

Reflexive Essay

## **Mapping Collaborators Dance. An Artistic Research Inquiry into the Decolonial Potentialities of the Surrealist Archive**

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# Mapping Collaborators Dance. An Artistic Research Inquiry into the Decolonial Potentialities of the Surrealist Archive

Moses März

*Collaborators Dance* is a large-scale hand-drawn experimental mapping of collaborative constellations loosely associated with surrealism. The research is inspired by the spirit of solidarity pervading this historical movement, leading to many of its protagonists deliberately crossing some of the big categories of difference that they inherited from colonial modernity, such as race, nationality, gender, and class, as well as professional categories such as 'artist,' 'academic,' and 'activist.' The map, presented in this contribution alongside an essay contextualizing it, seeks to offer an image for this kind of intersectional collaboration. Instead of celebrating the genius of individual artists, it addresses the question of who had to work with whom for their work to take up radically transformative potentials. In addition to providing insight into the main considerations, questions, and intentions driving the artistic research process that informed the drawing of the map, the essay provides an example for the way in which the map can be read from some distance and from up close, as an image and as a text. The latter approach is performed via an engagement with a section of the map that is dedicated to the friendship between two poets, Léon-Gontran Damas and Robert Desnos, who are considered to be key figures in avant-garde and Négritude history respectively. The specific qualities of artistic research and of experimental cartography in engaging with this archive are discussed on that basis.

**Keywords:** artistic research, avant-garde, black radical tradition, collaboration, mapping, surrealism

## Prelude to Writing Together

In the autumn of 2023, the curatorial team of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin invited me to contribute a series of maps to a project entitled *Surreal Continuum—Revisiting, Remapping, Reimagining Surrealism* that resulted in a literary event on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2025. In our initial conversations around the project, Dzekashu MacViban, the HKW Curator for Literature and Orature Practices, expressed his interest in countering prevailing perceptions of surrealism as a male, French, and European art movement. This view effectively marginalized a long list of visual and verbal artists who did not fit into these categories or who were in close conversation with the surrealist movement without being in direct contact with the circle around André Breton. Breton published *Le manifeste du surréalisme* in

1924 (Breton 1969) and over time became the movement's chief ideologue. My collaboration with the HKW team on the *Surreal Continuum* project resulted in an installation of seven large-scale hand-drawn maps that were shown in the HKW Sylvia Wynter foyer from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Since I am not a trained art historian, but a scholar interested in African and Caribbean anticolonial intellectual traditions from a political theoretical perspective, my interest in surrealism may not appear self-evident. What initially attracted me to this project was that it would allow me to weave together several strands of my research and combine it with my practice as an artistic mapmaker and editor of print publications. In terms of existing research trajectories, the enquiry into the surrealist archive allowed me to expand on the series of five experimental mappings that I had produced following Saskia Köbschall and Natasha A. Kelly's invitation to contribute to the exhibition *Expressionism Here and Now! The Horn Collection in Dortmund*, which opened at Museum Ostwall in October 2023 (März 2024a). During this research, I learned about the colonial entanglements of some canonical German expressionist painters who were part of the artist group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), which was formed in Dresden in 1905. Although the artists of *Die Brücke* set out to distance themselves from the aesthetic and lifestyle norms of the bourgeoisie and the modern industrial society of Imperial Germany by turning their attention towards 'foreign cultures' and 'primitive art,' they remained locked inside a colonial exotic imaginary, where non-Europeans tended to be portrayed in an objectified, romanticized, and sexualized manner (Kelly 2022). Moreover, idealized visions of a 'pure' and 'primordial' natural world were associated with women in a way that reproduced sexist tropes of fixed gender roles, female passivity, and innocence (Köbschall 2019). Thus, collaborative practices in a German expressionist context in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century meant, in my view, a group of middle-class men working together to foster their own art careers by disrupting Wilhelminian social and aesthetic norms, before they eventually re-integrated into the existing social order. In the case of Emil Nolde this went as far as making advances to key figures in the Nazi regime (Aagesen et al. 2021). Against this background, I was curious to find out how collaborative practices among surrealists differed from this earlier avant-garde movement?

A second strand informing my interest in surrealist histories was an ongoing study of the poetic and political practice of the Martinican poet, philosopher, and novelist Édouard Glissant. In Glissant's oeuvre, painters and writers like Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, and Agustín Cárdenas, whom art historians associate with the global reach of surrealism (d'Allessandro and Gale 2022), feature prominently without being discussed as surrealists, but in terms of their engagement with their respective Caribbean and American landscapes, as well as their visions of the whole-world, or *Tout-Monde*, in Glissant's (1997) terms. After having studied Glissant's role in the anticolonial Caribbean and African intellectual tradition, the *Surreal Continuum* project gave me an opportunity to look more closely at the avant-garde networks of visual and verbal artists with whom Glissant had been in conversation in Paris

in the early 1950s. Leaving aside Glissant's own critique of Breton's brand of surrealism as suffering from a tendency of '*européocentrisme*' (Glissant 1981: 429), I wanted to find out through which networks he, for example, had met the Austrian-Mexican painter and theorist Wolfgang Paalen, who had illustrated Glissant's volume of poetry *La terre inquiète* in 1955 and who had played an important role in the Paris Surrealist exhibition in 1938 before moving to Mexico with his partner Alice Rahon (Neufert 2015; Norby 2021).

A third, more personal and practice-oriented strand of my interest in the *Surreal Continuum* project was related to the tradition of politically committed publishing projects in which I have been engaged since 2014, when I joined the editorial team of the *Chimurenga Chronic*, a Panafrican literary magazine based in Cape Town, South Africa. The collaborative practice of working as part of an editorial team—where people with complementary skills meet to work towards a shared goal—informed my decision to launch, together with Philipp Hege in 2018, a publication project of my own, entitled *Mittel und Zweck* (MUZ). In several MUZ projects, we have been searching for an intellectual tradition to which we could link the editorial and artistic practices we are developing, practices that appear to us as being equally informed by the European avant-garde (Emmanuel 2017) and by writers, artists, and musicians considered to be part of the Black radical tradition (Robinson 2021). Where do these intellectual traditions overlap? How could their entanglements and exchanges be shown? And, in a more immediate sense, to what extent are the print publications produced at the intersection of surrealism, anticolonialism, and communism related to our own writing and publishing practices? The *Surreal Continuum* project presented itself to me as an opportunity to formulate a response to these questions. In addition to a shared affinity to printmaking, the surrealist movement also provided important points of connection with my practice of experimental mapmaking.<sup>2</sup> This practice essentially consists of translating my own reading notes from academic and literary texts into lines, images, symbols, and quotations (März 2024b: 117). The map *Le monde au temps des surréalistes* (Éluard 1929), which is considered to be one of the predecessors of contemporary counter-cartography (kollektiv orangotango 2019: 13), is just one among several instances where surrealists broke with established ways of writing and sharing knowledge to work against imperialist and Eurocentric representations of the world. When I chose the title *Where the Maps Come From* for the publication accompanying the installation, I had this diverse confluence of traditions and artistic practices in mind (März 2025).

### **Surrealist Spirits of Solidarity**

The book *Black, Brown, & Beige—Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, edited by Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley (2009), provides a geographically ordered anthology of a tradition of surrealism that is explicitly non-Eurocentric and anticolonial in orientation, and planetary

in scope. It opens up the concept of surrealism in a way that allowed me to connect my own interests and commitments to the discourse produced around it. Rosemont and Kelley (2009) frame surrealism not as an art style or an ideology but as 'a spontaneous association, based on elective affinities' (p. 1), 'a community of ethical views,' whose 'spirit of solidarity is its essence' (p. 3). Its political positioning on the far left led to a situation when 'surrealism's self-declared enemies also tended to be supporters of colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, and other forms of chauvinism, racism, and reaction' (Rosemont and Kelley 2009: 14).

Thus, at the onset of my research, I was less interested in engaging with the aesthetic innovations brought about by surrealist art than in the commitment to break with the idea of an autonomous social sphere of 'art' and to turn art into an everyday living practice instead (Emmanuel 2017: 30). It was this socio-politically committed perception of the artist or the poet that, in my view, had turned the term 'surrealist' into a rallying term that allowed for artists and activists to work together on specific issues, such as the exhibition *La vérité sur les colonies* (The Truth about the Colonies), which countered the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931 (Egger 2023). In my readings, the project was variably attributed to surrealist (Egger 2023) or Black diasporic activists in Paris (Edwards 2003: 373). The surrealist sensibility to the invisible, such as dreams or spiritual forces, and its resistance to fascism and colonialism provided a common ground for its adherents to connect to artists and political activists across national, linguistic, and continental boundaries. In that sense, it struck me as reminiscent of the role played by the term 'decolonial' in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Similar to 'decolonial' initiatives, it seems to me less productive to discuss the virtue of 'surrealism' in abstract conceptual terms than to consider the concrete practices, interventions, and collaborations to which it gave rise. The term 'surrealist' seems to have offered a shared language to develop a critique of the European imperial project as well as a strategy to create alternative communities of resistance.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the predominant male, white, and European focus of art-historical scholarship, a series of publications and exhibitions have been dedicated to balancing this one-sided perspective on surrealism. In addition to *Black, Beige, & Brown*, one could point out the volumes *Surrealist Women* (Rosemont 1998) and *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (D'Alessandro and Gale 2021) in this regard. While these works are committed to the opening up of the category of surrealism, they also inadvertently maintain some of the main categories of difference at play in art-historical research. In my view, this categorical approach contradicts the boundary-crossing, queer, or transversal energy that permeated the movement. Among the many cases that come to mind are Toyen's insistence on using the gender neutral version of her surname (Görge-Lammers et al. 2021), Ted Joans's (1970) claim that the Beat Poet Jack Kerouac was both 'black and white,' and the fact that Aimé and Suzanne Césaire's revue *Tropiques* operated in France and in the French-speaking Caribbean at the same time (Edwards 2003: 194). While Rosemont and Kelley's (2009) work was thus an important entry point in the way that

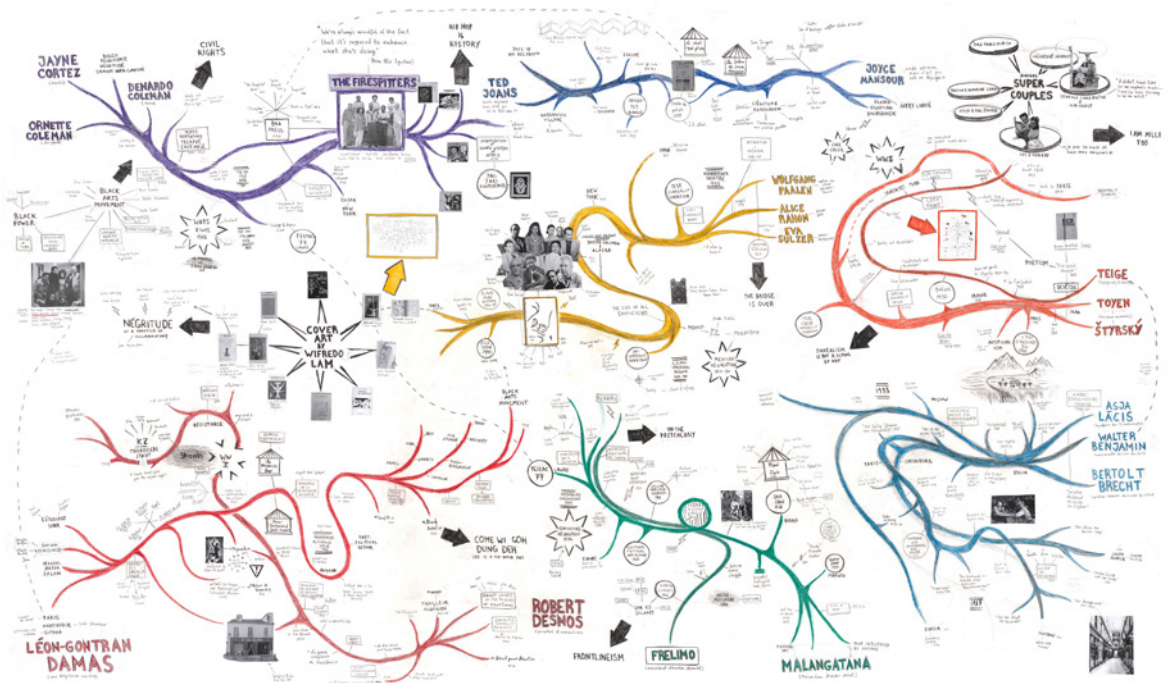
it frames Afrosurrealism as a 'virtual community of thought assembled by and through this medium, a poetics of relation' (Eburne 2022: 153), I was also aware that, in the process of mapping, it would be important to focus on movements cutting across the various sub-groupings associated with surrealism.

A focus on collaborative practices provides just such a transversal lens. Since the research on *Surreal Continuum* coincided with the beginning of my work in the Research Unit Collaborations at the University of Potsdam<sup>4</sup>—an interdisciplinary and trans-academic project aimed at researching emergent as well as persistent forms of the social and the political—I decided that one of the first maps I would produce for the HKW project would investigate intersectional collaborations that were in some way related to surrealism. I did not set out with a clear-cut definition of what I would consider as a collaborative practice worth studying. I perceived the research process to be explorative in the sense that it might intuitively lead it me to a better understanding of the kinds of collaborations I might be interested in further investigating in the context of the Research Unit. A general curiosity driving my engagement with the research material was the question of *who had to work with whom* for their work to take up transformative potentials? Transformative could mean that they may have created new artistic forms or had an impact on the smaller or larger communities to which they were committed. Transformative could also mean that their work still circulates and is discussed in the contemporary moment. Instead of focusing on some of the main figures of the movement, I also chose to focus on constellations that were in some way connected to figures that had appeared in previous maps I made and were less well-known in canonical surrealist scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

An important implication of this overall focus on collaborative constellations is that, at a basic level, it brings about a shift in attention away from celebrating the genius of individual artists and towards appreciating the group dynamics inherent in creative work. Instead of remaining within the paradigm of 'influence'—which, for example, plays an important role in discussions of surrealism's influence on the Négritude movement (Edwards 2009: 33)—a collaborative perspective on the surrealist archive puts a stronger focus on moments of conversation and exchange, a process of reciprocity. A mantra dear to Édouard Glissant (2005) says: 'I can change in exchange with one another, without denaturing or losing myself.'<sup>6</sup>

### What the Map Shows from a Bit of Distance

The following is a description of the overall constellation shown by *Collaborators Dance* (see Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> Each of the colorful rivers or nerve-like structures on the map refer to a particular collaborative constellation. The names of the individuals involved are indicated at the root-like beginnings of each structure. The choice for this kind of organically swinging or meandering shapes to visualize human movement through space and time comes from a




desire to move away from Western conceptions of flat space and linear time. Instead of the predominant idea that human beings can be shown as dots on a map, this map suggests that the trajectories of human beings may also be visualized as rivers flowing into one another, thereby troubling a sense of singular subjectivity that is expressed in statements such as ‘one’s work or his work or my work’ (Moten and El-Hadi 2008, original emphases). In the course of the different tributaries flowing into one another, it becomes hard to tell who is behind what work of art. The notion of showing human beings like rivers is also expressed by Catherine Malabou (2012):

‘In the usual order of things, lives run their course like rivers. The changes and metamorphoses of a life due to vagaries and difficulties, or simply the natural unfolding of circumstance, appear as the marks and wrinkles of a continuous, almost logical, process of fulfillment that leads ultimately to death’ (p. 1).

The changes in the direction of the differently colored shapes are not arbitrary but respond to pieces of biographical information written along the waves. In some cases, the twists and turns refer to a change in location, to different degrees of intensity, and at times they measure the changing degrees of proximity and distance between the actors of a particular collaborative constellation—as in a dance choreography to which the title alludes. The drawing thus mixes different modes of mapmaking, where the importance of geography, or the metaphorical ‘territory,’ is replaced with other indicators that matter.

Figure 1. Moses März, *Collaborators Dance*, 2025. © All rights reserved, courtesy of the author.

 [Click here](#) to see the image in high resolution



## What the Map Shows from Up Close

Since a detailed description of each constellation on *Collaborators Dance* is beyond the scope of this article, I want to zoom in briefly on an exemplary constellation, namely the one between Léon-Gontran Damas and Robert Desnos, drawn in red crayon in the bottom left section of the map. This is meant to provide a better understanding of some of the dynamics shown by the individual shapes and to give some insight into the kind of research materials on which the map draws.

I was aware of the friendship between Damas (1912–1978), who hailed from French Guyana, and the French-Jewish poet Desnos from my earlier research into the tradition of Black Study in the Francophone world as part of a Chimurenga library installation in 2021 (Chimurenga 2021). As part of the exhibition, I produced a diagram on the basis of Damas's biography (Dumas 1999) (see Figure). When I learned about Desnos's reputation as a 'prophet of surrealism' according to Breton (Adès 2017), and read in *Black, Brown, & Beige* that Damas had said 'If I have become the man that I am, I owe it to surrealism' (Rosemont and Kelley 2009: 128), my curiosity to revisit this friendship was sparked. How were the figures of Damas and Desnos, important as they were to two different intellectual movements—Afro-Diasporic and Jewish-French poetic traditions respectively—connected? When exactly did they meet? How did they work together? How did they 'change in exchange' with one another, and what image could show the directions of their respective poetic-political projects?

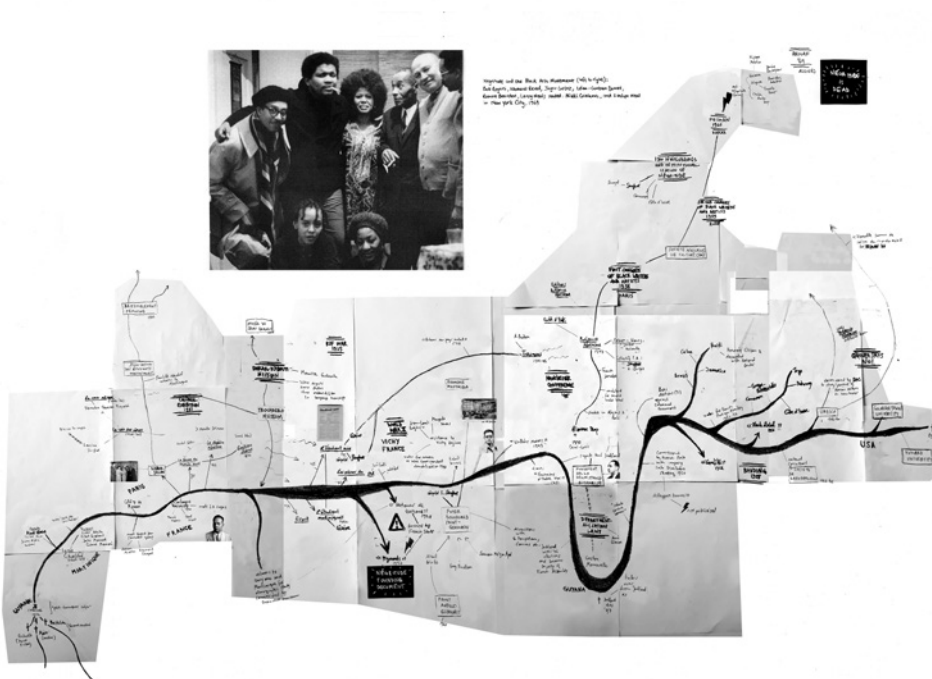



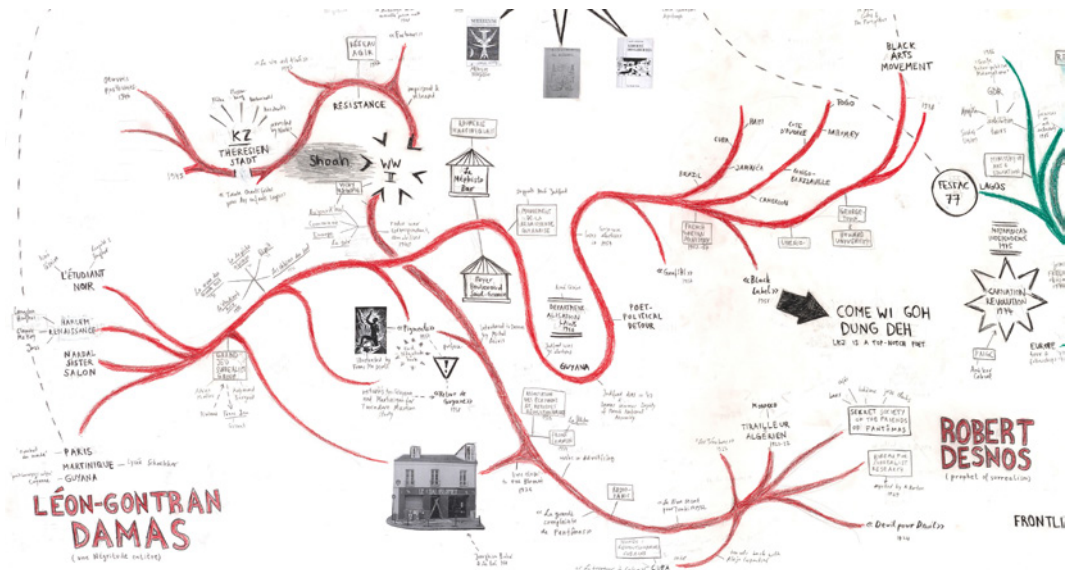
Figure 2. Moses März, *Je suis Damas n\*\*\*\* de personne!*, 2021. © All rights reserved, courtesy of the artist.

 [Click here](#) to see the image in high resolution



For a response to this question, the fact that Desnos broke with Breton's brand of surrealism in 1930 and that Damas never officially joined the movement did not matter as much as the fact that they were both part of a 'community of ethical views' and shared sensibilities to which Rosemont and Kelley (2009: 3) referred with the words of the Czech painter Toyen as effectively tying together anticolonial and antifascist struggles in the early 1930s.

My intuition that here was an interesting story to map was confirmed by Kathleen Gyssels's (2016) work *Damas et Desnos: Franchisseurs de lignes*. Based on Gyssels's research, a first intersection, which the map shows at the bottom center of the red shapes, is an image of *Le Bal Blomet*—formerly known as *Le bal nègre* and made famous by Josephine Baker's performances (see Figure 3). The image of this night club highlights Damas's and Desnos's shared affinity to jazz music, which led them to frequent some of the same night clubs. As Gyssels (2016) notes, Desnos moved close to *Le Bal Blomet* in 1926 and led a lifestyle similar to Damas. From the journal of Michel Leiris, who allegedly introduced the two to one another, I learned that 'Desnos's life was in many ways identical to that of Damas's, "boring," scattered between jazz evenings and love affairs, both of them yearning for the end of Western civilization'<sup>8</sup> (Gyssels 2016: 147).



Moving up from this first point, the one where the two red strands meet, the map shows how Desnos joined the *Front Commun* in 1934 and the *Associations des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires* in 1935. On the strand representing Damas's movement on the left, a set of newspapers for which he worked are outlined. A second connection revolves around Damas's 1937 volume of poetry *Pigments*, for which Desnos wrote a preface. *Pigments* is in fact regarded as the first book publication of the Négritude movement,

Figure 3. Moses März, detail of *Collaborators Dance*, 2025. © All rights reserved, courtesy of the artist.

Click [here](#) to see the image in high resolution

although it became overshadowed by the popularity of Césaire's (1939) *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, with a preface by André Breton. The decision for Desnos to write the preface to his friend's book might be seen as little more than a strategy for the book to reach a wider readership, owing to Desnos's larger reputation in the French surrealist circles. In contrast to such a one-sided dynamic between the older and the younger poet, the map does not create such a hierarchy between the two. Relying on the operative word 'friendship,' it assumes that the relationship between the two was not a one-way street or an instrumentalizing cooperation.

As Gyssels (2016: 141) notes, Damas's invisibility in accounts of Desnos's life is a troublesome omission that has contributed to the fact that there are no passages giving insight into Desnos's view of Damas apart from the preface to *Pigments*. Are there no records of Desnos speaking or writing about Damas, or did Desnos's biographers not consider Damas important enough to include him in their works? These questions point out an interesting limitation about mapping intimate relationships that underlie collaborative constellations and that tend to be difficult to trace in historical records. In any case, the event-driven research for *Collaborators Dance* did not allow for enough time to dig deeper. The map had to be content with a gesture working against a tendency to keep the stories of these two friends apart.

What Damas felt about Desnos is more widely known. He has been quoted as saying that 'Desnos influenced my career very very very much'<sup>9</sup> (Gyssels 2016: 141). Moreover, Gyssels (2016: 150–154) points out that Desnos left a stylistic imprint on Damas, who worked in radio and advertisement like his fellow poet Desnos to practice reaching a wider audience with his work. For the map, the fact that the two were involved in the same struggle linking the fight against colonialism to the battle against antisemitism and fascism is more important than detecting dynamics of influence. As Damas said, 'we were comrades in the struggle, side by side with the Jews, with the Czechoslovakians, and the antinazis...'<sup>10</sup> (Gyssels 2016: 141). This important commonality of their two life-works is what the intersection of their two red rivers indicates. While Damas's river eventually takes a turn to Guyana in the mid 1940s, where he becomes politically engaged for the socialist politician René Jadford ('poet-political detour'), and eventually moves to the US where he links up with the Black Arts movement in the 1970s, Desnos's line shows that he fights in the *résistance* against the Vichy Regime and is eventually arrested by the Nazis, leading to his murder in Theresienstadt. Following Desnos's passing, Damas dedicated the poem *Croyez-m'en* (Believe me) (1972: 85) to his friend.

### What the Map Shows from a Bit of Distance

The Damas-Desnos constellation is just one of seven intersecting rivers shown on the map. They are connected to one another by virtue of being placed on the same page, but also via dashed lines drawn in grey pencil (see Figure 1).

Many of these relations only came to me coincidentally, during the artistic research process. This speaks to a general characteristic of artistic research, which Qiu Zhijie (2020) has addressed as follows:

‘The beauty of drawing a map is to organize unexpected relationships, where more often than not abrupt connections play a role of integration. Things that I originally thought having no connections suddenly linked together, and the pleasure derived from that experience is the unique accidental sense of art’ (p. 28).

Moving up from the red constellation, the diagram touches on the collaborative practice between the visual artist Wifredo Lam and the many verbal artists to whom he contributed cover designs (see the ‘Cover Art by Wifredo Lam’ cluster on the map) (Khalifa 2025)—as if he was the designated graphic designer of a whole generation of surrealist and Afro-Caribbean poets and writers.

Shown in purple, and beginning on the top left, is the collaboration between the poet-activist Jayne Cortez with the saxophonist Ornette Coleman and the drummer Denardo Coleman. This mother-husband-son combo eventually took the form of a larger band with changing personnel, *The Firespitters*, whose LPs Cortez produced and distributed herself on the Bola Press label (Kingan 2014). The quote at the top of the map, ‘We’re always mindful of the fact that it’s supposed to enhance what she’s doing’ (Bern Nix), points out the shared objective of this musical collaboration (Kingan 2025: 152).

Shown in yellow in the center of the map are the merging rivers of Wolfgang Paalen, Alice Rahon, and Eva Sulzer, who together combined the skills of painting, poetry, theory, and photography, which provided the basis for Paalen’s publication project *Dyn*, based in Mexico City. The journal’s fourth and fifth issue, the ‘Amerindian issue,’ set out to engage seriously with indigenous art outside the paradigm of hierarchically structured modern art discourse. ‘This integration would be the negation of all exoticisms’ (Winter 2002: 160).

The green shapes at the bottom are showing the career of the Mozambican artist Valente Malangatana, who is among the most well-known African artists associated with surrealism, and his engagement with the anticolonial Mozambican liberation movement *Frelimo* (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) (Navarro 2003). This entanglement is interested in the very immediate form of politically committed art that is prevalent in Afro-Caribbean anticolonial struggles.

In contrast to the other strands, the blue rivers at the very top represent some of the main stops in the careers of Ted Joans and Joyce Mansour before their collectively authored brochure *Flying Pyrinha* (Joans and Mansour 1978), which was published by Jayne Cortez’s Bola Press—a connection shown by the dashed grey line running along the very top of the map.

On the right-hand side, the light-red strand represents the collaboration between the two Czech painters Toyen and Styrsky, and the

critic Karel Teige, whose ‘Poetism’ preceeded surrealism and who played an influential role in what became known as the ‘Surrealist International.’

The light blue strand at the bottom left traces the entanglements of the careers of Asja Lacin, Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht. While these figures may be associated with surrealism proper to an even lesser extent than the other collaborators, Benjamin’s essay *Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of European Intelligentsia* (1979) clearly outlines his interest in the movement. His friendship with Brecht involved a long-standing intellectual exchange that included a series of collaborative projects: a dynamic that was made possible when the theatre director Asja Lacin introduced Benjamin to Brecht (Wizisla 2017: 12–13). Lacin’s role in this light blue weaving is meant to show that sometimes, just creating a connection that allows for a creative constellation to emerge suffices to be a good collaborator. In the absence of written records that divulge detailed information about a particular group dynamic, the map suggests a way of recognizing these invisible traces, if only symbolically.

Just as the map does not suggest that any of these collaborations are ideal types that could stand alone to represent the surrealist spirit of solidarity, the *Collaborators Dance* map itself is also part of a larger archipelago of maps in which it plays a particular role. Moments where the map refers to other maps are indicated by the bold arrows. The yellow arrow, for instance, points to a map depicting intertextual references in Glissant’s work and entitled ‘A Beautiful Set of Differences’ (März 2025), and the red arrow is linked to a map entitled ‘Art Market Art’ (März 2024a), which traces the lines of argument in Karel Teige’s essay ‘The Marketplace of Art’ (2022).

Zooming out of two-dimensional sphere of the paper or the screen and returning to the process behind most of my cartographic work—in this case the invitation by the HKW team with which I began this article—it is important to indicate the inherently collaborative characteristics of this kind of mapmaking as a tool to visualize the overlaps and connections between different ‘geographies of knowledge’ (Zhijie 2020). In the sense that my maps mostly emerge out of shared interests and an exchange of research material, they are not primarily an expression of my personal preoccupations, but rather a combination or collage of the collective concerns, stories, and visions shaping the ‘community of ethical views’ of which I am part. The practice of writing about this kind of work for an academic journal, as I do here, is a deliberate decision to mediate between the artistic modes of research developed by this community, on the one hand, and established forms of disciplinary knowledge production, on the other one, in the hope of fostering more fruitful collaborations between them.

### Closing Considerations

I would like to close with some general comments about experimental mapmaking and the kind of artistic research method I have been describing, which is driven by a deliberate subjective, spontaneous, intuitive approach,

rather than a systematic, structured scientific inquiry that aims at being comprehensive (März 2025c).

A basic assumption driving artistic research is that there is something intrinsic to the artistic process—in my case the practice of drawing with pencil and crayons on large sheets of paper—that produces knowledge of a different kind than traditional disciplinary knowledge. This knowledge is not produced before the drawing process, or after it, but in the very process of drawing. Qiu Zhijie (2020), who has developed a mode of mapmaking close to the one discussed here, suggests that this knowledge is essentially a 'knowledge about relationship,' whereas 'knowledge that is divided into disciplines but not related is called science: the science of dividing disciplines' (p. 30). While I would contend that disciplinary knowledge also creates knowledge about relationships, I agree that the quality of these kinds of mappings largely depends on the strength of relations they render visible across the boundaries of established fields of disciplinary enquiry as well as their capacity to invite wider audiences to experience these relations. Finding the appropriate form to share a particular line of research is a crucial aspect of this work. It is thus closely related to the art of storytelling.

Not confining my interest in surrealism to academic discourses in art history, literary studies, or avant-garde studies, but reading across these fields and combining them with my own research interests allowed me to show a set of interpersonal relations running across the divisions of Surrealists, Afro-Surrealists, Women Surrealists, and Non-European Surrealists. On *Collaborators Dance*, a poet meets another poet, a singer meets a saxophonist, a photographer meets a dancer, a critic meets a playwright, and a painter joins a liberation movement. This largely confirms my intuition that this mode of cartography is well placed to trace relations across physical and imagined structures of segregation that are maintained by modern nation-state historiographies and the boundaries of academic disciplines. Since the genre of artistic research does not demand from the artist to be comprehensive, I instead chose to cover a lot of ground in a relatively short period of time by reading only a few sources on each of the figures that I wanted to bring into relation with one another. The economy of this kind of project-based artistic research, with a pre-set exhibition date in mind, does not allow for more in-depth research.

This might provoke a sense of dissatisfaction among readers who might bemoan the superficiality, factual inaccuracy, or reductiveness with which the life-works of the individuals shown on this map are represented. Of course, the map does not claim to do justice to the complexities and achievements of a person's life by drawing a curvy colored line of a few centimeters. Instead of claiming in-depth knowledge or expertise, producing this image, establishing this larger constellation was the main objective. In this sense 'the truth,' which the map offers, lies not as much in factual accuracy as in the bigger picture. *The map is the message*. Rather than formulating an authoritative statement on a certain subject, I perceive my maps to be more akin to research proposals, the opening up of a perspective on a field of

enquiry, visual essays-in-process instead of completed studies. By retracing lines representing different collective moves and movements made in the orbit of a surrealist universe, the map suggests that there might be a field of enquiry here, an archive that could be studied by those of us searching for decolonial practices and traditions of collaboration worth emulating across the intersections of art, activism, and scholarship.

1. The installation included a print publication (März 2025a) and an audio guide that can be accessed via the HKW website (März 2025b).
2. I am using the term 'mapping' to encompass a wide range of visualizations (Schaubilder). These include diagrams, charts and 'narrative structures' in the spirit of Mark Lombardi (Wegener 2012).
3. I am particularly thinking here of the Dekoloniale—Erinnerungskultur in der Stadt initiative in Berlin, with whom I have been collaborating during several events. URL: <https://www.dekoloniale.de/de> (22/06/2025).
4. Research-Unit Collaborations. URL: <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/research-unit-collaborations/> (19/09/2025).
5. Although I did not want to foreground the connection between André Breton and Aimé Césaire, or the dynamic between famous romantic couples such as Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, they still feature on the map around the clusters 'Négritude as a Practice of Collaboration' (middle left) and 'Surreal Super Couples' (top right).
6. 'Je peux changer, en échangeant avec l'autre, sans me perdre ni me dénaturer' (my translation).
7. I am referring here to a version of Collaborators Dance that was included in the Spring/Summer 2025 print program (Haus der Kulturen der Welt 2025: 8–9). The version differs from the one exhibited at HKW and the one included in the self-published print magazine (März 2025a). The maps are always slightly edited depending on the audience they are addressing.
8. 'sa vie est à maints égards identique à celle de Damas, "plate," éparpillée entre les soirées de jazz et les affaires amoureuses, tous deux voulant l'effondrement de la civilisation occidentale' (my translation).
9. 'Desnos a beaucoup beaucoup influencé ma carrière' (my translation).
10. 'nous avons été des combattants de lutte, aux cotés des Juifs, des Tchécoslovaques, des antinazis...' (my translation).

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