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# Dakar's Market Imaginary: Mobility, Visuality, and the Creative Economy of Second Chances



By Joanna Grabski March 25, 2014 Topics: Market, Urban, West Africa

My concern in this essay is with the concepts that produce the market imaginary in the city of Dakar, Senegal. In particular, this essay centers on a cluster of questions: how might we characterize something as intangible and abstract as the market imaginary in this particular city? How do the individuals involved in its imagining situate and articulate its relevance? And, how is the everyday social and visual experience of Dakar's markets indicative and generative of the market imaginary? To pursue these questions, I focus on the themes of mobility, visuality, and the creative economy of second chances in relation to my research about two markets in Dakar. The first is Marché Colobane, a sprawling market for second hand goods located in a neighborhood many would describe as a slum; the second is Dakar's art market, a multi-sited entity constituted by the transactions between artists and art world figures. <sup>[1]</sup> Inscribed by the high and low of luxury



Cheikh Ndiaye, Enfranchissement of Competing Voices, 2011, mixed media on canvas.

and scarcity, each market's spaces, propositions, and participants appear unambiguously asymmetrical at first glance. Yet, the visual and social practices of each market overlap and taken together they create a scope of inquiry that allows for analysis of markets as spaces that are embedded in neighborhoods, cities, and global commodity flows as much as they are productive of the imagination.

In addressing markets and mobility, I consider how markets image mobility as normative while creating the conditions of possibility for movement. Markets are sites where people, objects and desires both converge and diverge. Furthermore, I consider how networks compose and articulate in the market to provide the logistical framework for mobility across many registers. The remainder of my essay elaborates on the creative economy of second chances for people, places, and objects. Underpinned by the recognition that the practices of remaking and everyday visual experience are vital to the imagination, I offer a theorization of visuality, speculation, and reinvention in relation to the market imaginary. <sup>[2]</sup> I foreground the market's multiple arrangements of objects and people in imaging a modality where reinvention is regularized in everyday visuality and the market imaginary. The propositions populating Marché Colobane and the art market emblematize the possibility of many forms of reinvention. Moving between analysis of these themes in relation to Marché Colobane and Dakar's art market, I attend to the specific topography, spatial configurations, objects, and participants constituting each to theorize the market's visual, social, and commercial spaces as productive of its notional space – the market imaginary. This essay theorizes the market's relevance as transcending commercial inscriptions for it also generates and consolidates a market imaginary about many potential inclusions, circulations, and reinventions.

## Mobility and Networks: The Case of Marché Colobane

Marché Colobane is aptly characterized by the Wolof dictum, "*Lepp looy wut rekk am na marsé Colobane* (You can find anything in the world at Marché Colobane)." The objects populating market stalls — colorful plastics, used clothing and shoes, new garments and shoes, tattered copies of journals such as *Jeune Afrique* or *Marie Claire*, watches, cosmetics, radios and cell phones — oblige the eye and imagination to travel. Attributed to China, France, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United States, the objects points of origin declare association with elsewhere. Their very presence draws lines of connection to places beyond the market's immediate visual register. Even as these objects indicate the expansive commercial relationships webbing Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, they signify the continent's rapid transformation into a consumer society, where objects from all corners of the globe find their way across miles of ocean, settling momentarily in the market. Viewed collectively, their visual power is straightforward: the range of objects and points of origin they invoke visualize the market as a coalescence of multiple circuitries.



[video] : You can find anything in the Marché Colobane. Video clip from Market Imaginary.

The identity and configuration of Marché Colobane have transformed significantly since its establishment in the 1930s as a neighborhood produce market. By the 1980s, Marché Colobane was deemed Dakar's primary market for used clothing, termed *fuug jaay*, meaning 'shake out and sell' in Wolof. Over the years, the market for second hand clothing grew to encompass other used items including shoes and accessories as well as books, journals, and electronics. Although today the market brings together a beguiling combination of used and new items where as they say, you can find anything in the world, its specialization is second hand goods. Indeed, the dedicated amassment and sale of second hand goods distinguishes Colobane from Dakar's other markets. Throughout the city, Colobane is considered the place to go for used goods of diverse origins. The genealogies and potentials of these items contribute to inscribing the market with a particular modality of worldliness predicated on notions of mobility, networks, and inclusion.

Place narratives about Colobane further recapitulate this modality of worldliness. In interviews and conversations, many describe Marché Colobane as comprised of several markets within the market. <sup>[3]</sup> Ndeye Gueye, a *griotte* and life time resident of Colobane, spoke of her surprise in discovering that during her lifetime, Marché Colobane had grown to include several "markets within the market" and that the markets were named after other countries.



[video] : Colobane resident and griotte Ndeye Gueye describes the many markets within Marché Colobane. Video clip from *Market Imaginary*.

The "markets within the market" include Marché Gambie, Marché France, Marché Italie, Marché Congo and Marché Burkina. As the names suggest, Marché Colobane's markets within the market picture the world as concentrically embedded. Moreover, the world beyond Colobane is represented visually, commercially, and notionally within it.



[video] : Clothing collector Vieux Cissé elaborates on the commercial presence of goods from elsewhere. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

Although this image of concentric embedment is subject to critiques about the impossibilities of global citizenship or the power disparities associated with the movement of commodities across hemispheres, I propose that other conceptual elements and relationships are afoot. <sup>[4]</sup>

Conceptual elements affiliated with mobility and connectedness (transits, conduits, and circuitries) and the possibilities they promise are deeply embedded in the market imaginary. Objects testify to both the vastness and effectiveness of market circuitries. Visually, materially, and notionally, the presence of objects in the market demonstrates that the outcome of departures and arrivals can indeed be successful. Herein is the articulation of an object's biography, what Appadurai designated as "the social life of things." <sup>[5]</sup> As much as the market represents the convergence of objects, people, and desires, it is also the point from which these ensembles diverge and take new directions. To look at the piles and arrangements of objects in market stalls is to see them as tentatively positioned, poised for sale and thus departure. Vieux Cissé, a buyer and seller of second hand clothing put it like this, "It is simple. Objects of all kinds arrive here and leave again." <sup>[6]</sup> For objects so too for people, the market is a place from which to visualize, acquire, and implement various mobilities.



[video] : Bundles of second hand clothing in storeroom. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

In relation to Marché Colobane, mobility can be read vertically within the market's spatial parameters and professional frameworks just as it can be read laterally as stretching beyond them. <sup>[7]</sup> For instance, vendors often recount the development of their professions using the trope of vertical professional mobility. The savvy shoe shop proprietor 2Pac Colobane explained that when you enter the market, "you start small, selling on the street and then build up the financial and social resources to rent a table in the market." <sup>[8]</sup> After working in Marché Colobane for twenty years, 2Pac Colobane has come to maintain two sales spaces. One is a small shop in Marché Colobane and the other *Docta Wear*, a fashionable shoe salon in Zone B, another Dakar neighborhood.



[video] : Doctawear shoe store in Dakar's Zone B neighborhood. Video Clip from Market Imaginary.

Just as diligence is fundamental to gaining mobility so too is proficiency in the market's social practices. Knowing how "to operate" in the market involves knowing how to build relationships, maintain them, and of course, navigate the connections they offer. Relationships are important not just for their immediate advantages but also as building blocks or links in potential networks that afford mobility.



[video] : Businessman 2Pac Colobane checking shoes in Marché Colobane. Video Clip from Market Imaginary.

Thus, as much as the market is a space for commercial transactions, it is also a space for social interactions. This

assertion is well demonstrated by considering the complex negotiations around objects and the accommodations made in negotiation. Few deals are foreclosed entirely and a transaction not completed "this time" is possible "next time." From this vantage point, we can read notions of temporality in relation to the market as simultaneously compressed and expandable. The opportunities represented by relationships of the past, present and future all figure into "the time of the market." While the objective of offering objects for sale is certainly to complete a transaction, uncompleted transactions are still valuable because they represent potential relationships that may be generative otherwise. Social acumen and visual perspicacity are essential to operating within the market. These entail proficiency in reading people and cultivating relationships as well as keeping relationships open and possible, even when evidence of their productivity is not readily discernable. Proficient operators keep their eyes on several prospects at once for as the Wolof proverb tells us, "*Su mbul bañee, làmbaay nangu* (If one person refuses, another accepts)." Those working in the market are dexterous jugglers of opportunity, ever watchful of and responsive to what might come their way. This orientation challenges assumptions about the boundedness of commercial transactions where success is measurable by the completed exchange of money for goods. Rather, it exemplifies that completion of a commercial transaction is not the only desirable outcome of encounters in the market.



[video] : Artist Abdoulaye Ndoye comments on the visual proficiency of vendors in Marché Colobane. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

Construal of the market's commercial spaces as interactive social spaces is a fundamental driver in the market imaginary. In conversations, many individuals acknowledge the importance of a *réseau* or network to their professional and social activities. Because the market brings together so many networks, exchanges of all types represent potential relationships waiting to be called upon and accessed. By navigating market spaces proficiently, a skillful operator is constantly building networks and creating opportunities for mobility. With many possible networks there are also many access points from which to participate. The implications of both Latour's discussion of networks <sup>[9]</sup> as well as Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome paradigm <sup>[10]</sup> are pertinent to considering the composition and articulation of networks in the market imaginary; networks are envisaged as most productive when they are permeable and adaptable. Should they become too narrowly circumscribed or too exclusive, the linkages constituting them would cease to proliferate. Because networks also disassemble, dissolve or disappoint, they demand constant and active building and rebuilding. The inclusion of people and objects, and the multiple opportunities and directions they promise, both structure the market's daily inner-workings and consolidate the market imaginary.



[video] : With the railroad line, bus station, and highway nearby, both the market and neighborhood are wellpositioned hubs for transit. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

Another critical dimension inflecting the market imaginary in relation to Marché Colobane involves its geo-spatial location in Dakar. Colobane is considered a zone of convergence and transit because of its position between the sprawl of downtown Dakar and adjacent neighborhoods. Described as easy to access or centrally located, Colobane adjoins downtown Dakar, offering one of the four entrances/exits to downtown, along with Niayes Thioker, Medina

and Rebeus. Both the market and neighborhood are well-positioned hubs for transit due to their proximity to the railroad line, bus station, and the *autoroute*. Colobane's bus station is a critical node in the transportation network linking the population of Senegal's interior to Dakar. In an interview about Dakar's markets, economist Ousmane Sene elaborated on how the sites of transit enmeshed in the neighborhood factor into the imaginary about Marché Colobane and mobility. Sene told of a young man coming from Senegal's interior to Dakar who upon arriving in Colobane found work at the market, first as an ambulant vendor and then as a vendor with his own table. Literally and figuratively, the young man stepped into the possibilities of this particular market because it was near the bus station where he disembarked. After some time, the young man accumulated the resources to move on to work in another Dakar market and then eventually moved to the United States. Sene's emphasis was clear: "Marché Colobane is a place to begin, a place to move from." <sup>[11]</sup> As with any navigation across spatial and socio-economic scales, moving through and beyond Marché Colobane depends on an individual's agility and good fortune as well as networks and resources. This example underscores that the market's conduits and circuitries enable mobility whereby people and objects slide across registers or step across scales into many possible worlds.



[video] : Economist Ousmane Sene describes how individuals from rural Senegal come to Marché Colobane to seek work. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

# Artists as Travellers and Art Market Spaces



Materials and art works in Ndary Lo's studio, 2010.

The association of markets with mobility figures prominently in my analysis of artists and institutions in Dakar. As illustrated in the preceding discussion of Marché Colobane, the art market is a site where mobility can be visualized, articulated, and actualized. The impressive number of artists in Dakar who travel for work further indicates that markets, and in this case the art market in particular, provide the conditions of possibility for movement. Whether in subtle increments or radical leaps, artists and their works move because of the circuitries and networks of Dakar's art market. Despite the frequent complexities of obtaining the right visa and acknowledgement that art objects often move with greater ease than their makers, examination of artists' career trajectories points out that the market generates many opportunities for mobility and that market related opportunities produce artists' careers.

Artists are among the most traveled professional categories in

Dakar. A common theme in casual conversations with artist colleagues is that someone is always travelling or about to travel. Correspondence with artist friends in Dakar via email or telephone details their regular opportunities for work-related travel. Talk often circles around



Artworks ready to travel to exhibition in Las Palmas, Ndary Lo's studio, 2010.

travel by listing their projects in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. These opportunities are productive of one another in that one residency, exhibition, or workshop often leads to another. Moreover, they credential artists as travelers while providing evidence of networks at work.

Dakar's art market provides the platform and possibilities for travel; it figures as a conduit to other art world sites. The networks and circuitry that make this possible include the many art professionals and amateurs who visit the city to prospect inventory for exhibitions and other projects. Likewise, the many international institutions in Dakar, especially the city's foreign cultural centers and embassies weave Dakar's art market with international circuitry. Institutions such as the British Council, the Institut Français, the Goethe Institute and other international bodies including non-profits and corporations such as Eiffage Sénégal offer regular opportunities for exhibitions, acquisitions, and collaborations. By way of these sites and the individuals associated with them, artists have potential access to many networks and opportunities for mobility.

Unlike Marché Colobane, the art market in Dakar cannot be assigned a single location or geographical center. In Dakar, art market spaces are enmeshed in the city just as they are locatable beyond it. Along with a handful of occasional buyers and dedicated collectors who live in Dakar, a steady flow of buyers come to the city, acquire art and take off again. Commercial encounters between artists and buyers are what constitute market spaces. Thus, instead of describing its topography in terms of brick and mortar constructions, the art market in Dakar is best characterized as fluid, contingent, and in a state of continuous recomposition. Those entering and exiting the market come from diverse directions and positions, and so link Dakar's art market to a constellation of transnational sites. The ins and outs of those who buy art and collect its stories not only impart great mutability to the art market, they also lace the art market with many networks for artists to access and navigate.

plans for exhibitions or other projects in France, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Canada, China, Japan and the United States. Artists' resumés further attest to their lineages of



Artworks in Ndary Lo's studio 2010.



The Goethe Institute during Dak'Art Biennale, 2010.

Most transactions around art take place outside of Dakar's few dedicated commercial galleries. Artists often sell their

work in their studios, when they travel, or at their exhibitions. In short, the art market is a most opportunistic phenomenon because transactional possibilities can arise whenever potential buyers and sellers converge. Exhibitions in Dakar do not just serve to display visual propositions; they also represent spaces for potential commercial transaction and social interaction. While Dakar has few dedicated commercial galleries for the sale of art, it does have many exhibition sites, including both the government owned National Gallery and IFAN Gallery as well as the privately owned and operated Musée Boribana and Espace Vema.



Dakar's National Gallery, 2010.

In addition, a gamut of spaces can be used for exhibition and therefore commercial activities although the display and sale of art is not their primary purpose. For instance, art exhibitions take place in gas stations, hair salons, private residences, restaurants, hotels, and corporate offices. That commercial inclinations emerge in non-commercially designated spaces further indicates the fluidity and continuous re-composition of Dakar's art market.

As much as selling works is important, so too is composing future possibilities for exhibitions, residencies and workshops in Dakar and in other parts of the world. With few dedicated galleries, galleristes, or dealers, artists undertake the work associated with making sales themselves. This includes both commercial transactions and social interactions. Because doing well commercially very often depends on proficiency in the social operations of the market, successful artists devote a good amount of time to creating and maintaining relationships and

networks. The skillful management of relationships and navigation of networks that make up Dakar's art market offers the promise of movement in many directions and across many spaces for artists and their propositions.



One of many billboards advertising airline travel, Dakar, 2010.

#### Narratives of Place and Colobane's Creative Economy of Second Chances

Colobane is a storied place where narratives circulate as readily as the people and objects transiting through the market and neighborhood. Place narratives about Colobane gather around a couple of dominant themes. On one hand, the market is infamous for hustling, pickpocketing, and being

a place where one "can find anything the world," including stolen merchandise and illicit commerce. Anecdotes about finding a misplaced or stolen wallet, watch, or passport at Marché Colobane abound. Along these same lines, many speak with derision or frustration about the neighborhood as a slum whose monstrous traffic jams and intractable

in



Fally Sene Sow, Rocade Colobane, 2010, mixed media collage and glass.

poverty so often limit possibility. This place narrative settles somewhat anxiously next to the other dominant narrative focusing on Colobane's association with rapid urbanization, rural exodus to the city, and the creative economy of second chances whereby people and objects participate in remaking both in spite of and because of their conditions.

These narratives are deeply embedded in the specificities of place, capitalizing on Colobane's particular geo-spatial location, history and development, transportation infrastructure, and the market's specialization in used objects. Furthermore, despite the apparent contradiction about limits and possibilities discernible in the dominant narratives, each emerges from and reiterates the themes of mobility and the creative economy of second chances. Place narratives referring to pickpocketing, hustling, and deals around stolen or illicit goods relate directly to the development and consolidation of the second hand clothing market. Accounts of the market's development indicate that it took shape in the 1930s in response to the recently settled neighborhood's demand for a produce market and within five decades its presence solidified as the city's main market for second hand clothing. Once the space was accorded for a second hand clothing market, other used objects followed, some of which were of dubious origins or speculative authenticity. Given that some of the used objects, especially easily portable accessories such as wallets, jewelry, or handbags, were presumably obtained by theft, the space became associated with illegality and risk.<sup>[12]</sup>

Along with the type of objects sold at Colobane, the market's geo-spatial location and identity as a transportation hub are fundamental drivers in producing its narratives of place, and as elaborated above, the market imaginary.



[video] : Economist Ousmane Sene comments on the transportation infrastructure linking Colobane to Dakar, Senegal and West Africa. Video Clip from Market Imaginary.

Narrativized as a place of entrances and exits as well as transits and convergences, the neighborhood is an important doorway to and from downtown Dakar. The train station and railroad line, bus depot, and autoroute provide many options for moving in and out of the neighborhood just as they contribute to connecting Colobane with the rest of the city and country.<sup>[13]</sup> As the city's major hub for movement between Dakar and the regions, Colobane's bus station is deeply associated with the increasing numbers of individuals migrating to Dakar in search of livelihood from Senegal's interior and beyond. Likewise, the train tracks running through the neighborhood link local, regional and international populations. The train station at Colobane is identified with the Petit Train Bleu a regional commuter

train that provides affordable transportation to Colobane station, the market, and downtown Dakar. <sup>[14]</sup>

At the same time, the railroad is also identified with the Dakar-Bamako line that connects Senegal to neighboring Mali. The train and buses offer conduits for people to share space who might not otherwise. For instance, urbanites mixed with populations from Senegal's regions and other parts of West Africa. Many of them carried their valuables, making them easy targets for theft. Stories of petty theft on the train are plentiful, as are stories of attempts to hawk the stolen goods — watches, wallets, and identity documents — at the market, a quick sprint from the railroad tracks.



[video] : Colobane resident El Hadji Ousmane Mbenga explains Colobane's settlement during the colonial era by populations displaced from Dakar's Plateau. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

A final theme contributing to Colobane's place narratives involves its historical establishment and the transformation of its built environment. During the colonial period, Colobane was undesirable marshland settled by a displaced, economically vulnerable population. The area was settled in the 1930s by families displaced from Dakar's Plateau by the French who wanted the Plateau for their own administrative and residential interests. Offered land and materials to rebuild their homes, the indigenous population thus moved to marshland on the Plateau's outskirts. Because the land was covered by dense, tall grasses and seemed far from what was at the time the heart of Dakar, the area was named Colobane after a village in Senegal's interior. From this perspective, the creative economy of second chances is further resonant for Colobane's residents and the spaces they inhabit because both the land and the built environment have been reinvented or remade from swampland to a highly urbanized crossroads.



[video] : Colobane resident El Hadji Ousmane Mbenga comments on the growth of Colobane in relation to Dakar's urbanization. Once a far off swamp land, Colobane is today part of central Dakar. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

It was by way of the overlap of Colobane's location, transportation infrastructure, and second hand commerce that the market, and subsequently the neighborhood, became associated with place narratives about both unfavorable happenings of many sorts as well as the creative economy of second chances. Because some notoriety continues to hang over Colobane, residents and vendors alike are committed to vindicating the reputations of the neighborhood and its market. Residents, for instance, are quick to remind that Colobane is much bigger than just the market and that the market is but one landmark of many in a neighborhood large enough to be distinguished by several administrative subdivisions. That the market and neighborhood are separate entities is a point of much insistence, with residents emphasizing that vendors are not actually born and raised in Colobane. And still, the market and neighborhood conflate easily for many in Dakar, perhaps due in part to the powerful imaginary that singularizes Colobane.



[video] : The spatial imbrication of commercial and residential buildings resulting from the rental of rooms to vendors and travellers. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

To some extent, the conflation of market and neighborhood relies on the spatial imbrication of commercial and residential buildings. As the market grew and rural migratory streams intensified, the neighborhood's built environment transformed. Residents rented or sold parts of their domestic space to vendors looking for commercial space and travellers seeking lodging. Rooms that faced the market were considered especially desirable and eventually many homes adjacent to the market were transformed into shops and gradually absorbed as market space.



[video] : Colobane resident Aminata Diop talks about the growth of the market and transformation of homes. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary*.

This largely unpredictable, staggered transformation of domestic space to commercial space resulted in Marché Colobane's peculiar configuration: it weaves around some of the neighborhood's residential buildings, the result being residences within the market's circumscription and commercial spaces attached to homes. The economic gain from renting or selling domestic space is not without its costs; the tensions between the market and neighborhood as well as insiders and outsiders fuel another rather anxious narrative about the boundaries between public and private, commercial and domestic space. Yet, residents and vendors recognize that the market and neighborhood will continue to draw populations from across the city and beyond. And, like the objects these individuals seek, they transit in and out of Colobane.



[video] : Colobane resident and griotte Ndeye Gueye elaborates on the market's relationship to the neighborhood. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

# Visuality, Speculation, and Reinvention

Marché Colobane's accumulation of second hand goods and their juxtaposition to various new items make the market's visual register both dense and accommodating of multifarious propositions. Incongruous ensembles of old and new, strange and ordinary, broken and intact, useful and depleted concede space to each other in this market. The objects themselves as well as their arrangements compel visual engagement. The display of objects takes many forms, from stalls and piles to clusters and hanging arrangements. Watches or cell phones might be laid out carefully

in tidy rows whereas shirts and shoes might appear in jumbled heaps, their worth discoverable only after much sorting. Neckties and handbags hang compliantly from a rack while nearby a suspended bunch of tangled earphone wires respond to the slightest breeze. Taken together, these objects and their displays contribute to the "traffic" constituting the market's visual register. Artist Jacky Ly described, "the proximity of all these items, how the folks here display them, and how they move around inside the market create a certain atmosphere of traffic." <sup>[15]</sup> This characterization emphasizes that the market's visual register is productive of the market imaginary in that the movement of people and objects index and evoke many forms of mobility. Furthermore, the constitution of the market's visual field by objects awaiting movement and people in motion figures into an imaginary where inclusion anticipates circulation and reinvention.



[video] : Artist Viyé Diba comments on the visual and spatial organization of markets. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

In addition to the capacity of the visual to impress the notional aspects of the market imaginary, a bundle of processes related to visuality are critical to the experience of the market. These include looking, prospecting, identifying, recognizing and evaluating. The market's visual register is also a speculative space; from here the eye speculates on what it sees. With used objects and goods, one speculates on their origins as well as their futures. Into what projects and purposes might they be inserted? This question applies not just to visual encounters between people and objects. It is applicable to the commercial transactions and social interactions driving the market where individuals speculate on the intentions, limits, and possibilities of one another. Both sellers and buyers are skilled in reading and evaluating people, objects, and situations. Much like the social proficiency explicated in relation to mobility and networks, vendors must also demonstrate keen visual skills. Looking and working are correlate activities in the market. In relation to vendors' ability to observe, assess and speculate on visual information, shoe shop proprietor 2Pac Colobane offered, "When I see a person I know how to talk to them, whether they have money or not, whether they want to buy or are just pretending. I know who is playing me because I have learned to detect it. When a person puts their foot in my store, I watch and observe and identify those who come to buy and those who come to play or ask about prices. I know all that. When I'm with a person, I've learned to evaluate the situation within seconds." <sup>[16]</sup>



[video] : Businessman 2Pac Colobane speaks of the speculation associated with selling practices in the market. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

Visual speculation and evaluation also weave through discussions with buyers who speak of prospecting in the second hand clothing market. For instance, tailors often acquire used garments or materials and resell them after modifying them. An interview I had many years ago while working with tailors in Niayes Thioker, another Dakar neighborhood adjacent to Marché Sandaga is revealing. To qualify his talent and industriousness, tailor Bira Diouf explained to me that a client could give him meters of any cloth and he could do something extraordinary. Alternatively, he could look for used material on his own and compose it as he saw fit. "Not to worry," he assured, for

he "could make a perfectly elegant dress from a second hand sheet acquired at Marché Colobane." <sup>[17]</sup> Many of Dakar's young and stylish who pursue their fashion goals with limited financial means rent or purchase clothing and shoes from Marché Colobane. Those in the know speak of discovering highly desirable and unique items, especially labeled garments and shoes that appear in the used clothing market. Successful prospecting in the market to identify labels, fabrics, and designs is premised on keen visual recognition. For instance, Vieux Cissé, who has been a purveyor and collector of vintage clothing since 1983, frequently acquires second hand designer clothing from Marché Colobane. He indicates succinctly that acquisition relies on his ability to evaluate the market's visual field: "I have a good eye, when I see something of good quality, I know it immediately." <sup>[18]</sup>

The items Cissé acquires are for his own collection and for resale to the network of clients he has built up over the years. A related aspect of his clothing business involves modifying garments before reselling them. He may alter the size of a sweatshirt or decorate the back of a jogging suit and then sell it to a friend in Dakar. In addition to local sales, he also sends jackets, handbags, shirts, and jeans to a business partner in Toulouse who resells them there and sends him the profits. The fluid back and forth movement of these items does not just symbolically loop the processes of global commerce; it refuses the logic of their presumed direction from origin (North) to destination (South). Read through the lens of postcolonial theory, to sell back to the North items originating in the North inverts paradigms of commerce and power traceable to the export practices of Senegal's colonial era peanut economy. <sup>[19]</sup> Returning items to the North by resale also summarizes the ironies of manufacture, utility and disposal: it declares the impossibility of truly casting off items by discarding them while interrogating the nuances among used, useful, usable and useless. Cissé's example illustrates powerfully that the creative economy capitalizes on the materials and cross-flow of global networks just as it emblematizes reinvention as part of everyday practice at Marché Colobane.



[video] : Clothing collector Vieux Cissé modifies clothing he finds at Colobane and sends it to Toulouse for resale. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

In reference to the designer attire for fashion devotees, the utility value of certain propositions in the second hand market is easily extrapolated. Yet, other used objects in the market seem so broken-down, so depleted, or so worn that one wonders what *could* become of them? How could they be useful and into what could they be remade or refigured? Marché Colobane's many tables dedicated to the amassment and sale of *pièces detachées* (spare parts) provide a compelling point of consideration. From a distance, tables piled high with bits and pieces evoke the poignant "heap of broken images" in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. Some are recognizable spare parts while others are unidentifiable fragments from unknown wholes. Wherever the objects originated, and however they are arranged in the market stall, they are available for remaking, reincorporation, or the reframing of their utility. A "part" by its very definition is constituent; its purpose is to figure into something larger than itself. A place designated for the amassment of "parts" further represents a space from which to consider possibilities for reincorporation into new visual and material arrangements.



[video] : Tools and spare parts found at Marché Colobane used to repurpose objects. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

In Marché Colobane, the availability of "parts" is accompanied by the expertise required to compose them into new arrangements. There never seems to be a shortage of "parts" or nimble-fingered individuals, especially young men travelling to Dakar from Senegal's interior who have not pursued formal education, but who could replace a computer part or fix a cell phone.



[video] : Artist Abdoulaye Ndoye talks about cell phone repairers in Marché Colobane. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

Many have commented on the orientation to repair and rework salvaged materials in Dakar specifically and Africa more generally as signifying a collective ethos about making due (*se débrouiller*) by using resources inventively. <sup>[20]</sup> Colobane resident Aminata Diop remarked, "You know God has given the Senegalese people something, whatever we can see we can fix. Whatever we see broken we can make it work again." <sup>[21]</sup> Similarly, scholarship has interpreted this orientation as deriving from necessity as well as creativity. Art critic and philosopher Simon Njami writes, "in African cities, the art of survival, of wangling, is a daily necessity that is found at every rung of the social ladder. Nothing is thrown away. Everything is transformable. Everything is transformed." <sup>[22]</sup>



[video] : Colobane Resident Aminata Diop speaks of the practices of remaking and reinventing ostensibly broken objects. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

I propose an alternative interpretation that downplays survival or necessity as the definitive modality in the reinvention of objects. Instead, I suggest that it privileges a particular type of visuality — a disposition to looking, prospecting, and speculating — that proceeds from recognition of the market's dense and accommodating visual register. Like the emphasis on the repurposing of objects and materials that is embedded in the imaginary around Marché Colobane, the market imaginary engages objects as elements insertable into new compositions, arrangements, and possibilities. The market's visual register generates imagination about the *potential* for objects to figure materially and visually into many other propositions and purposes. It pictures the viability of many arrangements of second hand goods, reinforcing that objects can become materially and visually relevant in new combinations. Not only does sight give way to conjecture about the objects' genealogies and former uses, but more grippingly, speculation about their futures. Again, what *could* become of them and how might they participate in their remaking? The processes of visual engagement allow us to imagine them into a new context. Following the premise that sight is a catalyst for imagination and creativity, the market's visual power resides in its capacity to generate images that consolidate an imaginary about many potential inclusions, circulations, and reinventions.

This theorization about visuality, speculation, and reinvention is resonant for artists working across media in Dakar. However, it reverberates especially for artists associated with *récupération*, a category of expressive production relying upon culled or salvaged materials. These include discarded metal fragments, washed out driftwood, shattered windshield glass, plastic caps, used clothing or shoes, dolls' heads, and reinforced iron bar (rebar) from buildings in a city that seems to be under continuous construction.



Doll heads in Ndary Lo's studio, 2010.



Plastic caps in Ndary Lo's studio, 2010.

Not only does *récupération* exemplify the significance of visual processes in the creative remaking of second hand materials and ostensibly depleted objects. It entails a distinctive form of visual speculation where art making is not premised on the availability of a blank canvas or block of stone. Rather, artists prospect and gather materials. They disentangle and re-imagine materials already implicated in a set of relationships. As with the analysis of Marché Colobane's visual and social register, artists' engagement with objects in the market or urban environment more generally is not a passive act of taking in or gaining inspiration. Instead, it involves prospection and speculation that facilitates a subsequent act — that of imagination or more specifically, imagining objects otherwise. Consideration of work by the many artists working with *récupération* including Ndary Lo or Jean Marie Bruce suggests that because the materials (dolls' heads, bottle caps, windshield glass, used clothing and shoes) often originate elsewhere, their remaking further signifies the reinvention of objects with international social biographies into locally meaningful propositions. For many artists, the materials associated with *récupération* are further associated with the discourses central to their work. For Ndary Lo, one of the first artists in Dakar to develop a practice around *récupération*, the materials relate to the economic and environmental issues engaged by his work.



[video] : Artist Ndary Lo talks about the environmental significance of using discarded objects to make art. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 



[video] : Artist Cheikh Ndiaye explains his choice of materials from Marché Colobane in his installation, *Going Places*. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

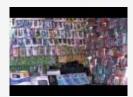
Artists who do not identify with *récupération* also gather impressions, images, materials and ideas in Dakar's markets. As the title suggests, the primary theme in Cheikh Ndiaye's *Going Places* (2010) is mobility, especially the movement

of Senegalese to Europe. Markets in general and Marché Colobane specifically offer a point of departure for interpreting this work materially and conceptually. The materials in this mixed media installation are used shoes from Marché Colobane and scaffolding rods visible at the construction sites populating the citys built environment.



[video] : Dakar's skyline with mosque and construction in progress. Video Clip from Market Imaginary.

When asked to account for the market's place in the artistic imagination, several artists speak of the significance of the market's arrangements of objects in relation to the spatial concerns of installation art.



[video] : Artist Abdoulaye Ndoye describes the installations in Marché Colobane. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

At Marché Colobane, piles of materials or bundles of items for sale appear at every turn, and in the art market as at Marché Colobane, everyone has something to sell, something through which to transact whether commercially, socially or visually. Both the order and disorder of the market's visual register offer much to behold just as its many arrangements and configurations afford many places and positions from which to see. The market's visual and spatial arrangements are also the subjects of Cheikh Ndiaye's mixed media on canvas, *Enfranchissement of Competing Voices*.



Fally Sene Sow, Kon bi / Tali bi (Rue-Route), 2009, mixed media collage on glass.



Jacques Daniel Ly, Colobane at Night, 2011, photograph.

That the market's visual register generates many ways of seeing is indicated by the range of work dealing with Marché Colobane as its subject. Take for instance, Jacky Ly's color photographs of the highway entrance to Colobane or Fally Sene Sow's mixed media on glass scenes of the neighborhood and market Sow grew up across the street from Marché Colobane and his pictures are based on stories he composes or collects about the market and neighborhood. His pictorial work originates from the interplay of narrative and visual spheres, as he describes in his working process: "I just go outside, I look, I take my notebook, I write a story and I make a picture about the story." <sup>[23]</sup> The titles he gives his works, *Mbedd-Burr* (The Street Belongs to God) or *Marsé Feug-Jaay* (Used Clothing Market) are further evocative of the place he portrays. Like Marché Colobane, Sow's works seem gritty, mostly because of the rough, yet skillful, collage of paper fragments cut from discarded magazines, cloth scraps, and aluminum foil wrappers from chewing gum left behind in the market.



[video] : Artist Fally Sene Sow talks about sourcing Colobane's environment for his art. Video Clip from *Market Imaginary.* 

Many artists source the market's visual register. At the same time, these artists engage the work of reinvention afforded by the visual processes of looking and speculating. Even in depictions of a common subject, such as the visual and social life of Colobane's market and neighborhood, specific articulations of a subject and the modes of rendering them are not just contingent on an artist's stylistic orientation or personal vision. They are also the product of the processes of reinvention implicit in all projects of re-presentation.

Just as inclusion in the market promises eventual circulation, opportunities for mobility occasion opportunities for reinvention. This assertion is integral to conceptualizing Dakar's market imaginary and to analysis of both Marché Colobane and Dakars art market. Art objects take on new lives by moving into new interpretative contexts or exhibitionary fields. Likewise, artists re-present images from the field of everyday visual experience. They often attribute new directions in their work to having travelled because the visual engagement with new places, people, and pictures expands their imaginations and creative practices. In the case of Marché Colobane, objects comprising the second hand market evoke prospects for remaking. From here, seemingly depleted objects, materials, and "parts" without a context can figure into new compositions or purposes. In both Marché Colobane and Dakars art market, the market's visual, social, and commercial spaces produce and consolidate a notional space — a vast imaginary where mobility and the reinvention that accompanies it are imaged as eminently possible.

### Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to many friends and colleagues who have supported my research over several years and across many miles. The individuals named in this essay were especially generous with their time and insights. Several friends and colleagues have shaped this essay's conceptualization. They include Pap Ba, Aissata Barry, Cheikh Diallo, Fanta Diamanka, Viyé Diba, Jacky Ly, Cheikh Ndiaye, Abdoulaye Ndoye, Ndary Lo, El Hadji Sarr, Ousmane Sene, Fally Sene Sow and El Hadji Sy. My gratitude goes especially to Jacky Ly and Christian Faur for their collaboration in creating *Market Imaginary* (Distributed by Indiana University Press, 2012), the 53-minute documentary film on Marché Colobane which also provided the video for this essay. My research was generously funded by the Fulbright Hays Faculty Research Abroad Fellowship (2009-2010) while my work on *Market Imaginary* (2012) was completed with support from the Denison University Research Foundation (2011, 2012) and the GLCA New Directions Initiative made possible by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (2011, 2012). My thanks also to Rosalind Fredericks and Mamadou Diouf for hosting the conference The Art of Citizenship at Columbia University where I presented an earlier version of this essay that was published as "La Mobilité, Le Pouvoir de Visualisation, et L'Imaginaire du Marché à Dakar," in Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks, eds. *Les Arts de la Citoyenneté au Sénégal: Espaces Contestés et Civilites Urbaines* (Éditions Karthala: 2013).

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# Citation

Grabski, Joanna. "Dakar's Market Imaginary: Mobility, Visuality, and the Creative Economy of Second Chances." *CSSAAME Borderlines*, 25 March 2014. http://cssaamejournal.org/borderlines/dakars-market-imaginary.

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Notes:

- This essay brings together material from two projects, my documentary film on Marché Colobane, entitled Market Imaginary, and a book manuscript on Dakar's art scene. The essay is not meant to offer balanced discussion of each market. The essay draws more heavily on new research for my film while the material on the art market factors into my book manuscript.
- 2. Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture" and Mitchell, What Do Pictures Want?. 🔁
- 3. Ndeye Gueye, interview with author, January 6, 2011. **2**
- 4. Brewer and Trentmann, *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Miller (ed.), *Materiality;* and Myers (ed.), *The Empire of Things*. ⊇
- 5. Appadurai (ed.), The Social Life of Things. 2
- 6. Vieux Cissé, interview with author, January 7, 2011. 🔁
- 7. An important body of scholarship dealing with the transnational, cosmopolitan presence of Mouride traders references issues around lateral mobility and network formation. See especially Brändli, "Leben zwischen Hier und Dort: Das transnationale Netzwerk der Muriden zwischen Senegal und Italien"; Buggenhagen, *Muslim*

*Families in Global Senegal*; Diouf, "The Senegalese Murid Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism"; Ross, "Globalizing Touba: Expatriate Disciples in the World City Network"; and Stoller, "Spaces, Places, and Fields: The Politics of West African Trading in New York City's Informal Economy."

- 8. 2Pac Colobane, interview with author, January 5, 2011. **2**
- 9. Latour, Reassembling the Social. 2
- 10. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus. **2**
- 11. Ousmane Sene, interview with author, November 10, 2010. **2**
- 12. Incidents in the 1980s at Colobane's food and drink establishments involving violent robbery and homicide further contributed to the reputation. **P**
- 13. At the time of this writing, the government of Senegal has plans to relocate Dakar's main train station to Colobane. Personal communication with El Hadji Sarr, July 30, 2011. 2
- 14. The *Petit Train Bleu* is further emblematic of Colobane's creative economy of second chances in form and history. The *Petit Train Bleu* began in the early 1990s with carriages salvaged and refurbished from the scrap yard of the train company, *Chemin de fer du Senegal*. ⊇
- 15. Jacky Ly, conversation with author, January 6, 2011. 2
- 16. 2Pac Colobane, interview with author, January 5, 2011. **2**
- 17. Interview with author, July 26, 2001. 🔁
- 18. Vieux Cissé, interview with author, January 7, 2011. 2
- 19. Shohat and Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture" and Richard, "In [Them] We Will Find Very Desirable Tributaries for Our Commerce." ⊇
- 20. Roberts, 'The Ironies of System D"; Njami quoted in Subiros, *Africas,* pg 92; and Hug, "Antonio Olé and the New Objet Trouvé in Africa." **2**
- 21. Aminata Diop, interview with author, January 4, 2011. 🔁
- 22. Njami quoted in Subiros, 92. **2**
- 23. Fally Sene Sow, interview with author, Dakar, 29 March 2010. **2**



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ISSN: 1089-201X e-ISSN: 1548-226X

CSSAAME Borderlines ISSN : 2373-101X

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