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An Exploration on the Image of the Jungle: Experiential Perspective in the Imagined Spaces of Heart of Darkness and The Emperor Jones

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An Exploration on the Image of the Jungle:
Experiential Perspective in the Imagined Spaces of *Heart of Darkness* and *The Emperor Jones*

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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INTRODUCTION

You can find the jungle almost anywhere, if you know where to look. It's easy to be oblivious to the spaces that we navigate. As the spatial theorist Yi-Fu Tuan says, "Space and place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meanings and raise questions we have not thought to ask."¹ It is these questions that I wish to illuminate. In finding the jungle, one will see the world with a new perspective. Historically and culturally it has been imagined and embodied differently over time—from works like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which situates the jungle in the urban environment, to Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, set in the Indian jungle and made so culturally familiar by Disney's movie rendition. Some words like "wild," and "savage" still resonate with the space to this day. It is important to reflect on the jungle's true essence, if that is possible.

Jangala (Sanskrit: जङ्गल)² is the Sanskrit word that would over time evolve into the familiar English word, "jungle." But I am less concerned about the etymology of the word, rather very curious about the articulation and creation of the imagined space that is the jungle; how the jungle, beyond its physical features, possesses more obscure qualities that affect those in it. As it has referred to for centuries, the jungle appears a threatening, carnal, maddening, unnavigable, extremely racialized, and illegible space. But is this the true jungle? Apart from its identifiable physical features, is there such a thing as a true jungle?

¹ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

² "Jungle." Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia. Accessed April 20, 2016. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jungle>.

It is my contention that the jungle, as it is commonly comprehended, must be acknowledged as a fallacy. For many who view the jungle from the outside, it only truly exists as a threatening space that is in direct contention to the very nature of civilization. Much of the essence of the jungle, as I will demonstrate in this project, exists more accurately in the endless landscape of the human mind.

Before delving deeply into the jungle, it is important to familiarize oneself with the principal of imagined spaces. Another example of a similar imagined space is the arguably more culturally familiar pastoral and the literary and visual traditions it has inspired. In many respects, one would be able to infer a decent amount about the jungle from studying the pastoral—for both are often identified in contrast to each other, and inform the other. Thousands of years ago, during the beginning of the Hellenistic Age, Theocritus, a prolific poet of his time, created a series of Idylls, or poems—some of which were part of greater political and social dialogues, all of which play with the literary conventions of his time. Theocritus was considered to be a generally progressive poet who would, “highlight issues of gender relations, colonialism, immigration and cultural dislocation.”³ Along with these topics that he so often addressed in his poems, Theocritus was also accidentally innovative. As Richard Hunter states,

Virtually all landscape description in literature is more or less ‘typical’, i.e. its particularity lies in the place-names attached to it and its function within the text, rather than with ‘unique’ natural features. T. stands out in the range and detail of the flora which fills his landscape, not because he looks at the countryside in a quite new way; what is new perhaps is his exploitation of such typicality to reflect upon his own practices.⁴

³ Burton, Joan B. *Theocritus' Urban Mimes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995., 1.

⁴ Hunter, Richard. *Theocritus: A Selection: Idylls 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 13*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999., 13.

While other poets in the past have written about landscapes, they do not describe them to the degree that Theocritus does. As Hunter purports, it was this trivial act of articulating space in a unique way—however “typical” it may seem—that sets Theocritus apart from other poets of his time. While he described landscapes in this innovative way, from what features of the landscape that he chose to elaborate on, Theocritus unintentionally and seamlessly created the imagined space of the pastoral. As he writes in the first line of his first idyll, “There is sweet music in that pine tree’s whisper, goatherd, / There by the spring. Sweet too in the music of your pipe; / You would win second prize to Pan.”⁵ Theocritus, in having the pine tree whisper, personifies nature, and simultaneously interweaves the culturally familiar narrative of Pan, who, being half man half goat, is a god that is associated with nature. By interweaving the religious history of his people, Theocritus makes the space of the pastoral increasingly accessible. This religious history is a common narrative that is used to help readers and listeners alike to envision their own place and position in the space. The first human actions that are said to happen in the space of the pastoral have to do with sweet music—music that “would win second prize to Pan.” A space where not only history, but also the arts lie in harmony with nature is so simply articulated. Whether Theocritus intended to create the pastoral or not, he inevitably paved the way for other poets and thinkers to further develop this imagined space—a space that would over time come to be known as an exclusive, heterogeneous, and patriarchal space distinct on its own. This imagined space has been woven into the fabric of other histories, making its way into the narratives of colonialism in the Americas, American scenery, and certain aspects of higher education. While there have been numerous forms of media that have helped to influence, and shape the imagined

⁵ Theocritus. “Theocritus Idylls.” In *Theocritus Idylls*. Translated by Anthony Verity. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008., 1.

spaces of the pastoral and the jungle, I am interested in the textual canons that depict these spaces.

In speaking more on the conceptualization of imagined spaces, the subjectivity of relationships to these spaces should be emphasized. Imagine a pastoral without people. Is that possible? Can the jungle exist without anyone in its space? Humans exist in space and are inseparable from it. I ask that you try to imagine one who has no relation to space. The relationships to these spaces are what gives them meaning. When there is a human in any given space, there is always an inherent relationship that exists between that human and that inhabited space. Relating to the ties that people have with space, Tuan adds the element of experience into the picture. In describing what he calls, “Experiential Perspective”⁶ Tuan says, “Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolization.”⁷ Space is purely a human construction in that it is completely experienced. More concretely, those who have a different experience as it relates to their identity, will have an entirely different relationship with certain imagined and constructed spaces—a black American, because of their socio historical relationship with the American jungle and pastoral, would experience and have a different relationship with these spaces than a white American, who has been positioned on top of hegemony since the birth of this United States.

In my project, I want to highlight the subjectivity of one’s experience of these imagined spaces. My project will consist of two parts, the first part is a written component, and the second is a performance as it relates to the content of the first part. In the written component, in my first

⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

chapter, I will conduct yet another close reading analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel, Marlow, a British sailor, finds work under a Belgian company with its eyes set on the exploitation of the African continent, more specifically the Congo. He makes his way up the Congo River on a steamboat in search of one of the most efficient ivory suppliers, Kurtz.

Marlow, in being a white European man, carrying with him the sense of colonization and imperialism, inherently has power over the space of the jungle and its inhabitants. In the second chapter of my project, I will conduct yet another close reading analysis of Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Emperor Jones*. In this play, Brutus Jones, the self-proclaimed emperor of a small Caribbean island, wakes up to his entire empire in shambles. In order to survive, for fear of being captured by his used to be countrymen, Jones must make his way through the jungle of the island to the other side of the coast where he hopes to be rescued. Distinct from Marlow's character, Jones experiences space in a completely different sense due to his identity. Jones is a black American man, who in the space of the jungle has little power compared to Marlow. Since my focus area within Environmental and Urban Studies is Theater and Performance, for the third chapter of my project, I present an abbreviated script of the performance. In the fourth chapter, I present my rationale of my performance to explain how it relates to the imagined spaces of the jungle and the pastoral, my intentions with the performance, and the process of performing aspects of these spaces as a whole.

In studying Environmental and Urban Studies at Bard College, my studies have been greatly complicated due to my identity. I am mixed—my mother is white and Jewish, while my father is African-American. There have been times when, in the landscape of the EUS department at Bard, and at Bard generally, I have felt out of place. For a long time, this institution has bred exclusivity. Being a person of color in this institution, I have often felt as

though my own identity has been subject to the perception of my peers and has resulted in the reconstructions and re-imagining of my identity. This reconstruction of my own identity is often made up of the imposed associations related to the jungle—being a more racialized space. This brings me to why I chose the texts that I did. Representing a snippet of their time, both of the texts were written within twenty-two years of each other—*Heart of Darkness* was first published in 1899, and *The Emperor Jones* in 1921. Both of the authors of these texts are white men, both of whom had traveled extensively throughout their lives—Conrad traveled to the Congo,⁸ and O’Neill literally traveled to South America on a gold hunting expedition.⁹ In these texts, for the most part, the authors do not acknowledge the indigenous people of the space—the indigenous people simply remain nothing more than the indigenous peoples, natives who are inseparable from the space. The authors give them no voice. In the close reading chapter of my project, I am left with no other choice but to refer to the natives and indigenous people in the same way that the authors do.

More importantly, I want to highlight this insensitivity and lack of acknowledgment, while critiquing the authors’ imposed associations on the space of the jungle. As Tuan states, “Another place may lack the weight of reality because we know it only from the outside—through the eyes as tourists, and from reading about it in a guidebook.”¹⁰ Given the identity and experience of these authors, they are very much “from the outside” of the space of the jungle. Therefore, these texts can be seen as lacking in the “weight of reality,” as Tuan puts it. What these texts do offer is insight to a subjective perception of the space. In learning about the jungle through these texts, one will see that the jungle is anti-civilization. As a space, it both fights

⁸ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London, England: Penguin Group, 2007., 97.

⁹ O’Neill, Eugene. *The Emperor Jones*. Unabridged ed. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1997., 1.

¹⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 18.

colonization, yet begs to be exploited and explored. The jungle, as it is viewed in these texts, is a space that needs to exist for those in power to have something to fear—this fear allows for the continuation of domination and control in the name of defense.

CHAPTER 1: THE SNAKE HAD CHARMED ME

While people are aware of Africa's existence as a continent, most of the information associated with the continent is largely conjectural and based on preconceived cultural perceptions. Home to the longest river in the world and the third largest desert that is the size of china,¹¹ Africa contains fifty-four countries,¹² and is made up of several different types of ecosystems— the desert, gallery forest, montane, river, savannah, tropical forest, wetland, and woodland. Written in 1899, illustrating an encompassing image of the African environment, the novel, *Heart of Darkness*, written by Joseph Conrad, seems to serve as an everlasting portrayal of the continent as a whole. In the novel, Marlow, the narrator of the book, recounts the story of his journey through Africa, specifically the Congo River. Ignoring the other physical habitats that make up the continent, *Heart of Darkness* imposes the image of the tropical rainforest, or the jungle, on much of the whole continent, and portrays that space as a threatening land.

The *Heart of Darkness* is about the discovery of the unknown. With the help of his aunt's connections, Marlow, a white Englishman, lands a job with a Belgian company that works to traffic resources and goods, specifically ivory, back to Europe. Being a sailor with years of experience, Marlow is put in charge of a steamboat. As he makes his way from the outer stations by the coast, to the inner stations further inland, Marlow observes the jungle around him. He is instructed to find an employee of the company, Kurtz, the most efficient ivory supplier of all stations. In the *Heart of Darkness*, readers see how Marlow's character deals with notions of

¹¹ "Africa." World Atlas. Accessed April 16, 2016. <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/af.htm>.

¹² Ibid.

colonization, and imperialism in the space of the jungle, and how the perceived savagery of the space affects characters in different ways.

Conquest Written Over the Jungle

It is possible to glean many reasons as to why Marlow ventures to the African continent. For more tangible reasons, Marlow comes to the African jungle for the abundant resources that it seems to contain. As Marlow makes his way from one station to another, he says, “The word ‘ivory’ would ring in the air for a while.”¹³ Ivory, one of the most exported goods that the Company deals with, is on the minds of all. Ivory is what the company is after, and the good that drew Kurtz all the way out to the inner station so far removed from contact. Ivory is so sought after that even the word has an everlasting effect as it rings in the air. In referring to Kurtz, there are definitely greater forces at play that bring people from Europe all the way to Africa. As Marlow explains, “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by and by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance.”¹⁴ As a direct product of European culture and identity, Kurtz is very much associated with the oppressive regime of what is termed, the “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.” As is explained in the notes, Conrad uses the name “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs” as a pseudonym for other organizations of its time—organizations that King Leopold II put in place, such as the “Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo,” and the “Commission for the Protection of the Natives.”¹⁵ Illustrating the characters ties to the greater network of oppressive

¹³Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

organizations, Conrad shows the inextricable link between the act of venturing into the space of the jungle, and the oppressive ideologies associated with it. Marlow recalls an excerpt of Kurtz's report, "Luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'"¹⁶ With this quote, Kurtz shows the thought process that he carries with him, day to day, as he navigates the space and the inhabitants of the jungle. While these oppressive organizations may seem only applicable to Kurtz and removed from Marlow's reality, Marlow is able to fit himself in another, possibly more powerful narrative, as it relates to the jungle. Speaking in more broad terms of the Company and who it is made up of, Marlow says,

They were no colonists; [...] They were conquerors, and nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get and for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .¹⁷

Situating himself in hegemony, Marlow is able to find validation of his acts and the acts of his peers in the narrative of imperialism and conquest. Marlow places himself and all other Europeans above all others—specifically above "those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses." I would not say that Marlow is critical of his position, or of the narrative

¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

that he proposes at all; rather, he is simply aware of the atrocities that occur, and does not attempt to sugar coat them. From his point of view, this strength and power above all others is “nothing to boast of,” and “is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.” Being privileged, being the white European male that he is, the extent of Marlow's involvement with this narrative of conquest is at worst being free to “look into it,” not be subject to it, and is completely free to choose his relationship with the space of the jungle and the people that inhabit it. Because of the roles that this narrative of conquest provides, if he feels so inclined, as is the nature of men who “tackle a darkness,” he can commit such horrible acts, such as violent “robbery,” and murder “on a great scale” while feeling little to no remorse. Speaking more personally, Marlow describes his relation to the space of Africa. In looking at world maps as a child, Marlow says, “But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after. [...] And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me like a snake would a bird—a silly little bird. [...] The snake had charmed me.”¹⁸ Growing up as a child, Marlow has been fascinated by the unknown, or the blank spaces on maps. Maps reveal subjective perspective and hegemonic structures embedded in their layout. “The biggest, the most blank,” portion of these maps, was the space that made up Africa. While today even the specific topography of the continent is known, back in 1899, most maps showed the limited reach and extent of power of the western world. These blank spaces were by all means the “dark” and “unknown” jungles of the world that begged to be filled in. Referring to the jungle, Marlow compares the attraction to the space to that of the relationship between predator and prey—a dangerous and inherently violent relationship. Although there may be superficial attractions to the jungle, such as ivory and other resources, one of the main factors that brings men like

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

Marlow and Kurtz to the space of the jungle is a societal view of the space. As it is understood, in these narratives of conquest, the space of the jungle begs to be conquered.

In addition, Marlow constructs more antiquated and fictional narratives to legitimize his presence in the space of the jungle. It is important to properly understand Marlow's rationale behind his view of this environment. Before he set off for Africa, he spends a great deal of time conceptualizing the voyage. In prefacing the whole story, Marlow describes similarities shared with the roman military, saying,

I think of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago [...] Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine—what d'ye call 'em?—trireme in the Mediterranean. [...] Imagine him here—the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in the wilderness like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here.¹⁹

As Marlow reflects on his own experiences, he is reminded of the past—the past being inseparable from his perception of the present. He is reminded of the history of the space of the jungle. From Marlow's point of view, inherent to the history of the jungle, is the history of conquest. More specifically, for Marlow, the history of the jungle is tied to the colonizing empire of Rome. In recalling the experience of the roman commander, something he seems to know

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

little about, Marlow reveals the deep seeded resentment for, fear of, and hostility towards the jungle. Death, “sulking in the air,” is imbedded in the history of the land itself—“in the water, in the bush.” Juxtaposing the luxuries of the civilized with the savage of the jungle, there is no “Falernian wine”— there is only “Thames water to drink.” The water of the area is not even considered an option for sustenance. As the military camps are “lost in the wilderness,” Marlow reminds readers that it is in the jungle where all things are lost—even the might of the roman military. The history of the indigenous people who live in the area is not even considered or in question. Their history is completely disregarded. To Marlow, Africans have no history. The hegemonic structures that shape the narratives and histories of space make the history of the Romans the canon. As Marlow navigates the space of the jungle through the river, this constructed history constantly influences Marlow’s perception of the space. Marlow goes on to say, “They were men enough to face the darkness.”²⁰ In order to confront the jungle, one must be man enough like the colonizing romans. To sum up his feelings, Marlow says, “The fascination of the abomination—you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.”²¹ Marlow points out an interesting relationship— as he calls it, there is a “fascination of the abomination.” A perception that he shares with his imagined roman commander. The jungle gives him something to “hate.” In the beginning of the story, in talking about the roman commander, Marlow reveals his appreciation for those the history of roman conquest. He goes on to say, “The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle.”²² The jungle does not allow Marlow to simply navigate the space.

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 52.

The history of the space of the jungle influences how Marlow both perceives and acts in the jungle. In order to be in contact with the space in any capacity, Marlow is able to construct fictional narratives—often imperialistic in and of themselves—that directly apply to his identity and better situate him in the space of the jungle. These narratives are written over the landscape of the jungle.

The Wall of Darkness

Throughout the novel, Marlow describes the environment around him. Marlow experiences much of the continent from the steamboat that he travels on. Towards the beginning of his journey, he says, “Watching the coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out.”²³ As Marlow glides on the foreign waters, the coast seems to have a personality all of its own. In looking at the land, Marlow only sees the superficial, the facade of the space. Both “smiling,” and “frowning,” this space is very anthropomorphized— able to convey the expression of emotions, but nothing more. Marlow is confronted by its grandness, and made to feel at ease by its insipidness. But the land is not stoic. His description is sprinkled with brutal honesty seeing the space as “mean,” and “savage.” Revealing the truth of his perceptions, the words “mean,” and “savage,” get at a much deeper essence of the space than the superficial expressions of emotions. These words sculpt the character of a space, and speak to a violent relationship between Marlow and the jungle that is further realized throughout the novel. As he delves deeper beyond the facade that is the coast, Marlow describes, “The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks,

²³ Ibid., 15.

branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence.”²⁴ From Marlow’s point of view, the jungle is a threat. As a space, it is enclosed by a “great wall of vegetation,” signifying a separation between what he knows as the “savage” jungle and civilization. Used also in *The Emperor Jones*, “wall” are a typical form of description when talking about the space of the jungle. Within the great walls of vegetation lie the organic nature; the “exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons,” a landscape in which Marlow does not belong. In its essence this space is “a rioting invasion,” an all-powerful being ready, “to sweep every little man of us out of his existence.” Again, the jungle is personified; given the possessive pronoun “his,” and imbued with the possession of an existence so great that it makes Marlow feel like a “little man.” As Marlow states, “I felt as though, instead of going to the center of a continent, I were about to set off for the center of the earth.”²⁵ Marlow’s preconceived notions that Africa is the center of earth, reveals his warped appreciation for the continent. As his journey continues he finds that the center of earth is an expansive jungle. Marlow calls it “the heart of darkness.”²⁶ In Marlow’s mind, darkness is the jungle. It is the unknown, and demands to be explored. As Chinua Achebe notes in his acclaimed critical essay of the *Heart of Darkness*, “his fixation on blackness is equally interesting, as when he gives us this brief description: ‘A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms’—as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms! But so unrelenting is Conrad’s obsession.”²⁷ Conrad’s insistence on pointing out blackness, shows how overwhelming the experience of the unknown

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁵ Ibid., 15

²⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁷ Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness." Lecture, The University of Massachusetts, February 18, 1975.

is. Coming from a white world, grappling with his poor understandings of the space, Conrad, in such a repetitive manner, highlights that which is most striking—the “blackness” and “darkness” of the jungle and the people who inhabit it. As Marlow continues to describe the physical aspects of this jungle, the space seems to develop into a being itself. It is created into a character of malice—a creature that has a mind of its own, and is inherently savage. Cut off from the rest of the world, the jungle exists independently of Marlow and all he knows. The jungle is a space in defiance of civilization. As he delves deeper, “The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return.”²⁸ The most threatening aspect of the jungle is its corruptibility. Its savageness, like a disease, threatens to not only infect all who come into contact with it, but ensnare, entangle, encapture, or “bar the way” of escape.

It was not only the space, but the indigenous people that Marlow paid particular attention to. When Marlow arrived to the first station, he was shocked at what he perceived. As he states, “Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair.”²⁹ In his description, he speaks of the native people more as decorations of the land than anything else. They are not people, but “shapes” that seem to make up the landscape. Spoken of in relation to the jungle, the black shapes so easily fill up space by sitting “between the trees,” and “leaning against the trunks.” As Marlow sees them, “clinging to the earth,” they are the people entrapped by the very environment that Marlow fears most. His worst fears are realized in the perceived interdependent, inseparable relationship between the natives and the jungle. Due to their intimate relationship with the “savage” jungle, he imposes

²⁸ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

“the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair,” on the faces of these people. He goes on to describe them further by saying, “they were nothing earthly now— nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom.”³⁰ Again, Marlow refuses to acknowledge the humanity of the people he is referring to. Although he more easily calls them shadows, and shapes than people, he allows them to suffer the worst of human conditions, “disease and starvation.” From his perspective, the indigenous people he comes into contact with are just as much a part of the land, as the trees, bushes and roots that make up the jungle.

The Mind is Capable of Anything

As Jones ventures farther up the river, his relationship with the indigenous people develops further, as a result of how he navigates the space. In working with some of the native people on his steamship, Marlow develops a kind of appreciation for them. Marlow describes his fellow native shipmates saying, “Fine fellows—cannibals—in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils.”³¹ Marlow provides no reason or evidence for labeling these Shiphands as cannibals. Having labeled them as cannibals, Marlow assumed that they would eat each other in front of him. While they did not eat each other and validate Marlow’s assumptions, these hired shipmates were still associated with the wild through the hippo-meat that “made the mystery of the wilderness stink.” Even though these hired shipmates were in close proximity to Marlow, he was able to distance them by associating them with the jungle—a space

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ Ibid., 42.

removed from his existence. But Marlow still came into contact with people along the riverbank who seemed more estranged than even his shipmates. As Marlow recalls,

But suddenly, as we struggled round the bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, [...].³²

While Marlow constantly sees the jungle from his steamboat, he keeps his distance. He experiences the space of the jungle through his lonesome steamboat, winding up river. Marlow sees only the periphery of the space, and, in passing, is only able to make out the abbreviated movements and noises of the jungle. Unable to read the space that they find themselves surrounded by, everything is in a state of “incomprehensible frenzy.” In referring to themselves as “phantoms,” Marlow and his crew removes themselves from the space of the jungle even more—unable and unwilling to have direct contact with the space or its people. While not being sure what exactly the men are doing,—“cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell?”—he maintains an endless series of assumptions, and chooses to view the people in the jungle as “prehistoric.” Marlow speaks further on his relationship with the environment of the jungle and its inhabitants. He goes on to say, “We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free.”³³

To Marlow, the jungle was seen as savage liberty. He says, “We are accustomed to look upon the

³² Ibid. 44.

³³ Ibid.

shackled form of a conquered monster,”—this monster being “those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses,” and more generally, the space of the jungle. But the jungle is also “a thing monstrous and free”—existing in direct contention to the relationship previously expressed. But there is something charming about the jungle’s monstrous nature. As Marlow goes on to say, “Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend”³⁴ Marlow, not only charmed by the space, is beginning to understand it. The space denotes a meaning that Marlow can “comprehend.” There is a hint of legibility. In speaking on this legibility, Marlow elaborates on the human mind and its ability to find commonality in experiences. He posits, “The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future”³⁵ Even though his socio-historical role may say otherwise, Marlow convinces himself that he may not be as distant from the jungle as he previously thought. To Marlow, it is in the “mind of man” where lies the ties to the land and environment. It is simply a matter of having access to those pasts and futures that exist in the mindscape that would allow one to better comprehend the jungle. While the jungle is “a thing monstrous and free,” Marlow begins to see that he is closer to the jungle than he may realize.

The Man Embraced by the Wilderness

However, in the space of the jungle, the mind is an extremely fragile thing. Marlow often remarks on the African people that he sees along the riverbank. In one of these instances, Marlow speaks of his own experience viewing the natives, “wondering and secretly appalled, as

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse.”³⁶ Threatening the very fabric of their minds, the natives from on the riverbank seem to possess an infectious insanity. Marlow’s imposes the image of a “madhouse” onto the landscape. With this imagery, there are associations of irrationality, and improbability. While he makes himself out to be sane, in his conversations with another European man from a station, he contradicts himself. Marlow lightheartedly says, “I don’t know why we behave like lunatics.”³⁷ Acknowledging his own mental instability, Marlow shares these feelings of insanity with his colleague. Another man that European man that Marlow works with tells him stories of men not being able to handle the land. Marlow’s friend says, “the other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road.’ [...] ‘Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.”³⁸ Marlow’s friend proposes that it is the “country perhaps” that drives a man to hang himself. Blaming it on the space that they find themselves in, this is another case when readers see a European going losing control to the point of suicide. Before venturing off to the African continent, Marlow sees a doctor who questions him. Of the few direct inquiries that are voiced, the doctor asks, “Ever any madness in your family?”³⁹ As a preliminary check before he goes to the space of the jungle, the doctor must make sure that Marlow is mentally stable enough for the journey. One with a history of insanity must not go gallivanting into the African jungle—for their insanity will only be exacerbated. To Marlow, even though he compares the space of the jungle to a madhouse, it is often the Europeans that deal with more direct cases of insanity than the natives themselves.

Throughout the novel, Marlow is fascinated by the character of Kurtz, a man who embraces what the jungle has to offer. Before Marlow had seen Kurtz, he would often wonder

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

what he looked like. When he actually sees Kurtz, in the flesh, he describes, “The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation.”⁴⁰ As Marlow eloquently puts it, the “wilderness” has entirely consumed Kurtz. In his appearance, Marlow can only where the wilderness shines through. Kurtz, having an insatiable attraction for ivory, has “an ivory ball” for a head. The wilderness “had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh.” The wilderness, being personified in a sense, has performed the human acts of loving and embracing, the predatory acts of consuming his flesh, while also effecting the makeup of Kurtz’s being—making its way “into his veins.” In many ways, the jungle did to Kurtz what Marlow had expected it to do. Kurtz was one of the few men among the company who dared to venture so far up the river, into the jungle—“the heart of darkness.” Losing contact with what was deemed to be civilized humanity, Kurtz became the jungle. Kurtz was not able to return home to Europe. Marlow speaks of the last moments that Kurtz lived, saying, “I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair.”⁴¹ On the “ivory face” of Kurtz, Marlow is able to see what the jungle has done to the man everyone talked about. Even though Kurtz was a prideful man, who maintained “ruthless power,” the jungle still filled him with a “craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair.” The jungle shaped the dying face of Kurtz, and, while it did not kill him, it left a lasting impression on Kurtz’s being, as Marlow saw it.

As Joseph Conrad proves, it is overwhelmingly complicated and difficult to accurately convey the essence of Africa as a space—rather it is easy to oversimplify. As was said

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

previously, Africa is a space of many ecosystems, and habitats, but only one is unfavorably depicted. Overall, I would say it is almost impossible to portray the objective truth of a space simply because people's relationship with those space is so relative. When there is at least one body in a space, there is inherently a relationship between that body and the space in which it inhabits. I would go even further in saying that, theoretically, it is impossible for space to exist in the absence of people. As the character of Marlow has shown, what he understands as the jungle comes many different sources. The jungle threatens him in such an active way that it can seem alive, breathing and conscious. From his point of view, all who live in the jungle are trapped in it, and suffer from it. The jungle as a space is part of people's history— it is the stagnation of the past and the fear of the future that constantly reinforces how people act in the space of the jungle. Marlow, not proficient in much else than nautical travel, would not normally have come into such close proximity with the jungle, but, as he comes closer and closer to that space, readers are able to see just how removed the jungle can be from their own lives.

CHAPTER 2:
TREES AN' ME, WE'SE FRIENDS

Once in the imagined jungle of *The Emperor Jones*, a play written by Eugene O'Neill, fear manifests itself quite literally. Brutus Jones, the black American, self-proclaimed emperor of a small Caribbean island, awakens from his slumber to his right-hand man, Henry Smithers, a corrupt, white Englishman, who reveals the chaotic state of their empire. Throughout the story, driven by fear of their environment, both Smithers and Jones attempt to reassert their own identity by degrading the islanders around them. It is in the jungle where the fearful past returns to and is realized by Jones. Furthermore, the jungle is presented as an obstacle—something that is in the way of Jones' freedom, and ultimately leads him to his death. *The Emperor Jones*, first published in 1921, is a story, representative of a time and perspective that fits into a compendium of similar work⁴² portraying the jungle as a place to be exploited and as a threat to be feared. Like many other texts about the jungle, it is the characters within these stories that impose their own culturally constructed connotations and associations onto the physical spaces of the jungle, otherwise known as a rainforest, tropical forest or other dense forest ecosystems.

To give readers a little background, Brutus Jones, after fleeing the United States for fear of imprisonment for the crimes of murder, finds himself on an ambiguous Caribbean island. There, with the help of Smithers, Jones becomes the self-proclaimed emperor of the island. All of the inhabitants of the island have been under Jones' control for quite some time, until, when the play starts, they all abandon their posts. As Jones wakes up in the morning, Smithers warns Jones that his countrymen have all fled into the jungle, and, upset with the way that they have

⁴² A few similar works: *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), written by Edgar Burroughs, and *The Jungle Book* (1894), written by Rudyard Kipling.

been treated, will be mustering the courage to hunt Jones down. Jones, for fear of his life, knows that, if he expects to live, he must make it to the other side of the island, but, in order to do that, he must make his way through the jungle. In the jungle, Jones runs into a series of apparitions that haunt him. Jones is eventually caught by the countrymen, and Smithers, alive and well, seems to be behind it all—laughing at Jones’ failure to escape. It’s important to note that there is very little background information provided for both Smithers and Jones. Readers must rely heavily on the dialogue for small bits of information that they can piece together to get a better understanding of the characters’ pasts.

Insatiable Greed

As Eugene O’Neill sculpts the imagined space of his jungle, he begins by making it out to be weak space that is at the mercy of the foreigners Jones and Smithers. An alluring aspect of jungles are the hidden treasures and wealth that hide within them. Throughout the play, Jones and Smithers speak of their monetary incentives for spending so much time on this jungle island—a space that constantly threatens their identity. As Jones talks about the unregulated taxes that he places on the natives by which he acquires his wealth, in speaking to Smithers, he says, “De fuss and glory part of it, dat’s only to turn de heads o’ de low-flung, bush niggers dat’s here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to ‘em an’ I gits de money.”⁴³ The title of emperor means little to Jones. It is merely a facade to continue getting money from the islanders. Highlighting an interesting interaction, Jones compares his position, status, and actions to a “big circus show.” Greatly simplifying this transaction, in exchange for this circus show,—which is never clearly specified—the people of the island give their money to him. Besides

⁴³ O’Neill, *The Emperor Jones*, 12.

taking their money, Jones makes the people of the Caribbean island out to be fools. To Jones, only these islanders of the jungle could fall for such a trick. In recalling some of Smithers' doings, he says, "Ain't I pertected you and winked at all de crooked tradin' you been doin' right out in de broad day? Sho' I has—and me makin' laws to stop it at de same time!"⁴⁴ Jones acknowledges Smithers' corrupt actions of trading. As Jones makes it clear, Smithers does not attempt to be very inconspicuous about his corruption, seeing as how he does it in "de broad day." As he says "I pertected you and winked," not only does he acknowledge Smithers' actions, but both protects and encourages him. On top of this, Jones, using his power as emperor, is "makin' laws to stop it at de same time!" Making it seem as though he is against such corrupt behavior, Jones plays the role of lawmaker, while still taking money for himself and allowing Smithers to continue with his "crooked tradin'"—only performable in the ideal fantasy of both Smithers and Jones. In the unregulated space of the jungle, Smithers and Jones are able to exploit and profit off of the natives of the island. In the jungle, there are no morals restraining those in power. As Jones points out, the space of the jungle is lawless. Smithers, responding to Jones' accusations, says, "you been grabbin' right and left yourself, ain't yer? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!"⁴⁵ To which Jones replies, "No, dey ain't all dry yet. I'se still heah, ain't I?"⁴⁶ As Smithers points the blame to Jones, he reveals that he is not the only one grabbing riches for himself. Jones has put taxes on all the islanders that, as Smithers puts it, has "squeezed 'em dry." In going further with the metaphor that Smithers puts forth to describe the exploitation that occurs on the island, Jones sees the island and its inhabitants as a juicy treasure trove to be squeezed dry with no care for any possible repercussions. Jones then

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

suggests that if the islanders were squeezed dry, then he would not be on the island in the first place—the only reason he stays is to continue to abuse his power by controlling the jungle island and robbing it of its resources. In the beginning of the play, Eugene O’Neill makes the jungle out to be a weak space that is subject to the oppression of others. Jones continues to exploit the jungle of its resources at his own convenience. The emperor then goes onto speak of the differences between little stealing and big stealing. He says, “For de big stealin’ dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o’ Fame when you croaks.”⁴⁷ As Jones understands it, it is the stealing that elevates one’s status, and solidifies one’s mark in history. The only reason Jones and Smithers continue to remain on this jungle island is because they perceive there to be valuable riches to be grabbed. Apart from generally exploiting the land and people of the island, on top of this, Smithers’ greed reaches new heights. With Jones gone, Smithers says to himself, “A bloke ought to find a ‘ole lot in this palace that’d go for a bit of cash.”⁴⁸ Once Jones leaves his palace for good, Smithers seizes the opportunity and makes his way into the palace of the emperor to steal some of its treasures—turning against the one partner he has had, profiteering off the crumbling empire, of which, he was once a part of. Eugene O’Neill reveals the relentless reality of exploitation that occurs in the jungle through Jones and Smithers, who are driven by greed and an insatiable desire for money that, as Jones said, will land them in the “hall of fame.”

The Reshaping of Identity

On this ambiguous Caribbean island, being the only two foreigners, Jones and Smithers feel the need to reassert their own identities as much as possible. In the first spoken line of the play, Smithers, suspicious, grabs onto a woman he believes is stealing from the empire. He snarls

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 26.

at her, “None o’ that, me birdie. You can’t wriggle out now.”⁴⁹ Smithers calls this woman a “birdie.” Disregarding her humanity, he makes her out to be an animal. In continuing with his dehumanizing taunt, after calling her a birdie, he restrains her like an animal that is trying to escape, or “wriggle out.” Smithers, in yelling at the same woman as she runs free, says, “Stop or I’ll shoot! Pop orf then, if yer like, yer black cow.”⁵⁰ The same woman, once referred to as a birdie, is now a black cow—a common domesticated animal that is often imagined as owned by other humans. Jones, adding to the persistent chime of Smithers’ insults, goes on to shout, “I’ll git de hide fravled off some o’ you niggers sho’!”⁵¹ Again, echoing Smithers’ insulting sentiments, Jones, speaking more generally refers to the skin of the island people as hide. In constantly associating the inhabitants of the island to animals, Jones and Smithers degrade the people of the jungle in an attempt to define their own humanity. Adding to the relentless insults, referring to the inhabitants of the island, Jones says, “dese fool, woods’ niggers.”⁵² Jones directly identifies the islanders based on the natural features around them, attributing them to the land itself. In Jones’ mind, the fact that these islanders live in the woods, as he understands it, makes them fools—reflecting a greater cultural belief held by many westernized or self-proclaimed civilized people such as Jones. Creating distance between himself and the inhabitants of the island, Jones proudly says, “From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat’s goin’ some!”⁵³ Jones, arguably insecure and uncomfortable about his own past, separates himself from the “woods’ niggers,” by elevating himself to the title of emperor. Highlighting the many insecurities that he has, the jungle that is the island makes him constantly question his own

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ Ibid.

identity, where he comes from, his sins, and forces him to confront his racial makeup with practically every step that he takes. He responds to this selfreflective questioning and reasserts his identity by reminding Smithers, as much as possible, that he is the Emperor of the this island. In attributing the islanders to animals and to the land around them, Jones and Smithers make themselves out to be more human, while hypocritically committing malicious acts themselves.

In another instance, Smithers attempts to redraw his past. Jones reminds him of his jail time. As the stage directions say, Smithers “Furiously”⁵⁴ replies saying, “It’s a lie! Garn! Who told you that fairy tale?”⁵⁵ While Smithers may not have gone to jail, in his response to Jones, he is quick to dismiss this accusation as fantasy, or a “fairy tale”. Smithers, like Jones, seems to have a darker past. The jungle is a space devoid of all past acquaintances and relationships, and allows one to reshape not only their identity, but also their past. While, on the island, continuing to commit greedy acts of corruption, with no accountability, nonetheless, Smithers is still able to shrug off past sins and atrocities from other spaces—making them out to be purely fanciful. Both Jones and Smithers, feeling estranged from the environment of the jungle island and its inhabitants, question their own identity and, consequently, use many tactics to reassert their own desired identity. Jones and Smithers impose a natural hierarchy on the island that they inhabit. But as Jones ventures further into the jungle, this method of reasserting his desired identity is not effective enough on its own.

Another Wall of Darkness

Throughout the entirety of the *The Emperor Jones*, both Brutus and Henry, to the utmost degree, will often critique and insult the landscape that they occupy. This easily has lead both

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

characters to have a very dangerous relationship with the space of the jungle. Smithers goes on to describe the forest and his feeling associated with it, “It’s a bleedin’ queer place, that stinkin’ forest, even in daylight. Yer don’t know what might ‘appen in there, it’s that rotten still, Always sends the cold shivers down my back minute I gets in it.”⁵⁶ As he elaborates, he sees the Caribbean forest as a threatening space. Characterizing it as “stinkin’” and “rotten,” the space of the jungle is diseased in a manner of speaking; it is a dirty space that intrinsically demands to be cleaned up. As he says, “Yer don’t know what might ‘appen in there,” the improbability of the space is its most the frightening aspect—eliciting a fear so strong that it resonates through the body of Smithers through “cold shivers.” Of all that Jones and Smithers claim to own and exploit, the Caribbean jungle stands free from their control. Referencing temporality, he mentions that “even in daylight” the jungle is still “queer.” There is a sense that even the effects of time cannot mend the space, even more so that time does not affect the jungle. It is an ongoing space,—lasting forever in the human mind—and represents a fear that will never die. The stage directions describe the tropical forest in a different manner, “the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world.”⁵⁷ With its distinct features the tropical forest can be a strong and imposing image, and, according to Eugene O’Neill, is grand enough to divide the world. Creating a segregated space, the forest is a “wall of darkness” that separates the dark from the light, the known from the unknown. In some ways there is more truth garnered from stage directions than the dialogue, being that the directions come from no biased or subjective character—they come from the mind of the playwright himself.

Of course this terminology of “darkness” is problematic, as it relates to the identity of the Caribbean jungle’s inhabitants. O’Neill’s constant use of the words “darkness”, and “blackness”

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 27.

reveal a type of fascination. As Chinua Achebe writes in his critique of *Heart of Darkness*, the author, Joseph Conrad, shares a similar fascination with the words. Achebe, more specifically, says that Conrad “had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts.”⁵⁸ There are multiple instances throughout the stage directions when darkness is brought up in describing the image of the jungle. O’Neill in describing the trees on the set, says, “pillars of deeper blackness.”⁵⁹ Along with this, he describes a group of apparitions as “blotted out in an enshrouding darkness.”⁶⁰ Not only does O’Neill insist on repeating certain aspects of the spaces aesthetic in his descriptions,—making these visual features of “darkness” and “blackness” out to be defining characteristics of the jungle—he also entitles an entire group of characters as “The Negro Convicts.”⁶¹ The blackness of these convicts defines them enough for their identity to be reflected in the title of their group. At the same time, O’Neill entitles other white characters as “The Auctioneer”⁶² and “The Planters,”⁶³—choosing to omit the information specific to their identity in the titles of these white characters, O’Neill shows a set standard for the space. This standard assumes that whiteness is the norm. To O’Neill, the space of the jungle, being so non-white and racialized, must be loudly acknowledged.

The Jungle in all of its Rotten and Stinkin’ Glory

In being such an illegible space, as a result, Brutus Jones is unable to navigate the “darkness” of the jungle. Once Jones learns of the state of his empire, he knows that he must traverse this “wall of darkness” and journey through the jungle—the one great obstacle to his

⁵⁸ Achebe, “An Image of Africa”

⁵⁹ O’Neill, *The Emperor Jones*, 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

freedom. Smithers says, “You’ll have to cut through the big forest—an’ these blacks ‘ere can sniff and follow a trail in the dark like ‘ounds.”⁶⁴ Again, associating the people of the island with animals, in this case, Smithers implies that the people of the island inherently have a more intimate connection to the land. To put it simply, this connection to the jungle is the islander’s ability to navigate this unique space. As Smithers puts it, Jones must make his way through the “big forest,” a space that he knows nothing about, but more importantly does not know how to navigate. Jones is not a “‘ound,” as Smithers describes the other inhabitants. He does not possess that inherent ability to navigate the jungle, and, consequently, does not belong in that space. To further emphasize the impossibility of the trek that Jones is about to embark on, Smithers says, “You’d ‘ave to ‘ustle to get through that forest in twelve hours even if you knew all the bloomin’ trails like a native.”⁶⁵ Again, using the comparison to a native, Smithers articulates Jones’ inability to move through the space. As much as Jones tries, he will never and can never be a native. In turn, the emperor is at the mercy of the uncontrollable space of the jungle, in all of its “rotten” and “stinkin” glory.

More specifically, both characters comment on their relationship to the tropical forest. In response to Smithers’ forewarnings, Jones attempts to talk up his experiences and somehow validate his time spent on the island. He says, “Trees an’ me, we’s friends.”⁶⁶ Jones tries to manifest some sort of connection to the natural world around him. He insincerely describes his relationship with the trees as platonic—a vapid description. More generally in this moment, he expresses that he has no issue with the natural world around him. That being said, he is about to enter the jungle itself, and, in an attempt to cushion his experience, he tries to mitigate his fears

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

with false statements about his relationship to the jungle, knowing full well of the fears that he harbors. Jones goes onto say, “I’se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin’ to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high and low like a book”⁶⁷ The very essence of hunting implies an intimate understanding of the lay of the land and the creatures that inhabit it. Jones, in pretending to hunt—an impractical and strictly performative act—has no obligation to know any extensive knowledge of the environment. In being one of the only ways that Jones interacts with the jungle, the disingenuous nature of the bond between himself and the jungle stands out. The only way that Jones previously interacted with the jungle was through fallacious performative acts and insincere statements carrying little to no weight.

Throughout the first portion of the *The Emperor Jones*, the jungle threatens Jones’ faith. As Smithers warns him of what lurks in the tropical forest, he tells Jones, “Give my regards to any ghosts yer meet up with.”⁶⁸ Smithers points out one of the more specific fears associated with the space of the jungle. The ghosts that inhabit the space are part of what makes the forest so improbable and uncontrollable. As a means to comfort himself, he says, “Ha’nts! You fool nigger, dey ain’t no such things! Don’t the Baptist parson tell you dat many time? Is you civilized, or is you like dese ign’rent black niggers heah?”⁶⁹ The sheer existence of ghosts makes Jones question his religious beliefs; beliefs that he greatly depends on. According to his faith, ghosts do not exist—there “ain’t no such things.” These “Ha’nts” are associated with the people that Jones ruled over as emperor. Making the distinction between civilized and ignorant,—or savage—Jones asks, “Is you civilized, or is you like dese ign’rent black niggers heah?” He insinuates that only “ign’rent black niggers” believe in such heathen phenomena. This also

⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

implies that the Baptist faith is categorized as civilized. But his fear gets the best of him. His relationship with the space would say otherwise. From O'Neill's point of view, the western perception of the jungle dictates that it is a space where faith does not operate. It is inherently a heathen space that challenges dominant religion. Even in the space of the jungle, one can still have his faith, as Jones says, "De Baptist Church done pectect me and land dem all in hell."⁷⁰ In such an unfamiliar space, Jones must turn to faith—a landscape that has no boundaries. But, as the story plays out, faith is not enough on its own to protect Jones. His insecurity of identity, unforgettable past, and fearful relationship with the jungle redefine him in the tropical forest.

While the emperor is at the mercy of the space of the jungle, this inability to navigate is further realized in the fleeing from his used to be countrymen. From what Smithers has told him, he needs to escape the islanders that are in pursuit of him in order to survive. Once in the jungle, past the "wall of darkness dividing the world," speaking of his pursuers, Jones says, "Couldn't see dem now, nohow, if dey was hundred feet away."⁷¹ Not only is Jones frightened of his pursuers, but, in the space of the dark jungle, his senses are compromised and his ability to make out his surroundings is jeopardized. Jones goes on to say, "Can't see nothin'. [...] Can't tell nothin' from dem trees! Gorry, nothin' round heah look like I evah seed it befo'. Woods is you tryin' to put somethin' ovah on me?"⁷² Reiterating the illegibility of the space, the emperor says that he cannot see. His senses are not familiar with the landscape of the jungle. To Jones, the trees of the jungle serve as no markers. They are silent decorations found endlessly throughout the space. Being such a common feature of the jungle, Jones believes them to be the agents of trickery—revealing yet another aspect of Jones' relationship with the land. From his point of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁷¹ Ibid., 28.

⁷² Ibid., 30.

view, the jungle actively tries to fool those who stumble into it—attempting to make them lose their way. Again, when Jones is in the forest, he references temporality. As he makes his way through the space, he inquires, “How long I been makin’ tracks in dese woods? Must be hours. Seems like fo’evah! Yit can’t be, when de moon’s jes’ riz”⁷³ Jones begins to lose track of time. Being so reliant on time, Jones reveals his true sense of lostness. In the jungle, time stands still. While Jones runs from his pursuers for the sake of his survival, he is again further challenged by his inability to navigate the space of the jungle. To Eugene O’Neill, the jungle is illegible. It cannot be read by those who do not understand it. It is this illegibility of the landscape that threatens not only Jones’ physical wellbeing, but his own sanity as well.

Jones’ very sanity is at stake. It is this stillness of time, and inability to navigate the jungle that makes Jones question his own sanity. In a fit of frustration, Jones asks, “Nigger, is you gone crazy mad?”⁷⁴ O’Neill emphasizes the connection between navigation and sanity. Jones, who cannot voluntarily and consciously move through this space, loses his mind. This sense of imperceptibility, coupled with his inability to navigate the space and his general unawareness of time, leads Jones to lose his sense of identity—everything that he prides himself for. As the stage directions read, “His uniform is ragged and torn. [...] He tears off his coat and flings it away from him, revealing himself stripped to the waist. [...] He unstraps them [his spurs] and flings them away disgustedly.”⁷⁵ As Brutus gets farther and farther into the jungle, he begins to lose the very aesthetic that defines him—his royal clothing.

⁷³ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 37.

“Der ain’t nothin’ majesty ‘bout this baby now.”⁷⁶

—Brutus Jones

O’Neill offers yet another interesting quality of the jungle. He purports that legibility of one’s environment influences the perception of their identity. Through the shredding of his clothes, the jungle has systematically managed to tear the polished identity that Jones has worked so hard to achieve right off his back.

Haunted by his Own Identity

In *The Emperor Jones*, the past, as it relates to one’s identity, is imposed on the physical landscape of the jungle. Brutus Jones, upon entering the jungle, carries with him a fully loaded handgun to defend himself, or, worst case scenario, kill himself. The first instance when he shoots his gun is when he is confronted by the “Little Formless Fears.”⁷⁷ One of the only audible actions that these “Little Formless Fears” have is when they let out, “a tiny gale of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves.”⁷⁸ These “Little Formless Fears” represent a part of Jones’ insecurities, laughing at his inabilities. Jones, in dealing with them in the best way he can, shoots them once with his revolver. After firing the shot, he says, in speaking to himself, “what you think dey is—ha’nts?”⁷⁹ Not only does Jones shoot down his insecurities, but he also fires away at the ghosts that infest the jungle. The second time Jones fires his gun is when he surprisingly runs into Jeff, a fellow pullman porter that Jones murdered in the United States.⁸⁰ At first Jones

⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

is pleased to see a familiar face. He then goes on to say, “Ain’t you gwine—look up—can’t you speak to me? Is you—is you a ha’nt? Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you again? You take it den.”⁸¹ Yet again, Jones is plagued by the ghosts that inhabit the jungle. Distinct from the “Little Formless Fears,” Jeff is quite literally, a person from Jones’ past. Jeff represents a part of Jones’ past that he has been trying to run away from since he fled the United States. In an attempt to silence his dark past again, Jones easily shoots the apparition. Moving onto the third time Jones fires his weapon, the scene begins with Jones seeing a group of black men in prison garb being led by a white man—the prison Guard.⁸² After the Guard orders Jones to perform the manual labor that the other prison inmates are doing, Jones, “As if there were a shovel in his hands he goes through weary, mechanical gestures of digging up dirt, and throwing it to the roadside.”⁸³ In this scene, Jones regresses to the time he spent in prison. As opposed to being completely separate from the ghosts, the audience sees Jones become a part of the actions performed by the many apparitions. Eventually, the Guard approaches Jones to strike him with his whip, and, in a fit of rage, Jones yells, “I kills you, you white debil, if it’s the last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!”⁸⁴ In a blind rage Jones fires his revolver at “point blank”⁸⁵ range, and immediately, “the walls of the forest close in from both sides.”⁸⁶ Becoming directly involved in the acts of the prisoners, Jones moves and interacts with the ghosts that appear. When Jones came into contact with the ghost of Jeff, Jeff did not even acknowledge him. The prison Guard not only acknowledges Jones, but gives him orders and lashes him. The Guard, in ordering Jones around and performing the intimate action of lashing him, threatens to bring

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 39.

⁸³ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Jones closer to the ghosts that haunt him. Hinting at the contemporary presence of slavery in the United States through incarceration, these ghosts paint another familiar landscape of Jones' past—one of servitude, pain and suffering. As Jones fires his gun in an attempt to kill the past that haunts him, the jungle closes in around him even more.

“Emperor, you is gettin’ mighty low!”⁸⁷

—Brutus Jones

While the last scene may have subtly alluded to slavery, in the fifth scene, Jones finds himself in the middle of a slave auction made up of many apparitions. The Auctioneer signals to Jones that he should be a part of the auction to be sold.⁸⁸ Once the auction begins, Jones asks, “What you all doin’, white folks? What’s all dis? What you all lookin’ at me fo’? What you doin’ wid me, anyhow? Is dis a auction? Is you sellin’ me like dey uster befo’ de war? And you sells me? And you buys me? I shows you I’s a free nigger, damn yo’ souls!”⁸⁹ Jones slowly realizes that he has been put up for sale at a slave auction, and, in the name of his own liberty, fires not one, but two shots at the Auctioneer and Planter, respectively. Having ran from his identity for so long, Jones does not immediately recognize the image of the slave auction. In this scene, just as Jones unfairly imposed specific identities on his countrymen, Jones’ identity and history is unknowingly imposed him. The identity, history and persecution that Jones has ran from his whole life is manifested in the jungle. One of the most traumatizing socio historical aspects of being black in the United States, is the ever present relationship to slavery—a

⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

narrative that is always fought against, but is inextricable from the black American experience. In fighting this narrative, Jones fires two deserving shots at the ghosts performing this snippet of history. And “As if this were a signal the walls of the forest fold in. Only blackness remains and silence broken by Jones as he rushes off, crying with fear.”⁹⁰ In fighting the narratives, Jones simultaneously throw himself deeper and deeper into the blackness of the jungle. What he fears most about the jungle is slowly tightening its grasp around his existence.

“I’se skeered! Oh, Lawd, Pertect dis sinner!”⁹¹

—Brutus Jones

Jones, down to his last bullet, is extremely exhausted by the series of unexpected ghosts that he has encountered, and his endless journey through the jungle. In scene seven, the last scene in which Jones is alive, Jones is greeted by the Congo Witch-Doctor, who, while chanting an incantation, performs a narrative mirroring Jones’ experience navigating the jungle.⁹² Embodying the heathen that Jones fears so much, the Congo Witch-Doctor, like the other ghosts he has seen, seems to be a figment of his imagination. While this ghost is called the Congo Witch-Doctor, the island that this play is set in is nowhere close to the Congo. Dressed up in an assortment of different animal hides, furs, and ornaments, this Witch-Doctor is the stereotypical medicine man, or shaman. The Witch-Doctor eventually signals to Jones that he is to be sacrificed. Jones pleads to his only possible savior, as he yells, “Mercy, Oh Lord! Mercy! Mercy

⁹⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁹¹ Ibid., 51.

⁹² Ibid.

on dis po' sinner."⁹³ He cries out to his god, hoping that he will be saved. Accepting his true identity in this space, he admittedly labels himself a sinner. As a gargantuan crocodile makes its way out of the water, heading the Witch-Doctor's call the sacrifice of Jones, Jones shouts, "De silver bullet! You don't git me yit!"⁹⁴ Using the last bullet, Jones' silver bullet, the bullet intended for his own death, Jones blows away his fears of the heathen medicine man and the crocodile. As Jones makes his way through the space of the jungle, his worst fears are realized and physicalized. Not only does his dark past come back to haunt him in the tropical forest, but so do histories of oppression related to his race, and frightening associations that he has with the space of the jungle.

Given the context of the *The Emperor Jones*—who wrote it, and what it is about—Brutus Jones, being an American-black man who attempts to exploit the indigenous peoples of a jungle island, presents a complicated relationship with the environment. What brings Jones to this island? What makes him treat his countrymen so poorly? In the beginning of the play, Jones speaks of "de big stealin'"⁹⁵ that makes men great. In speaking on who he learned this from, he says, "If dey's one thing i learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years."⁹⁶ Jones, looking back on his past as a pullman, remembers who he learned about "de big stealin'" from. Overhearing the "white quality talk" is what has influenced him so much as emperor. This "white quality talk" instructed Jones on his methods of exploitation and greed. Jones, learning from the white people of power in the United States, treats the space of the island and the people that inhabit it as if he were a colonizing white man.

⁹³ Ibid., 53.

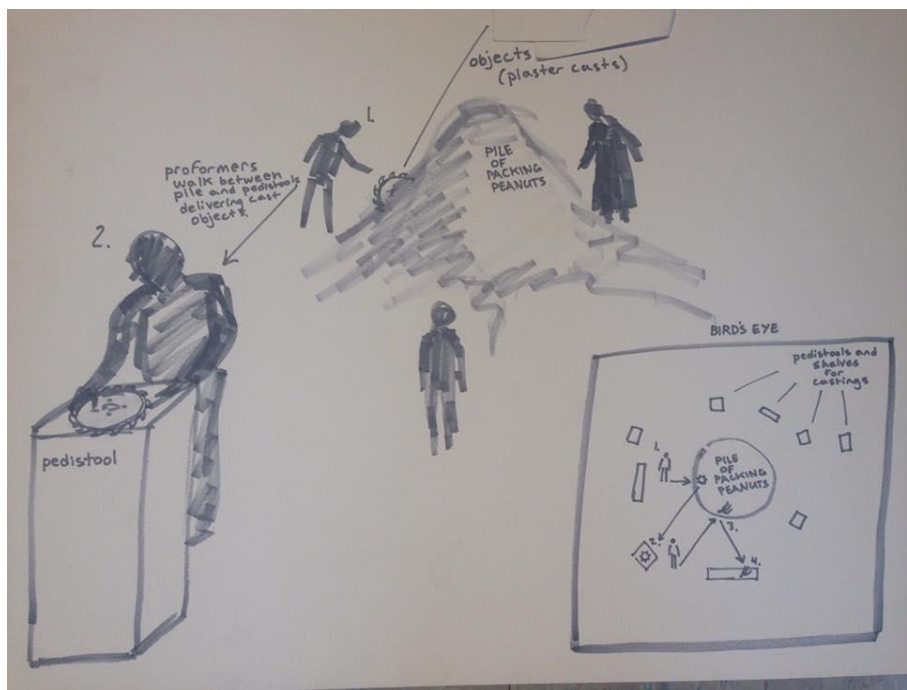
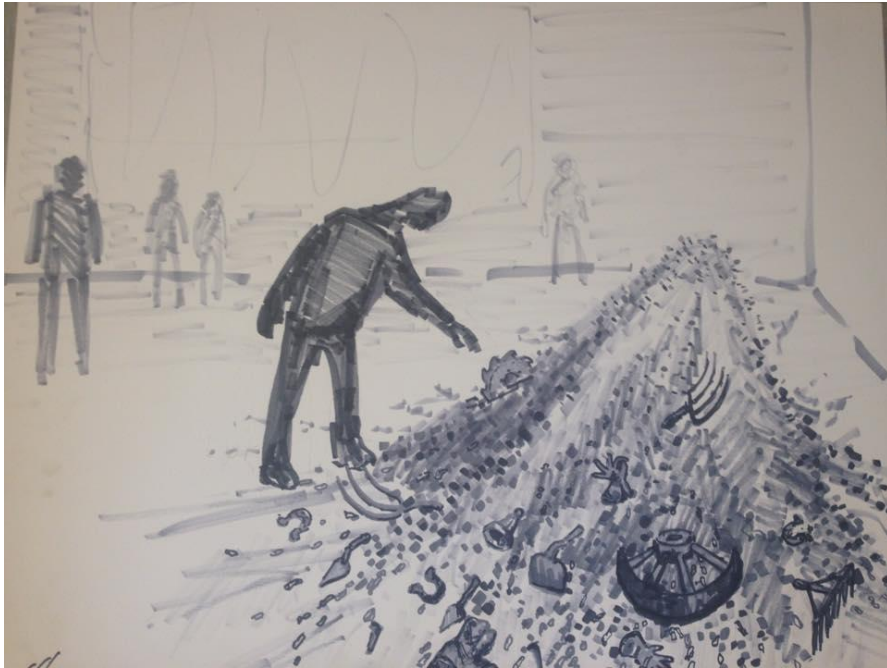
⁹⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Emperor Jones has been running from his identity for a long time. While stealing the riches of this Caribbean island may have been enough incentive on its own, it is possible that Jones, above all else, was trying to escape from the constructed identity that shaped him in the United States. This identity has been shaped by sin and rage, rife with histories of oppression. As Jones ventures through the jungle, his true identity shines loudly. It is easy to say that the jungle is a threatening, violent space, but this is not the case. In this construction of the jungle, it is the fears that reside in Brutus Jones that find the space to exist in the jungle. In many ways, to Eugene O'Neill, the jungle reflects identity. It brings to life the darker, hidden parts of people's identity, past and histories. I would argue that the frightening images seen in the jungle would be different if, for instance, Smithers made his way through that space. Smithers, as a white man, would have a much different relationship to the space of the jungle. Smithers is extremely privileged in that his identity, past and history sit on top of every hegemonic structure imaginable. That being said, I am sure Smithers would not have survived the jungle because the jungle threatens everything that the whiteness stands for.

**CHAPTER 3:
LAYOUT OF PERFORMANCE**



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⁹⁷ Both figures on this page were sketched by Henry Williams to help visualize the final product

PACKAGING PEANUTS

A performance by Noah Keyishian in collaboration with Henry Williams, Aniya Picou,
Auri Akerele, and Alex Graf

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4 May 2016

Performers:

Auri Akerele	Herself/Museum Artifact
Aniya Picou	Herself/Museum Artifact
Cullan Powers	Himself/Museum Artifact
Noah Keyishian	Himself/Museum Artifact
Alex Graf	Himself/Music and Sound

Time: Present, but flexible. Not specified.

Location: A museum.

Act 1

[It is quite. The periphery of the room is cluttered with random objects and shapes that cannot be fully made out. In the center of the room lies a large mound of packaging peanuts. In this mound, parts of objects can be discerned. They are plaster, oomoo, and wax castings of farm equipment. Lying with the objects, are the performers, as loose as rag dolls. They remain still, lifeless until Music and Sound plays a sharp noise. This noise activates the performers. They slowly awaken, and rise out of the packaging peanuts. The performers begin to move their stiff bodies, exploring the space of the museum and their own movements, as if for the first time. Their physicality starts to shift from a rigid stiffness, almost robotic, to that of organic, fluid, monstrous expression. Eventually, the performers notice the mound of packaging peanuts. As they begin to interact with the objects, their physicality begins to fade. At this point, Music and Sound play recordings of discussions on the imagined spaces of the pastoral and the jungle as the performers place the objects on shelves and mantelpieces.]

The End

CHAPTER 4:
PERFORMANCE RATIONALE

“Although both people of color and whites are deeply engaged in environmental struggles, the nature each group is concerned with remains markedly different. One environment is inhabited, toxic; the other is uninhabited, wild, pure, untouched except by the gaze of the privileged visitor. American wilderness in all its empt(ied) glory remains a largely white preserve, while urban, polluted landscapes have long been identified with people of color.”⁹⁸

—Paul Outka

After doing research on the specific perspectives of the jungle through close readings of *Heart of Darkness* and *The Emperor Jones*, I will present a theatrical performance related to the imagined spaces of the pastoral and the jungle. In beginning to conceptualize this performance, I knew that I had certain preconceived notions of what I thought these spaces meant, and how they affected those that were in them. As Paul Outka proposes, identity is one of the main factors that affects people’s relationships with space. As a result, many environmental issues affecting black and white communities remain culturally relative, or “markedly different.” In being a person of color, my perspective would probably go against the grain of those expressed by Conrad and O’Neill. Since most other non-white characters in their stories have little to no agency in the space of the jungle, this performance provided a unique opportunity for others of varying experiences and identities to speak on and define their own relationships within the spaces of the pastoral and the jungle. Unlike Conrad and O’Neill, I feel as though it is imperative to

⁹⁸ Outka, Paul. *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*. Signs of Race 6. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

incorporate as many perspectives as I can manage in order to explore these spaces in the contemporary context that they deserve. Of the collaborators, Henry Williams, a recent graduate of the studio arts department, will be designing the set, and Alex Graf, a fellow EUS senior, will be developing the sound and music. Cullan Powers, Auri Akerele, Aniya Picou, and I are the performers, and will work together to devise material as a testament to the theater department's method of creating theater.

This performance has given everyone involved the opportunity to critique the space of Bard College. With its rolling hills, grassy fields, proximity to the great Hudson River, awesome view of the Catskill Mountains, collection of colonial estates, exclusivity, and a convenient forgetfulness of the past or, in other words, a selective history, Bard fits into many of the parameters of the pastoral. It was this slow discovery of Bard's pastoral identity that has led me to investigate my own place within the institution. From my point of view, the more I analyze the romantic portrayal of the American past, a past closely linked to the pastoral, I realize that I do not fit in. As O'Neill shows in *The Emperor Jones*, black Americans must constantly fight these narratives and histories that often depict their identity as inextricable from slavery. After reading O'Neill's play, I had many questions. Where do people of color exist in the pastoral? By extension, where do I exist in the pastoral? Can I exist in the pastoral without question, or does my color paired with my liberty challenge the space of the pastoral? Since the spring semester of my second year at Bard, I have been working on the Bard Farm—also an easily definable pastoral space. Being one of the few people of color who work on the farm, I am interested if I can somehow incorporate my experience with the Bard Farm's pastoral into the performance.

I was originally inspired by the popular American-slave folktale, “Old Marster Eats Crow.”⁹⁹ It tells the story of a slave, John, who had been using a gun to hunt too close to his master’s plantation. At first, the master simply warns John not to do this again, but, as he catches John hunting a second time, he takes John’s gun. Forcing John to pluck the feathers of a crow that he had killed, he orders John to eat the crow beginning at its head up to where he plucked the feathers, and warns John not to be caught again. As John begins eating the uncooked crow, having left the gun by John’s side, his master walks away. John then stops, and, in a brilliant act of resistance, says to his master while pointing the gun at him, “Lookie here, old Marster, [...] I want you to start at his ass and eat all the way, and don’t let a feather fly from your mouth.”¹⁰⁰ John, in using what he had in his possession, subjects his master to the same cruelty that he faced. I was fascinated by this instance of rebellion. In the *Heart of Darkness* and *The Emperor Jones*, I found no instances of characters fighting their oppressors to such a powerful degree. Much like the *Heart of Darkness* and *The Emperor Jones* did, I felt pressure to incorporate natural features of the space of the jungle, in order to clearly represent it. But, as time went on, I knew that I was much more interested in portraying something along the lines of John’s resistance, as opposed to simply representing imagined spaces. Something that I wish to explore further is what it looks like when one from the jungle takes over the space of the pastoral. Does that happen? Is that possible?

⁹⁹ Giltner, Scott. "Slave Hunting and Fishing in the Antebellum South." In *To Love the Wind and the Rain*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006., 31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

When I began meeting with Henry Williams in March of 2016 to discuss the performance, we thought it would be a good idea to swap some readings.¹⁰¹ We also directed each other to several art exhibits and shows.¹⁰² This helped our creative energy, and provided us with more material to develop ideas. At this point, we had been trying to think of other ways in which we could represent the space of the jungle and the pastoral. Among the sources that Henry showed me, I found an interest in Elias Hansen's book, *I'm a Long Way from Home and I Don't Really Know These Roads*. A local artist who Henry works for, Elias, in his book, speaks on his artistic process and philosophy. He is particularly interested in found objects, and the idea of giving an object meaning by presenting it in a new light—placing it alone on a shelf or mantelpiece.¹⁰³ Some striking objects came to mind, followed by some that were more mundane. I immediately thought the object of the whip—an extremely racialized tool that is associated with plantations and the American pastoral.

To explore my experience with my work on the farm, Henry and I came to the consensus that we will cast a series of farm equipment out of oomoo, plaster and wax. This farm equipment ranges from boots and gloves, to trowels and wheels. My hope is that these objects, most of which are culturally and aesthetically familiar to people, will bring to mind associations of the imagined space of the pastoral. With an interest in playing with artificiality, while these castings maintain the shape of the objects, they are devoid of functionality—one would not be able to use a delicate plaster casting of a trowel in the same way that trowels are normally used. With these castings, all that is left are the associations and connotations that people have with the shapes of

¹⁰¹ Among the more notable texts, he lent me Chis Wares' graphic novel *Building Stories*, and I gave him copies of Nancy Duncan's book *Landscapes of Privilege: The Politics of the Aesthetic in an American Suburb*, and Thomas Cole's *Essay on American Scenery*.

¹⁰² I shared an installation by Dihn Q. Le entitled *Everything is a Reenactment*. Henry showed me Ilya Kabakov's *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*.

¹⁰³ Hansen, Elias. *I'm a Long Way from Home and I Don't Really Know These Roads*. Los Angeles, CA: DoPe Press, 2014.

this farm equipment. To make the performance increasingly localized, aware of the Hudson River Valley's ties to agriculture, Henry and I traveled to two antique stores in Red Hook, NY, to purchase some more obscure farm equipment. In thinking about the power that some objects have, I tried to envision a performative act that one could have with these objects, while allowing the associations that people have with them to remain uninterrupted. I arrived at the arguably easy act of unearthing them from a pile of dirt, but, with dirt being so dirty and keeping in mind the intended space of the performance, I proposed that we unearth these objects from a large mound of packaging peanuts. The differences in having a mound of dirt vs. a mound packaging peanuts are immeasurable. Having these castings of farm equipment in this mound of packaging peanuts implies that these objects are not from here—they have been shipped from a distant space.

I am also interested in ways that we could play with the subjectivity of relationships that people have with these objects, and, in turn, the pastoral. Throughout the *Heart of Darkness*, and *The Emperor Jones*, relationships to inhabited space play such an important role in how characters navigate and interact with said space. In myself being a mixed man, Aniya and Auri both being black women with different shades of brown skin, and Cullan being a white man, I wanted us all interact with the same pastoral farm equipment. This object will not be used, but, for the purposes of articulating a point, how would the image of Cullan holding a whip be different from Auri, Aniya or me holding a whip? Like in *Heart of Darkness* and *Emperor Jones*, the main characters often impose false identities onto the native people who live in the space of the jungle. My theory is that the audience would similarly impose different associations onto the image of Cullan—a white man—holding a whip, than say Auri—a black woman—holding a whip. Using Elias Hansel's art as inspiration and to highlight the different imposed identities on

the performers, all performers will unearth the castings from the packaging peanut mound and place them on shelves and mantle pieces placed around the performance space.

There was a lot of discussion on whether or not we should include our own specific narratives in the performance. As a group, we all ended up having extensive conversations on what the jungle and pastoral meant to us, respectively. Among other things we asked each other many questions. Where are you from? Do you consider where you're from to be the pastoral or the jungle? Where is your family from? Do you consider where your family is from to be the pastoral or the jungle? We also developed a long list of words, sounds, feelings, and places that we associate with the jungle and the pastoral. In our discussions, I also wanted to share with everyone involved the texts that I had been working with over the course of the year. Some knew of the *Heart of Darkness*, but not one knew of *The Emperor Jones*. While I had been dealing with this material for several months, much of the more difficult aspects of these spaces arose very quickly in the meetings that we had. At one rehearsal, with just Auri and Aniya, I gave them a small set of rules and told them to create two 5 minute pieces using some text from *Heart of Darkness*, Paul Outka's *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*, and D.J. Waldie's *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*. They chose to use text from only *Heart of Darkness*, and *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*. With this material containing extremely derogatory content and blunt hate towards people of color, inevitably, Auri and Anyia produced some difficult, tense theater. Among other things that were touched on, in one of their pieces they created, there were moments in which the two of them could easily be construed as slaves. This experience of embodying that history was understandably painful. Feeling unsure and critical of what was created, Auri and Aniya approached me about later on. Having become so familiar with it, I was oblivious that the

material I was dealing with could be so difficult for one perform. While it may have been a hard thing to perform, I believe it was an important step in our process of dealing with these imagined spaces. By devising theater in such a short amount of time, the quickest, easiest things are often created. From what we experienced, in having a people of color in the pastoral, associations with slavery are easily made. In making this short piece, the project became much more serious for Auri, Aniya and me. In the next meeting, with all the other collaborators of the production, we made sure to address how this piece created was problematic. Unfortunately, it was complicated trying to express the pain that exists in certain environments for people of color to those who identify as white—for those who identify as white, it seems as though the pastoral does not have very much pain associated with it at all. Regardless, together we wanted to make an effort to move beyond simply representing the pains of slavery, and arrived at the even more difficult task of solving the issue. We decided that one way to hint at some kind of solution is by recording the discussions that we ended up having—discussions in which we grapple with these imagined spaces. These recordings will then be played as us performers interact with the casted objects.

In trying to make sense of the all the varied components of this performance, we began to play with the space of the museum. In imagining a less performative production of our own, Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* seems most akin. As a cultural critique, having access to the Maryland Historical Society's stored historical artifacts, Wilson curates his own exhibit—grouping images of slave shackles and plantation silverware together.¹⁰⁴ As we discussed in our meetings, a museum seems to be a pastoral space in and of itself. They are usually exclusive spaces where certain histories are preserved, and certain histories are exoticized while also being dismissed to the past. The space allows us to play around with what Henry terms, “relational

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, Fred. *Mining the Museum*. 1992. Museum Exhibit. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.

aesthetic.” The relationship that museum viewers have with the curated artifacts. Being in the space of the museum raises further questions. Are the performers artifacts as well? How would performers of the jungle take over the space of the museum, representing the pastoral?

As this performance is scheduled to happen on the 14th of May, it is still very much subject to change. I have not even begun to articulate the many different ways in which this project has already developed. This performance is really one of the first collaborations that I have worked on, and it has been an unbelievably rewarding experience to be able to listen to the many beautiful and wondrous ideas that everyone has. I hope to continue to foster a strong sense of curiosity in everyone involved. I think what we all realized in putting this performance together that the jungle and the pastoral are everywhere. These imagined spaces constantly inform and affect our lives.

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