



SWEET, SWEET CHARIOT

Shaun Motsi

ZZ: You ended one of your earlier drafts with a Stuart Hall quote, which was really great. I like what he says elsewhere in that same text: “What we are talking about is the struggle over cultural hegemony, which is these days waged as much in popular culture as anywhere else. That high/popular distinction is precisely what the global postmodern is displacing. Cultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination (that’s not what the term means); it is never a zero-sum cultural game; it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it.” [1]

AA: We should include a bit from that very first draft which worked more like a map of references, not so much an explanation of the show: “Carved into the sides of the [vehicle’s] body are the words of the exhibition’s title, *Sweet, Sweet Chariot*, which allude to being carried over, to being taken home. But where is that? Maybe somewhere in this world, or maybe elsewhere. Planet Earth is depicted in the painting of a tarot card [being held up in front the viewer as if to offer an objective view of one viable option among many other possible ‘homes’]. Outer space is filled with objects we are told, and some of them might theoretically be habitable. Jazz musician Sun Ra discovered one of these, [as revealed] in his 1972 film *Space is the Place*, wherein he [claims to use] music as his mode of transportation. Ra visits Earth with the goal of recruiting young African-Americans aboard his ship to bring them back to this new planet. Sun Ra looked to understand and critique the Afrodiasporic experience through the lens of science fiction . . .”

ZZ: And then something about “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” or do we already have enough? Oh, by the way a box of gourds might arrive at the gallery tomorrow, in case I’m not there yet.

AA: “Follow the drinking gourd”? [2]

ZZ: That’s sort of space-y too, right?

AA: . . .

ZZ: It’s interesting to think about the show now in relation to the Hall quote; I’m not sure what the work is really doing in so far as a “cultural hegemonic struggle” is concerned. But then again why must there be a struggle; that’s falling into the very trap that Hall is trying to pull us out of.

1. Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘black’ in black popular culture?” in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 471.

2. A *drinking gourd* is a special pumpkin, which was used as a cup or bottle but also *drinking gourd* is another name for the Big Dipper asterism. “Follow the Drinking Gourd” is an American folk song first published in 1928. Folklore has it that fugitive slaves in the United States used it as a point of reference so they would not get lost.

Shaun Motsi (*1989, Harare, ZW) is currently a student at the Städelschule, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste, in Frankfurt am Main. Recent solo and group exhibitions include: *NÜ SENSITIVITY*, STORE Contemporary, Dresden, DE; *Before, After the Butcher*, Berlin, DE; *All Flesh Is Grass And All Its Beauty Is Like The Flower Of The Field*, ODX, Berlin, DE; *2nd Skin*, 8Eleven, Toronto, CA; *Formation Center*, TOVES, Copenhagen, DK; and *Windowlicker*, Center, Berlin, DE.