Slide 1: Introduction

I am glad to be here, at HLRS. I thank HLRS, and in particular Uwe Wössner, for being generous hosts.

This session takes place at the heart of one of the most powerful computing environments in Europe. The machines around us process billions of operations per second.

They simulate the climate, entire cities, and — not least of all — the cars for which Stuttgart is famous.

Slide 2: Asymmetry

And yet, the minerals that make this computation physically possible — cobalt, coltan — the ores at the heart of every circuit — are primarily extracted from the soil of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The ore travels to Europe. But technological and economic power does not make the return journey.

This asymmetry IS our subject today. I want to oppose to this logic of extraction a logic of reciprocity.

In a conference like "The Gate," which brings together arts and technology, we should ask a question that is both ancient and futuristic: can we, rather than simply consuming African resources, build a technology that genuinely integrates African perspectives and knowledge?

I call this "African Intelligence."

Slide 3: German- Zaire Satellite

This asymmetry is not new. In 1975, Stuttgart engineer Lutz Kayser founded OTRAG, the world's first private space company. Prohibited from launching in Germany, he found in Zaire — our present-day DRC — the ideal terrain.

In May 1977, a first modular rocket lifted off above the Congo Basin Forest. Africa became a space launch site.

The USSR, the United States and France grew alarmed by this audacity and forced the programme to a halt in 1979.

What interests me here is that for a precise instant, the Congo was no longer a periphery. The Congo had become a centre of geopolitical calculation, a unique place where land, minerals and the spatial future converged. **Back then, the asymmetry almost got reversed. But it was stopped — from the outside.**

Slide 4: Cerveau 2

I approach the possibility of such reversal of asymmetry through my work.

My painting Cerveau 2 proposes a mental cartography that opposes itself to colonial maps. Those maps deliberately presented the Kongo as an **empty space**; a productive lie, which allowed King Leopold II to legitimise the liquidation of our sovereignty.

To expose this asymmetry, I replaced oil paint with raw mineral pigments — malachite, cobalt, cassiterite, extracted from Congolese soil. This choice is not illustrative. **The material is the argument.** Minerals torn out under criminal conditions have become pigments of repair.

In Cerveau 2, the green patches of malachite are not decoration. They are agents — bearers of memory, of force, of the capacity to act.

I place them precisely where colonial power sought to impose the void, to prove that this void never existed.

This logic is not foreign to the science of complex systems. African knowledges function like dynamic systems — distributed, relational, capable of self-organisation.

Slide 5: African Knowledge Systems

African Intelligence designates ancient systems of knowledge, suppressed during the colonial period but never destroyed.

The evidence exists everywhere.

The Ishango bone, discovered in the DRC and dated to 20,000 years BCE, testifies to structured mathematical thinking among the oldest in the world. This is not a curiosity; it is a foundation.

Likewise, the Adinkra signs of the Akan people encode an entire symbolic logic in which each sign is simultaneously an image, a concept and a moral principle.

Together, they form complete knowledge systems.

Slide 6: Kikumbi

These systems are not only mathematical or visual — they are also ritual. **Ritual is our oldest form of transmission.**

The Kikumbi ritual of the Kongo Kingdom incorporates the initiation of a young girl into society.

She learns the relationship between her body and the earth.

She learns what her ancestors transmitted before her. I performed it at the Liverpool Biennial, to restore its place in the present.

This knowledge does not exist in a book. It exists in the relationship between the young girl, the women who accompany her, and the ritual moment that unites them. **Remove that context. The knowledge disappears.**

Slide 7: AI as Wunderkammer

It is here that the philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe addresses us with an essential warning: authentic African knowledge cannot be produced by remaining enclosed within the frameworks of the "colonial library" — that system which devalued our epistemologies while extracting our material wealth.

This library has a concrete historical image: the European cabinet of curiosities — the Wunderkammer. **Its sole gesture was a gesture of tearing out**. African objects were displayed far from their context, separated from the rituals and bodies that gave them life. They became nothing but exotic and sumptuous ornaments. **The link was severed, meaning disappeared.**

Modern AI systems fail on African languages for the same reason. It is not for lack of data — it is because they extract and decontextualise. An African word ingested by a large language model loses the ceremony, the voice, the tonality and the gesture that surrounded it.

The data server has become the new Wunderkammer: a storage space for fragments torn from their world.

Just as I refuse that our minerals should be mere raw materials, I refuse that our languages should be the raw data of the Western algorithmic industry.

I refuse this gesture of tearing out.

Slide 8: Living Atlas

To reverse this gesture, we are conceiving the Living Atlas of African Knowledges, a memory infrastructure that places relationships before objects.

This is not a static archive. It is a relational space that weaves together, among other things, oral histories, 3D modelling and urban maps.

It would include medicinal knowledge from the Mayombe Forest, ancient rituals such as the Kikumbi, and data on the ancient trade networks of the Congo.

In this collection, connections matter as much as objects.

This relational logic echoes the Mnemosyne Atlas of European art historian Aby Warburg: a large panel of images in which he assembled photographs, reproductions of artworks and maps. He arranged images by association and proximity rather than rigid classification. Warburg discovered the constellation.

African Intelligence, for its part, had never needed to discover it — it had never functioned any other way.

The ambition is concrete: to build this digital infrastructure — and that is precisely why we are here, with HLRS — but also to create a physical space in Africa, with the help of Professor Bamwene Solo, to root this work in our own soil.

Slide 9: CAVE

But before that, I wanted to experience it here, now, in this building. I am currently working right here, inside the CAVE, in collaboration with Uwe.

I am creating a fantastic forest of immersive mushrooms. Mushrooms are my symbols for reciprocity: they form vast underground mycelial networks, sharing nutrients to sustain life through invisible relationships.

Our horizon, our ultimate ambition, is to bring the computing power of the CAVE to the place where the resources come from: to Boma, in the DRC. This is an act of technological repatriation.

We will then present, with Uwe, what we have accomplished here in the CAVE. I will give a performance with him after the close of this session.

Slide 10: Politics

This project is not possible without political conditions. Africa generates the raw materials of the digital age, but it remains excluded from its governance. It is the product of decisions — colonial and post-colonial — that have always privileged extraction over local capacity.

The digital economy too often does nothing but reproduce the colonial structures of extraction.

The answer cannot be humanitarian. **Africa does not need to be saved.**

I**t needs the means of its own power.**

This means sovereign digital infrastructures on African soil: servers, data centres, and African universities capable of developing their own tools. In their own languages.

Slide 11: Serene Table

In a moment, you will be invited to take your place at the Serene Table. In my work, this table is a philosophical proposition: the absolute antithesis of the Berlin Conference of 1884, where European powers divided Africa without a single African present.

The Berlin table was a table of partition. **The Serene Table is a table of confluence.**

A space of encounter where different forms of knowledge — artistic, technological, ancestral — arrive as equals. The architecture of this conversation is, in itself, our conclusion.

Welcome to the Serene Table.