

# Play and the profane in Samson Kambalu's *Holy balls, Holyballism* and *(Bookworm) The fall of Man*

Massa Lemu

## Introduction

In his performances, artist Samson Kambalu takes over, upturns, and redeploys the signs of power to refashion the self. These self-refashioning acts are particularly marked in Kambalu's performance titled *Holy Balls* (2000), which involves kicking footballs which were created by plastering Malawian rag and plastic street soccer balls with pages of the King James Version of the Bible; his quasi-spiritualism of *Holyballism*, which is a doctrinal syncretic mixture of *Gule Wamkulu* philosophy of the Chewa, the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten's sun-worshipping monotheism, the creed of Moses the prophet, Jesus Christ, and Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*; and the performance-cum-installation *(Bookworm) The Fall of Man* (2003), featuring a ritual performance in which apples are eaten, surrounded by concrete poetry written on gallery walls. In these artworks, the artist adopts the transgressive performative elements of the *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade, Duchampian irreverence, and play and the profane to confront his legacy in the form of language, patriarchy, Christianity, and the hegemony of Dr. Kamuzu Banda, founder of the Malawi nation, in processes of subjectification.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I use Jacques Lacan's conception of the symbolic father, which constitutes all conventions that bind one to society, Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque subversion of power by the powerless, and Julia Kristeva's abject and figure of "the deject" as "the one who strays" (as a "deviser of territories, languages, works") to illuminate how Kambalu takes over and upturns the signs of power, and purges ("exercise and exorcise," in the artist's own words) the dark traces of his legacy. In short, with the performances *Holy Balls*, *Holyballism* and *(Bookworm) The Fall of Man*, Kambalu subverts his own religious, cultural, and sociopolitical legacy in order to refashion the self.

## *Holy Balls* as Subversive Play

Kambalu created the *Holy Balls* by plastering Malawian rag and plastic soccer balls with pages of the King James Version of the Bible (Fig. 1). In Malawi, rag and plastic balls

are a street kid's alternative to the factory-made, mostly unaffordable soccer balls from toyshops. These balls are made by dexterously tying or heating together discarded rags or the plastic packaging of such necessities as salt, sugar, or flour.

I had the opportunity to kick the *Holy Balls* when they were exhibited for the first time at Chancellor College in Zomba, Malawi, in a show titled *Holy Ball Exercises and Exorcisms* (2000). The *Holy Balls* were exhibited as part of an installation that included draped tables with candles; the whole ensemble exuded an aura of the somber Christian ritual of Holy Communion. The exhibition caused a stir in a religious environment where such a sacrilegious act of tearing the Bible was unheard of. However, while the Bible had been sacred to Kambalu, who was a Catholic, tearing it was a deeply therapeutic play.<sup>2</sup> It was an important cathartic ritual for him. With the *Holy Balls*, Kambalu was looking at the displacement of religious emotions in his life and the modern secular society at large. He used religion as a language to communicate his experiences of being displaced by modernity.<sup>3</sup> He writes:

*I no longer believe in an objective God, and so Holy Ball for me is an act of suppressing inner demons inherited from my Christian background. It's an act of preventing me from becoming another Charles Manson. By approaching the Holy Bible on a purely cerebral level, I hope that I can keep my destructive religious emotions at bay.*<sup>4</sup>

Kambalu invited his audience to “exorcise and exercise the demons” in the kicking of the *Holy Balls* (the phrase is Kambalu's official artist's statement, as well as one of the many “Holyballist” slogans). It is important to note that, within Kambalu's cultural heritage, the kind of exorcism offered in the *Holy Balls* can be traced to the Nyau masquerade's *Gule Wamkulu* dance, which is cathartic and exorcistic. Kambalu has referred to the masks used in the performances of the Nyau secret society, called the *Gule Wamkulu* (“Big Dance”), as an important source of inspiration in his work.<sup>5</sup> The Nyau is an exclusively male club that was formed to address men's issues pertaining to power relations and marginalization in traditional Chewa societies of Malawi. The *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade dance is a Nyau forum for addressing these grievances. The *Gule Wamkulu* mask wearer is transformed into an animal or spiritual being and, transported into this boundless realm, he has license to ribaldry, obscenity, and even violence to express himself, to speak out. Thus through the “carnavalesque” (I elaborate on this term below), the mask wearer is by definition beyond good and bad; with the law in his hands, he ultimately becomes the law itself.<sup>6</sup> It is with this background that, with the *Holy Balls*, Kambalu became a mask wearer who does not respect boundaries or rules.

*Holy Balls* is more than catharsis. As a *détournement* of holy text, it is a kick in the nuts of male hegemony.<sup>7</sup> The metaphorical allusion to “sacred” male genitalia in the title of the work is apt. Michel Foucault has written that Western culture elected the written word as the primary site of meaning. God introduced meaning into the world not through the spoken word, but through the written word.

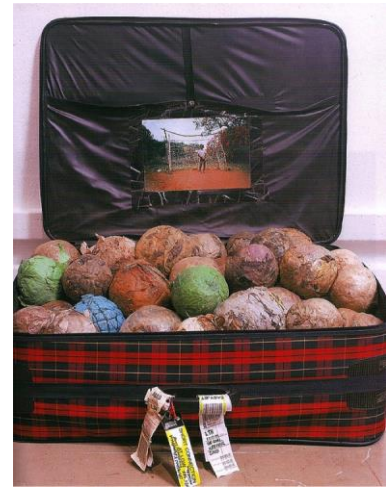


Fig. 1 Samson Kambalu, *Goal Keeper* (2000), suitcase, plastic balls, photograph

Manuscripts or texts became the primary location of religious and, in particular, Christian “truths.” The spoken word was stripped of all its powers; it became the female part of language.<sup>8</sup> But the problematic history of the church is also well-documented. Christianity was used to defend the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, and other atrocities. Therefore, by inviting us to kick balls plastered with biblical pages, Kambalu wryly but vigorously questions religious truth, law, and authority. In other words, Kambalu ventures to undermine what Foucault refers to as the “male principle” of language and writing: the “active intellect,” which has been designated sole proprietor of the truth.<sup>9</sup> Subjected to deconstruction and rupture—physically in the act of tearing and kicking, and metaphorically in the act of psychological engagement—biblical text undergoes a critical reassessment to the point where it no longer holds the standard of truth or power. Tearing holy text to paste it onto soccer balls is a profanation of the sacred aiming to challenge established Truth. It is this *détournement* of holy text, ironic *Gule Wamkulu* derision, and also what I call Duchampian irreverence (for example, “L.H.O.O.Q.’s” profanity) towards signs of power that makes the *Holy Balls* effective critique.

However, I stress that the carnivalesque features as an element for deriding sacred cows, not for its own sake, but as part of the process of self-redemption and reconstitution. By kicking holy text, language is stripped of its vested powers and, to borrow from Foucault, it “is no longer the figuration of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Recently, Kambalu has repeatedly referred to the diverse manifestations of his critical practice as Nyau; for example, he calls his videos Nyau Cinema, drawing from, and connecting his art to the *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade practices, and to emphasize the carnivalesque element in his art. According to Bakhtin, the medieval carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.<sup>11</sup>

As noted above, the temporary liberation from truth and the suspension of hierarchies in carnival parallel the boundless practices of the *Gule Wamkulu* from which Kambalu draws his subversive energies. In the carnivalesque, notes Bakhtin, “We find... a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ (*a l’envers*), of the ‘turnabout,’ of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.”<sup>12</sup> It is in the same spirit that the hitherto voiceless Nyau mask wearers are temporarily transported into a boundless realm, and whence have license to use ribaldry, obscenity, or violence to speak out, to upturn, in order to make a point.

## Exorcising the Symbol

A psychoanalytical reading of Kambalu’s exorcism sheds more light on his work. In his art, Kambalu has revealed that, before he could relate to the rest of the world, he had to start with himself, his childhood, and the people who contributed

greatly in his life, in order to define his present life.<sup>13</sup> This involved a critical reassessment of his language, patriarchy, religion, and all the elements that order his society. This reevaluation of the authority of language, text, the male principle, and the law as the figuration of the world culminated in the artist's revolt and bitter denunciation of the father. According to Kambalu, his father was the overbearing Jive Talker who used to torture his children with late night drunken philosophical lectures.<sup>14</sup> Kambalu's Oedipal relationship with the Jive Talker broke down when he recognized him as the source of familial affliction. For example, he suspected his father of infecting his mother with the HIV virus, and denounced him as the object of shame and guilt—the "abject father."

In psychoanalytic terms, the abject is a psychic threat to the constitution and identity of the subject. It is a threat that is external to, or different from the subject who must negotiate it often by repulsion in order to secure the self. Abjection indicates a loss of the distinction in meaning between self and other, or subject and object, which is expressed through revulsions, bodily fluids, filth etc. According to French psychoanalytic philosopher Julia Kristeva, the abject manifests as "dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the tolerable, the thinkable."<sup>15</sup> Kristeva states, "I experience abjection only if another has settled in place and stead of what will be me, and through such possession causes me to be."<sup>16</sup> The abject threatens to annihilate the identity of the subject, but abjection is a form of self-preservation that protects identity. I situate Kambalu's practices in the processes of abjection. Kambalu's revolt is against the father who is his "abject other." He is separating himself from the "loathsome" in the father to protect himself from the shameful. Of course, Kristeva stresses that however loathsome, the abject is internal to the subject and therefore cannot be completely cast aside or expelled. When the father's illness reaches a critical level of dementia, Kambalu derides him with verbal insults. The Jive Talker, who used to moan in English, switches to his mother tongue, a Chichewa dialect, when the terminal illness finally takes its toll. Even the authoritarian father cannot completely escape its maternal other, which resurfaces in the form of the "mother tongue" at the deathbed.<sup>17</sup> However, in a paradoxical twist that combines adoration and parody, the abjection of Kambalu senior only furthers the son's desire to forsake his native tongue, and to vow to outdo his senior, to moan only in English at his deathbed.<sup>18</sup> Kambalu proceeds to make nude sketches of the hapless Jive Talker sprawled on the floor, using drawing as a form of exorcism to contend with his paternal other. Thus, the Jive Talker degrades into "dad on his back with limbs held up like a dead insect, dad folded up in two like a fetus, with *hairy balls* appearing at the back of his thighs."<sup>19</sup> Kambalu has to purge the dark traces of his legacy through disparate acts of sketching, derision, and laughter in order to free himself and become a sovereign. As Achille Mbembe has conveniently remarked about the self-reconstituting acts of the postcolonial subject in crisis:

*Laughter and derision give way to an imaginary well-being; they allow for distance between the subject*

*who laughs and the object of mockery. The division thus realized is precisely what permits the laughing subject to regain possession of self and to wear the mask—that is, to become a stranger to this “thing” (la chose) that exercises domination—and then to deride torture, murder and all forms of wretchedness.<sup>20</sup>*

It is through acts of derision and mockery of the father as a symbol of power that Kambalu seeks to redeem himself. But in the father, the symbol carries more signification. It characterizes all that structures and molds being in society. In Lacanian structuralist terms, Kambalu reassesses the “symbolic order” or the “figure of the law” (i.e., of language, paternal law and culture, which dictates and controls his being). According to Lacan, the symbolic are psychic elements that are structured like language, in contrast to those formed as images, which belong to the psychic realm he calls “the imaginary.”<sup>21</sup> In the psychosexual development of the individual, the symbolic order is a linguistic stage that succeeds the pre-oedipal and pre-linguistic stage characterized by extra-verbal energies and drives (which Kristeva calls the semiotic).<sup>22</sup> Lacan’s famous pronouncement, “man thus speaks, but it is because the symbol has made him man,” summarizes his theory of the centrality of language in subject formation.<sup>23</sup> The symbol that is conscious and articulate in language is contrasted to, but exists with, the unconscious drives. It consists of language laws that structure our being represented in the name of the father.<sup>24</sup> As Lacan writes regarding the symbol and subject formation in psychoanalysis, “The resources of psychoanalysis are those of speech to the extent that it endows a person’s activity with meaning; its domain is that of concrete discourse as field of the subject’s transindividual reality....”<sup>25</sup> According to Lacan, the subject is formed through language when it enters the symbolic realm. Separated from the mother and thus emerging from the plenitude of what Kristeva terms the *chora* (i.e., a maternal receptacle of energies; the individual needs language to communicate in order to fulfill its desires and needs).<sup>26</sup> *Holy Balls* is a reassessment of this symbolic that structured Kambalu’s identity formation. In the *Holy Balls* performance, the psychic energies and drives manifest as the exorcistic physical tearing and kicking of the holy text-bedecked balls, but it also manifests in the humor, wit, and rapturous laughter that accompanies these acts. A reassessment of language through performative and other text-based acts, such as described above, therefore forms a departure point for Kambalu’s fundamental reconstitution of the self.

### The Exile as a “Deject”

Kambalu has continued to purge the dark traces of his legacy since he departed Africa. In *The Jive Talker*, also variably titled *How to get a British Passport*, Kambalu denounces his plagued native Malawi. He calls Malawi a godforsaken country, “where the devil landed when he fell,” describing it as a “colon,” as “the asshole of the world.”<sup>27</sup> The apt description of “colon” not only captures the abject and grotesque status of the impoverished country, but also plays with and connects the country to its dark history as a British colony. In Bakhtin’s language, the grotesque

degrades a subject or object to the “bodily lower stratum” in order for regeneration.<sup>28</sup> To escape the abject, the grotesque Kambalu exiles himself to Europe. Thus, in the same vein, in order to redeem himself, he only has to become what Kristeva describes as a “deject who constantly places himself, situates himself, strays.”<sup>29</sup> According to Kristeva, the deject “is one by whom the abject exists. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines... constantly question his solidarity and impel him to start afresh.”<sup>30</sup> However tentatively, Kambalu strays to be saved. He has to be a deject to embark on a journey of self-redemption. He rejects his native language and country, and relocates to England to try to start anew.

While at the Thami Mnyele residency in Amsterdam in 2000, Kambalu noticed the ubiquity of black trash bags that contained the waste matter of the city. Borrowing the title of a 1989 Ziggy Marley song, he responded to this visual phenomenon by randomly attaching a handwritten “Black my Story” label to the trash bags in different locales around the city. This small but loaded gesture constituted not only an intervention, but also an index of his abjection upon encountering this symbol of capitalist consumption and expulsion. Kambalu observed that, being his first trip out of Africa, his experiences in Europe sparked a peculiar consciousness of the color of his skin. According to Kambalu, the labeled trash bags were both optimistic and pessimistic in the sense that, while they repelled him, the garbage containers also attracted and drove him to reconsider his racial legacy as a black man (a psychic crisis of identity which was particularly deepened by the racially tense atmosphere of a European metropolis). Thus, in “Black my Story,” the bags represented the abject other that was also internal to his being. As a story of the quest for salvation, the labeled garbage bags were more than an attempt to come to terms with his new identity.<sup>31</sup> With the trash bags, Kambalu set forth to flush out the baggage of racism, of the old myths and prejudices against the black body—of his story. The garbage represented the abject in his life, a “defilement he thrust aside in order to live.”<sup>32</sup>

It needs mentioning that, with the *Holy Balls*, Kambalu not only appropriates the text or the language of power in order to flush out dark narratives, he endeavors to replace old meaning with his own meaning, or his own “truth,” through a performative praxis that interweaves and interlocks with his art and his life in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque manner. This desire to unseat old Truth and replace it with personal meaning is exemplified in his spirituality of *Holyballism*. According to Kambalu, *Holyballism* is a simultaneous celebration of the death of God and a return to Akhenaten’s monotheism through creative self-expenditure and the making and destruction of the *Holy Ball* through exercises and exorcisms:

*The Holyballist vision is the complete return of the sun as the paramount provider of life and its meaning, the day when all holy books of the world shall be made into holy balls exercising and exorcising people into everlasting happiness.*<sup>33</sup>

In his autobiography, Kambalu writes that he formulated the basic tenets of *Holyballism* while playing in playmate Arthur's bunker.<sup>34</sup> It is in this secluded heretic's play haven, a hallowed spot as it were, that the process of assembling the *Holy Balls* and the fundamental ideologies of Kambalu's sub-religion are laid out by the artist, revealing how *Holyballism* is indebted to the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten's sun worship, Moses the prophet, Christ, and Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (*Holyballism* sees the Nietzschean death in the belief of the concept of a Christian God as the opportunity for an individual's revival). Entrenched in play and ribaldry, but also in solemn Catholic ritual, Holyballist philosophy is formulated against the background of Arthur's murmuring of the recipe for baking bread—an apt reference to the Catholic theology of transubstantiation of bread as Christ's body or "the word" (even Holyballist philosophy is hatched from this sacramental "Word"); and the "da! da!" of the onomatopoeic pun of Dada, as the ball bounces on the walls of Arthur's "catacomb." By mixing solemn ritual and play, *Holy Balls* constitutes the blasphemous and the profane. Yet, according to Kambalu, blasphemy is the foundation of religion.<sup>35</sup> Just as the *Gule Wamkulu* mask wearer becomes the law de facto, with the *Holy Balls* and *Holyballism*, Kambalu elevates himself to high priesthood at the altars of spiritual authority. Since *Holyballism* is Kambalu's new religion, elaborating his own ideology and beliefs, albeit culled from various established creeds, a new personal cult is the metaphysical outcome of the reconstitution of a personal spiritual legacy.

### *The Fall of Man*

Kambalu has continued to present the *Holy Balls* in various exhibition contexts as part of other performances and installations. One such example is a performance-cum-installation titled (*Bookworm*) *The Fall of Man* (Fig. 2), which was presented at the Museum De Paviljoens in Almere, the Netherlands, in 2003. The installation consisted of selected text from Genesis 3, the chapter about the Fall of Man, written in three vertical columns—in concrete poetry form—and in alphabetical order on walls painted in black, red, and green, the colors of the Malawian flag. On the floor were the *Holy Balls* and more than 2,000 apples, which the visitor was invited to pick up and eat in a form of participatory ritual. Also accompanying the installation was a framed photo of the barefoot artist clad in a suit, standing regally in front of a huge bookshelf and holding a fly-whisk.

The fly-whisk and the bookshelf in *Bookworm* allude to the former fly-whisk-toting Malawian dictator, Dr. Kamuzu Banda, a voracious reader (who was, in his thirty-year rule, referred to by Malawians as Father and Founder of the nation and Life President of Malawi). A lifetime learner, Banda kept a huge library in his presidential palace and built a grammar school, called the Kamuzu Academy, for the brightest Malawian students to study in an environment modeled after Eton College in England. Kambalu himself studied at this school, modeling his life on Banda's British lifestyle. Banda was one of a number of third-world dictators who were supported by the West because of their capitalist



Fig. 2 Samson Kambalu (left) eating an apple and carrying a fly-whisk with patrons viewing (*Bookworm*) *The Fall of Man* (2003).

affiliation. Like a number of other totalitarian regimes of his era, his authoritarian government fell in 1994, following the end of the Cold War. It can be said, therefore, that Kambalu critiques capitalism through Banda—a symbol of neo-colonization. According to Kambalu, in a dramatic loss of trust in language, the senile and vanquished Banda—the ultimate progressive African—moaned to his death bed throes not in the Queen’s English, the language of authority he had adopted to sustain his myth as a figure of power, but in Chichewa, his mother tongue, a language he had long abandoned, which, however, was internal to his being and which he could therefore not completely expel. Thus, in Banda parody, Kambalu wore a British suit and carried a fly-whisk at the opening of the show in Almere. This parody is intensified in the barefoot portrait mentioned above, which accentuates the emptiness, vulnerability, and banality of power in the post-colony.<sup>36</sup>

*Bookworm* is also an allusion to Kambalu’s father, the Jive Talker, who was a voracious reader and philosopher, and whose drunken lectures and library, called the Diptych, played a vital role in fomenting the intellectual and artistic growth of Kambalu junior. The Diptych introduced the artist to a wide range of Western literature at a very early age. *Bookworm*, however, extends Kambalu’s subversive acts beyond the realm of the familial and the paternal. While its critique of the myths of power is manifested in its *détournement* of the imagery of Kambalu’s father and of Banda, the installation can also be read as a metaphor for the decline of humanity in general. By inviting the visitor to pick up an apple and eat it, Kambalu assumes the role of devil incarnate, inviting humankind to reenact its own Fall, a fate that was sealed in the Garden of Eden. But, by eating the apple, Kambalu implicates himself in this universal carnivalesque laughter; an act of self-mockery and derision of the futility of life.<sup>37</sup> *Bookworm* is therefore a ritual that sanctions our ultimate decline. However, it is not really the fall of humankind in general that Kambalu emphasizes. The vertical print of the Biblical text written on the gallery walls alludes to the eventual waning and final collapse of power. It is a visual and performative metaphor of the biblical expression, “the writing is on the wall,” which derives from the story in the book of Daniel (chapter 5). In this story, King Belshazzar saw in a vision a hand writing on the palace wall in a cryptic language, which only Daniel the prophet could translate and which, as it turned out, spelled out God’s wrath and foretold Belshazzar’s demise. Once again, through this Biblical tale we read in *Bookworm* the decline of male hegemony in the symbol—represented by language/text in the form of concrete poetry on the walls—which Kambalu reenacts in an apple-eating ritual. By parenthetically titling the work “bookworm,” the artist seems to cleverly suggest that he is himself a worm ruminating through text. Also, considered within the context of the problematic history of religion, of church sanctioned capitalism, imperialism, and colonization, Kambalu suggests that it is the Word from a “Holy Book” that is infested and rotten. Seen in this light, *Bookworm* is a precise jab at authority, a summary of Kambalu’s disarticulation and rearticulation of culture, of morality and law, and of power.



## The Profane

Perhaps, at this point, it is proper to locate Kambalu's practice, the *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade of the Nyau, and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque all within what Julia Kristeva terms the semiotic. As we have seen, Kristeva posits the semiotic as the extra-linguistic aspect of the psyche that exists with, but always threatens to shatter, the symbolic, particularly in speech acts. Broadly, within the subject and beyond, in society, and in art and literature, these archaic, "lowly," and extra-linguistic drives which constitute the semiotic offer the channels for transgression of socio-symbolic prohibitions. Writing about this transgressive potential of the semiotic, Kristeva notes:

*What we call signifiante, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists—the subject and his institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring and de-structuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then—and only then—can it be jouissance and revolution.<sup>38</sup>*

The *Holy Balls* and *Holyballism*, *Gule Wamkulu*, and the carnival are all different forms of "signifiante," which originate from these primal, unbounded, and heterogeneous psychic drives that gather underneath and erupt against the symbolic order.<sup>39</sup> According to Kristeva, these archaic eruptions result in the subject's "jouissance," or happiness. Therein lies their significance to the processes of the constitution of the subject, and also beyond, in the political realm. Bakhtin, who situates the carnivalesque within the context of the medieval Church, has emphasized the philosophical significance of the carnival in this solemn feudal tradition, particularly its potential for revival and renewal.<sup>40</sup> Thus speaks Bakhtin of the significance of carnival's obscene language and humor:

*Abusive expressions are not homogeneous in origin: they had various functions in primitive communication and had in most cases the character of magic and incantations. But we are especially interested in the language which mocks and insults the deity and which was part of the ancient comic cults. These abuses were ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying them at the same time revived and renewed.<sup>41</sup>*

It is this understanding of the carnivalesque's capacity for revival and renewal that informs Mbembe when he comments on the subjectivizing power of laughter and derision. The *Gule Wamkulu* mask erupts and disrupts the social order within Chewa society. The cathartic effects of Nyau licentiousness are also well documented.<sup>42</sup> In the same vein, Kambalu's performances seek to upset, upturn, or subvert his linguistic, paternal, religious, and political legacy, not for its own sake, but for personal renewal. It is in this regard that I categorize as the profane the semiotic archaic and extra-verbal drives which always threaten to

rupture the symbol, the rapturous laughter of the carnivalesque, Nyau ribaldry, and Kambalu's irreverence.

## Conclusion

Kambalu's current website features a video of patrons dribbling the *Holy Balls* in an empty gallery in London, where the artist now resides (Fig. 3). It also features images of the new version of the factory-made soccer balls, complete with a user's guide on "How to Make a Holy Ball," Holyballist hand signs, flags, some Holyballist t-shirts, and other paraphernalia that commercialize *Holyballism*.<sup>43</sup> Not to confine Kambalu's work in a monolithic reading that spatially and temporally grounds it in the past, but considering the narrative of colonial and capitalist exploitation in Kambalu's country of birth, the original *Holy Balls* offer crucial strata of significations plastered in layers of consumer detritus of Scripture, salt, sugar, and flour—strata that are missing in the new version. Also, in the space of the exhibition, *Holy Ball Exercises and Exorcisms*, as well as in the larger installation of *Bookworm*, the *Holy Balls* assert their presence more as performative objects rather than as collectable aesthetic items. However, by exorcism through the *holy balls*, Kambalu taps the radical potential of the psychic energies of the semiotic and the carnivalesque, with its logic of the "inside out," and of the "turnabout" (to borrow from Bakhtin), to upset and subvert power.

In summary, Samson Kambalu is an iconoclast who profanes the sacred cows of his legacy in order to refashion the self. In the *Holy Balls*, in the quasi-religion of *Holyballism*, and also in (*Bookworm*) *The Fall of Man*, Kambalu upturns, subverts, and redeploys the signs and symbols of power to reconceptualize the self. As has been demonstrated through Lacan's symbolic, Kristeva's abject, and Bakhtin's carnivalesque, it is only by exercising and exorcising the demons of his dark legacy that Kambalu is able to embark in subjectification.

**Massa Lemu** is a Malawian artist and writer currently studying for a PhD in Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.



Fig. 3 Patrons kicking the *Holy Balls* at Rivington Place, London (2008).

1. Paul Rabinow, ed., *Michel Foucault: The Foucault Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 11. In the Foucaultian concept of objectification, the individual is politically determined, categorized, and given a social and a personal identity from the outside. Objectification forces include the family, religion, and capitalism. Subjectification is the opposite process, whereby "a human being turns him-herself into a subject." Subjectification "takes place through a variety of operations on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct."
2. Samson Kambalu, in discussion with the author, 2008.
3. Steve Chimombo, "To Exercise and Exorcise: Samson Kambalu – A Profile," in *Black My Story*, ed. Macha Roesink (Almere, Museum De Paviljoens, 2003), 96.
4. Accessed August 20, 2015, <http://www.vmcaa.nl/vm/magazine/001/artikel002>.
5. Samson Kambalu, in discussion with the author, 2009.

6. See Samson Kambalu, *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 237.
7. *Détournement*, the French word for “deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion... hijacking,” is an aesthetic practice invented by the Situationists in the 1950s, which involves the appropriation, refashioning and redeployment of signs and symbols of power, such as logos, trademarks, adverts, and official portraits, for new significations (Hal Foster et al, 2011).
8. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973), 38–39.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.
12. Ibid., 11.
13. Steve Chimombo, “To Exercise and Exorcise: Samson Kambalu – A Profile,” 93.
14. See Kambalu, *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis*.
15. Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on the Abject* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.
16. Ibid., 10.
17. Thus, Kristeva's abject can be connected to Bakhtin's grotesque when he writes that “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.... Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.” See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19–21.
18. Kambalu, *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis*, 265.
19. Ibid., 267 (my italics).
20. Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman, “Figures of the subject in times of crisis,” *Public Culture* 7 (1995): 352.
21. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock Publication, 1977).
22. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
23. Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 257.
26. Noelle MacAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
27. Kambalu, *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis*,
28. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 23.
29. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on the Abject*, 8.
30. Ibid.
31. Chimombo, “To Exercise and Exorcise: Samson Kambalu – A Profile,” 94.
32. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on the Abject*, 8.
33. Kambalu, *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis* , 137.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. To borrow from Mbembe, 2001.
37. See Bakhtin 1984.
38. Julia Kristeva 1984, 17.
39. “Signifiante” is a term Kristeva coined to refer “to the work performed in language (through the heterogeneous articulation of semiotic and symbolic dispositions) that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say”. See Kristeva (1980, p18.) quoted in MacAfee, *Julia Kristeva*, 38.
40. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 12.

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41. Ibid., 16.
  42. For example, see Deborah Kaspin, "Chewa Visions and Revisions of Power: Transformations of the Nyau Dance in Central Malawi," in *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).
  43. Accessed August 20, 2015,  
<http://www.Holyballism.com/Holyballism.html>