

THE HUMANITIES CENTER

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“Franco Luambo Makiadi's Universalism”

By

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English



In this paper, I take up the invocation of a cultural universal--that everyone should get together to "Stop AIDS!"--in Franco Luambo Makiadi's Afro-pop tour de force *Attention na Sida*, perhaps the most brilliant public service announcement ever made, a warning against AIDS that has been described as “the most intense 16 minutes 37 seconds ever recorded, and the most courageous.” Franco, who died in 1989, most likely of causes related to the disease, was widely known

as *le grand maître* of *rumba-soukous*, a cultural figure who achieved a scale of recognition comparable to that of the major actors in the postcolonial history of Congo/Zaire, from Kasavubu and Lumumba to Mobutu. Franco achieved this recognition by means of a popular art that began with a synthesis of local knowledge and imported idioms, defined a distinctive genre at a parallel moment to national liberation, was redefined in conditions of exile and emigration, and ended with a hybrid, global aesthetic articulated at the scale of a social discourse. Due to historical conditions of reception, Franco’s work is much less known to Americans than it should be, particularly in comparison to the Nigerian oppositional icon Fela, even while there is a consensus among historians of Afro-pop of the enormous scale of Franco’s influence. As a result of its form of cultural innovation, *Attention na Sida* both intends and realizes a poetics of universal address, written from a position of postcolonial displacement, that allows us to reassess the status of universals through the specifics of history, genre, and local knowledge.

Tuesday, October 31

12:30 - 1:30PM

2339 Faculty
 Administration Building

Barrett Watten is the author of *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Wesleyan University Press, 2003, recipient of the 2004 René Wellek Prize of the American Comparative Literature Association) and *Progress/Under Erasure* (Green Integer, 2004)

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