



“This Silence is like an Invisible Wall that Needs to be Shattered and Broken”

An Interview with Jupiter Child

According to themselves Jupiter Child is always in transit. Transnational, transgender and transatlantic – a borderland the performer associates with pain, but also with an enormous strength when it is articulated through art. In the fall of 2018, it was possible to experience Jupiter’s interactive performance pieces *Julia and 500 Years of Freedom* and *Shut up Anastasia!* at Warehouse9 in Copenhagen. The former took the form of an autobiographical journey across temporal and national borders. From the birth of colonialism, through an upbringing in war-torn Mozambique to navigating life in today’s Denmark, we followed Jupiter in their battle for emancipation. Emancipation from colonial heritage, from narrow gender categories, and the emancipation brought about by telling one’s own story. In *Shut up Anastasia!*, Jupiter revisited the historical figure Escrava Anastácia who, as an enslaved woman in Brazil, was forced to wear a muzzle mask because of her utterances that challenged the colonial and enslaving powers that be. In the performance, Jupiter brought Anastácia to life, producing a collision between a historical silence and a powerful voice as the piece examined and challenged the silencing of Black presence and resistance.

Marronage met with Jupiter in the summer of 2020 for a conversation about their practice, confronting colonial amnesia, challenging anti-Black racism and remediating the erasure of queer bodies.

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Jupiter Child: *Wa(D)king Copenhagen 18 July: Júlia Machindano/Jupiter Child*, 2020. Photograph documenting the performance carried out by Jupiter Child featuring Arnold Foyen-Tetga. Copenhagen. Courtesy of the artist and SAKABA. Photo: SAKABA.

MARRONAGE (M): *Your own personal story is crucial to both of your performances. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got started as an artist?*

JUPITER CHILD (JC): I grew up in a family where people did not have jobs or education. Growing up was a struggle. It was not apartheid like in South Africa, but it was clear to me that there were schools for white kids and different ones for us. There was a fence between us; white people were on one side and we were on the other. When I came to Denmark, I experienced these same racial structures but arranged in other ways. I have a background in traditional dance, music and performance from Mozambique. When I came to Denmark, I had to bury my identity, my competences were depreciated, who I was and what I wanted to do or become did not matter. Now it was all about integration lines, learning the language and getting a job. The more I spoke to my Danish friends about my background in arts, they said, “Well, if you are not a graduate from the academy, you can forget all about making it in the art field.” That really killed me inside. I believed in those words and I felt like there was nothing I could do. So I carried on learning Danish and started working as a *SOSU-hjælper* (social and healthcare assistant). Time passed and I started rebuilding my self-esteem and confidence, strengthening and inspiring myself into removing those limitations intercepting my destiny and from living my truth. No! You don’t necessarily have to go to a fancy art school to express your truth. I think BIPOCs need to get that message. We need to understand that, because we are blocked in so many ways.

M: *In your semi-autobiographical play Julia and 500 Years of Freedom, you shift seamlessly between Makonde, English, Portuguese and Danish without translation. What do these languages mean to you and can this “refusal of translation” be seen as a form of resistance?*

JC: In order to tell my story, I have to speak Makonde, Portuguese, English and Danish. Those languages are part of my storytelling, part of telling my authentic truth. Being from Mozambique, my national language is Portuguese. However, the language of my ancestors is Makonde. I understand quite a lot of it and know how to say a few words, but I cannot have a fluent conversation in Makonde. My tongue has been colonized, and so to revisit my local language was challenging. It feels like a permanent scar that I’m not good at speaking my own language fluently. However, I see Makonde language as a powerful instrument of resistance to learn how to speak my truth authentically and to decolonize my narrative. I realized my local language is another way to recollect the legacy of Black



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history, and Black history is my mother tongue. In the performance, I talk about my body always being in transit, translation, transnationality, transatlantic, transgender or genderqueer. I think language has the same effect in that way, that it's kind of a tool that transports us from one point to another.

M: *In your performance Shut up Anastasia!, you use the term “post traumatic slave syndrome” as something that has formed you as a Black person. What do you mean by that?*

JC: I don't want to speak on behalf of all Black people. But in Mozambique we have intellectual figures such as Graça Machel who was a revolutionary activist during the Mozambican War of Independence from Portuguese colonial rule and is today an international icon. But even strong womxn like her don't dare to confront the present corrupt leadership, call out those big white exploiting companies or speak up for the league of womxn addressing the role and the rights of African/Black womxn. Many Black people in Africa and in the diaspora have an internalized fear of disputing and challenging the powers of the establishment. Looking into the colonial legacy, the fact that we were not allowed to meet and to talk honestly to one another or own property of our own without being severely punished must have caused trauma. It's like the violence that Black people went through on the continent and in the diaspora created an invisible muzzle mask that shuts us down instinctively. That is what I mean by “post traumatic slave syndrome” which is also what Fela Kuti, the Nigerian afrobeat legend, coined as “colo-mentality”.

M: *How do you see the intersections of your body in relation to the collective struggle?*

JC: I am not directly thinking, “I'm doing this for me, my family, my people and my community.” Right now, I am thinking, “How can I exist as a singular unit? How can I speak my truth and be respected, honored and loved unconditionally? How can I be Black and see myself as a beautiful person beyond the limits of white gaze?” I am trying to express and liberate myself. However, I'm connected to all of those who came before me, all of those who are with me and will come after me. It is like whatever I do to liberate myself is basically simultaneously unlocking the chains of others linked to me, and the other way around. For example, during my journey of understanding my sexuality and gender I did not have a community that looked like me or a language that spoke explicitly to me

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or my situation. But I feel that finding the queer BIPOC community in Denmark filled that space. I happened to step upon something that I was desperately longing for, a foundation that had already been laid by those before me. Therefore, me coming forward, is simply putting another stone for the next to come and stand on. I think of myself as a mirror and a direct reflection of the collective struggle. My anger, my story is just like yours. In that sense, I seek only to reflect the stories I share with the other BIPOCs.

M: *Both Julia and 500 Years of Freedom and Shut up Anastasia! are interactive performances. What were your considerations about including a white majority audience in these performances dealing with topics like colonization and racism?*

JC: I wasn't really worried about the audience. I wanted them to react, to say something, anything, but also to be open minded to the people that didn't like it, felt like this was bullshit or didn't get it. In *Shut up Anastasia!*, I was actually counting on some people leaving the room because white fragility is real. But even if they walked away that would also be a part of the interaction. All I knew was that I was going to be unfiltered Jupiter; angry, because the topic I was talking about made me angry. I wanted to break the silence connected to the Black experience. This silence is like an invisible wall that needs to be shattered and broken.

M: *What about your next performances, are they going to be interactive as well?*

JC: Definitely, some of them will be. But I would also like to do actual plays bringing back the critical theatrical style or what the Brazilian director Augusto Boal calls "the theater of the oppressed" in respect of the nuances. White people are like, "the theatrical is over, we have removed the fourth wall, let's make all interactive." But they don't get to set the standards on how we tell our truth independently. I would like to combine performances or plays in the future involving Black actors/actresses telling their stories and where white people just get to watch, not saying anything, not participating and not having an opinion, but just watch that image unfolding.

M: *You told us that Shut up Anastasia! was only a teaser for a much longer performance you are working on. Can you tell us a little more about that?*

JC: In the case of *Escrava Anastácia* and the legacies of colonial torture by silencing our voices, I would like to do an actual play with other BIPOCs and tell the

narrative again from the perspective of our present stories and conditions. I know many strong and eloquent womxn and men but when in white spaces it's like they shut down. I want to revisit the legacy of colonial torture of silencing voices – how does it feel not being able to speak your own truth, to filter yourself all the time? How to survive the gaslighting we experience in white spaces. I want to revisit the image of “the loud Black woman”, I mean is she loud or just not allowed to express herself in her own terms? Why am I annoyed whenever I meet a Ghanaian sister on the street talking loud on her cellphone, when that's exactly the way I spoke when I grew up? And how come whenever I hear a siren on the street or an alarm go off in a store the muscles in my stomach tighten? It doesn't make any sense. After all I am here legally, but then again, my body and identity have been criminalized. Simply being Black in a white space, I'm potentially perceived as an aggressive entity, and it doesn't matter whether you are queer, straight, have your hair loose or carrying your child on your back. My desire is to find ways to express these experiences through art and to heal. That's what I'm working on currently.

M: *Can you expand on this? What projects have you been working on since Shut Up Anastasia!?*

JC: As a multidisciplinary artist, I wait for the universe to direct me and the spirits of my ancestors to instruct me. They guide me to what's next. I've done a few collaborations with different artists, such as Sall Lam Toro. Together we made a project called *Black Bodies in Cultural Limbo*, which was performed at the support party for The Union – Cultural Workers' Union for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The project was about exploring the multitudes of being – when you're Black in Denmark yet not fully Danish and when you're in Africa yet not fully African. So we were looking at how our bodies exist in these cultural limbos and how we can see the positivity of it, as we transport ourselves and narratives into the future. I've also done music, spoken word presentations and visual art exhibitions. I created a series of works called *Selected Memories*, consisting of collages combining fabric, photography and poetry. This work was an extension of *Shut Up Anastasia!*, revisiting colonial tools of torture that silence voices. The work was presented at the Dome of Visions in Aarhus in an art exhibition organized by IMMART and M'BARAKÁ. It was intense and a lot of fun since the material I was bringing tapped into the colonial past, which in Denmark is still something people don't like to talk about.



M: *What can we expect from you in the future?*

JC: I want to do more work within these themes that illustrates and speaks about Black stories and experiences. It is very difficult for us to have a voice, and to be given a space is absolutely a paramount. For a long time, I was suppressing my story, my voice, trying to fit in and thinking that I needed to forget about the past. But now the past is my source, it teleports me to the next art project.

On the 18th of July [2020], I'll be participating in a project called *Wa(D)king Copenhagen* organized by Metropolis International Theater. They have invited a hundred artists and the idea is to do a walking performance compilation, making reflections on artistic praxis in relation to the current Covid-19 pandemic. So basically, I will be walking for 12 hours around Copenhagen in different locations and every hour I have to show a virtual sign of life in the form of a performance. The topic of my walk is "locating the Black queer body". Understanding queerness from its holistic meaning of being "different", the stranger, the other. Being an immigrant, a foreigner, a single parent and gay-lesbian and trans-curious, I feel that I'm queer by default. So I want to locate queer spaces in Copenhagen and occupy these spaces with my Black queer body. The route is going to be around Nørrebro because of the concentration of other Black and brown queer people. Here we are queer by nature. *Julia and 500 Years of Freedom* was based on an autobiography but for *Wa(D)king Copenhagen*, I want to express myself and use my performance to inspire a dialogue with people, especially other BIPOCs, and to see if we can have this conversation openly.

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