

ERGO

Journal Of Organizational Storytelling

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IKIRÉ JONES.

IKIRÉ JONES MARRIES AFRO-FUTURIST
STORYTELLING WITH EUROPEAN STYLE
TAILORING



bigSTORY™

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EDITORIAL

BY MIKE BONIFER



The Materiality Issue

Welcome to the inaugural issue of ERGO. The theme of this issue is what we call Materiality.

When we say material, what do we mean? Obviously, one thing we mean is stuff. Things. Substances. The blood and the fascia, the sweat and tears, the ties and nails and papers and plants and animals and minerals from which our environments are built, and sometimes imposed on us without any say on our part. This type of material is touchable. Tactile. It can feel good. It can hurt. It can reveal or conceal.

Storytellers mine their networks for a different kind of material: characters, scenarios, experiences and events they can commercialize, or make visible for some other purpose. To a journalist, a war presents a material-rich environment. To a comedian, a politician does. The storyteller generates this type of material through observation and intention.

Another meaning of material is what matters. Specifically what matters when, where and how? The quantum storytellers call this 'spacetime mattering.' Things matter differently in different contexts. What is germane, and available for processing when we need it?--in other words, 'material' to the situation in which we find ourselves? What matters to bodybuilders is muscle. What matters to bankers is money. The lives of the poor can be shaped by water. Religion matters to a lot of people. Their stories cannot be separated from their belief systems.

Blacksmiths refer to certain tools used in their smithing as 'ready-to-hand.' That means a tool is where it's needed, when it's needed, for the purpose it's needed. The connection between a piece of white-hot iron fresh from the fire, a proper hammer, and the smith's intentions toward the future of that piece of iron, is said to be material.

The new fashion brand Ikiré Jones blows up the concept of materiality and incorporates it into all aspects of the brand. Its cofounder and CEO, Walé Oyéjidé, creates a series of Afro-Futurist sci-fi stories, then he and team delve into those stories for design inspiration, guiding principles, and social relevance—which, in turn, are reflected in the product and brand.

I haven't worn anything Ikiré Jones yet (though I have my eye on that jacket from the Escape from New Lagos story) so this is me guessing: When a person dons an item of Ikiré Jones apparel, one isn't just donning a piece of tailored cloth. One is wearing one's connection to a story. Demonstrating one's place in the future, and what it will take to bring it about. One is wearing one's materiality.

A fashion advertisement featuring two men in profile, facing opposite directions. The man on the left has a short haircut and is wearing a red and black patterned suit jacket over a white shirt and a colorful patterned scarf. The man on the right has a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket with a vibrant, multi-colored pattern and a matching scarf. The background is dark and moody. The text 'IKIRÉ JONES.' is centered in white, bold, sans-serif font, with horizontal lines above and below the words.

IKIRÉ
JONES.

THE STORYTELLERS

IKIRÉ JONES IS THE ENDEAVOR OF
DESIGNER/AFROBEAT MUSICIAN/
ATTORNEY WALÉ OYÉJIDÉ, AND
MUSICIAN/BESPOKE TAILOR
SAM HUBLER.

**Walé Oyéjidé / Ikiré Jones.**

Walé Oyéjidé is the co-founder and CEO of Ikiré Jones, a fashion brand rising out of Philly. Once he was a disinterested employee of Banana Republic. Later, an indifferent dresser as a successful Philadelphia lawyer. His girlfriend challenged him to up his fashion game. He did. GQ named him one of their Five Best Dressed Men in 2010.

Imagination now on overdrive, he dreamed up a man living in West Africa in the year 2081. Named him Ikiré Jones. Wrote a series of sci-fi stories about him. Quit lawyering and designed what Ikiré Jones wore. Another beginning. A new game.

We talked with Walé about the material the Ikiré Jones brand is made of. You say cotton? We say that's only one thread of the story...

CULTURAL MATERIAL

This summer I found myself in Sao Paulo, Brazil, giving a lecture on my work. I'd never been to Brazil before. They have 16 different racial classifications in Brazil. For the people in the audience, it was novel and unaware for them to see an individual of African descent speaking to them about sophisticated storytelling in a way they would only expect to see from

somebody who didn't look like me.

Here are people who, because of the way the country's economy is set up, don't have a lot of examples of African-originated individuals who are doing things on a sophisticated business level.

They're seeing a guy who started from the bottom, made his own thing, and is traveling the world with his work, and is using his work to communicate stories about people of color. For them, it was way more powerful than somebody selling clothes, it was a living example of what many people there are still struggling to achieve. And that's something I did not foresee, or had no kind of designs on manifesting.

You can tell a small story that has tangible and powerful effects literally across the world. Your efforts in your backroom can become really important to people who grasp onto them and use them to propel their own lives forward.

NEW MATERIAL

I mine equity from what already exists.

Before I was a designer, I was a lawyer, before I was a lawyer, I was a musician. I was a guitarist and hip-hop producer. The story of hip-hop is kids in the inner city who didn't have

access would take their parents old records and sample the records and make something new. That was the way I started making music...and it's essentially the same way I make clothing. I oftentimes will mine from artwork from different parts of the world, and use these collage styles to tell new stories from old mediums. It's me taking old energy and making something new.

There are people like you and me who can visualize things. We can see things in our heads. And we are fortunate in that way. But a lot of people need to be led, in the sense that they need to see something before they can conceive that they can actually do it themselves.

By creating new work that features people of color in a classical sense, we then inspire a new generation of people of color to create work of their own. It perpetuates forward like that. Using what's been made in the past and recycling it into the future. And it goes on and on. And that's the quiet thing in what I'm doing.

CLOTH MATERIAL

A lot of what we use are African prints that are made either in Africa by artisans there, or they're printed in Europe for the African market. They tend to be interesting in that they're tactile—they're cottons—but they're printed,



Because we have had such a troubling past, if we can pre-write what's ahead of us, it will force us to align into that grid of what things are supposed to be like.

and each print carries with it some kind of social significance. What happens is that you're wearing these brightly colored clothings and designs that are very intricately made, but they also have quiet social significance to people who are aware of it.

It's not unlike in Europe, the Scottish have different patterns for their tartans representing different clans. Somebody who is not aware would just see a beautiful pattern. But if you take it back to the village where it's from, they'd go, "Oh yeah, I understand this is made by these certain people."

We're taking those patterns and introducing them, the West African side, to European-style tailoring. It's like what would happen if Ralph Lauren was born in Africa or something like that. I myself grew up in West Africa and I'm very much an American citizen. So I've been informed by where I grew up, and was raised from, just as we all are. Out of two different cultures, or several different cultures, you have a new identity that everybody can appreciate.

AFRICAN MATERIAL

It's becoming a common adage now, of telling one's own narrative so that nobody else does it for you. There's room for so much mis-interpretation. When you don't understand the culture, you're not going to know the nuances, and you get big open headlines which can fall in any possible direction. I guess the word is 'authentic' — not necessarily factual but true to the essence of what I know.

When you say the word 'Africa,' certain images come to mind. By and large they're not very positive. Those things you think of are absolutely there. They're absolutely true. They're a fraction of the pie. Of the pizza. You get a slice. There's so much more.

Nobody's a cowboy in a black or white hat. We're all in between, doing what we can. For me, it's the idea of pushing these small nar-

ratives that show different aspects of life and culture. These aren't necessarily bedtime happy stories. They're stories that are more full, and more rich, so that when you look at the things from the whole, you get a better understanding of a place that's very complicated.

FUTURE MATERIAL

'Afro-Futurism' is the term. It speaks to the idea of placing science fiction on the continent of Africa. This has been a neglected portion of the world where the future is concerned. People project stories about Africa into the future and it allows them to shape the world that they want to live in, rather than having these negative stereotypes that have been carried with us from the past for various reasons.

We now have a perception of what potential lies ahead, and with that potential, it affects what we're doing now.

Because we have had such a troubling past, if we can pre-write what's ahead of us, it will force us to align into that grid of what things are supposed to be like.





01



02

VISUAL DIARY

IKIRÉ JONES.

EACH PHOTO REPRESENTS A COLLECTION THAT HAS BEEN DERIVED FROM A THEME AND CORRESPONDING NARRATIVE.

01 SS16 "& Other Stories By Our Stolen Children"

The youngest of us were forcefully taken from our classrooms. Spirited away by ideologues who believed only in what they could wrench from the praying hands of people who sought peace. Elsewhere. When the virus swept through our town, it dragged us from the embraces of our mothers' arms, and into the sterile sadness of hospital wards that could not conceal us from the dark. Meanwhile, at the edges the Mediterranean, some of us were washed-up on the shores. Separated from homes that were miles across the desert. Separated from families that were miles beneath the waves.

02 FW14 "Of Saints & Savages"

To whom it may concern. This is a challenge to the zealously held belief that Africa is a monolithic village in need of perpetual saving. This is an open assault upon the delusions of those who cry endlessly of desolate stomachs and doorways darkened by disease. This is a public disavowing of all who think the cradle of civilization has nothing more to offer than unmolested raw materials and an army of open palms awaiting aid.



03

04



05

03 SS14 "Balotelli's Burden"

Named for the near-legendary Italian soccer player of Ghanaian descent, our Balotelli pop-over shirt is an homage to the many Africans who have emigrated to Europe in search of opportunity. Whether they be players of The Beautiful Game, or tourists of the beautiful streets, not all of them are welcomed with open arms. This garment is a sober reminder that there are still individuals who face mistreatment because of their hue and heritage. By combining soft-Italian tailoring with prints reminiscent of West Africa, the Balotelli bolsters the notion that beautiful things are born when we allow our cultures to boldly intertwine.

04 SS14 "The Untold Renaissance"

05 FW13 "Escape To New Lagos"

ERGO

IKIRÉ JONES.

NARRATIVE-BASED DESIGN

WHAT IS ERGO?

ERGO™ is bigSTORY's proprietary game structure. It stands for Environment / Roles / Guidelines / Objective. An ERGO™ is a story engine. It explores and expresses themes, creates focus at any scale, and generates positive outcomes that cannot be anticipated or predicted from the design of the game.



01 ENVIRONMENT

Africa, 2085

02 ROLES

Storyteller (Walé Oyejide)
Designer (Walé Oyejide)
Tailor (Sam Hubler)

03 GUIDELINES

- Storyteller mines cultural and historical equity to create Afro-Futurist sci-fi stories featuring the character Ikiré Jones
- Designer mines stories for materials (cloth, socio/cultural, narrative, geography, time, etc.)
- Storyteller uses materials to build out Ikiré Jones' brand
- Designer sketches Ikiré Jones' wardrobe inspired by and/or suited to the context of the stories
- Tailor produces Ikiré Jones originals in European style



04 OBJECTIVE

Florence Fashion Week, January 2016, generates \$1mm in international contracts.



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bigSTORY helps brands and agencies use organizational storytelling to drive revenue, customer advocacy and employee retention.

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