRENT (music for Russell Maliphant Company / Sadler's Wells, London and vinyl EP, 2014)

WE'VE GOT YOUR NUMBER (mathematics book for children: 96pp, Kingfisher: 2013, *shortlisted: Royal Society Prize 2014)

TEN THOUSAND WAVES (music for 9-screen installation by Isaac Julien, 2010)

LOVE, PIRACY & THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS WEBLOG EXPANSION (participatory installation: text, procedural censorship, collective reading, 2009–, with Manu Luksch)

FACELESS (soundtrack and script for speculative fiction film by Manu Luksch, 2007)

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