Art + Technology Lab Application
Nana Oforiatta-Ayim

● **Name of Project:**
Cultural Encyclopaedia

● **List 3 words that describe your proposal:**
Rethinking Historical Narratives

● **One sentence description of the work for which you are seeking support:**
The Cultural Encyclopaedia is a large-scale documentation and archive project dedicated to mapping the trajectories of cultural production in fifty-four volumes pertaining to fifty-four African nations, in order to facilitate the re/ordering of knowledge, narratives and representations from and about the African continent.

● **Full description of the proposed project (500 word maximum):**
The Cultural Encyclopaedia is a digital platform that will allow users to upload short summaries from theses, books and magazines on subject areas that cover the cultural foundations of each country and range in scope from the arts (visual arts, literature, theatre, film, music, fashion, design, architecture) to the social sciences (mathematics, science, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, politics and economics) to a digital archive and database. People will be able to upload and comment on each other's summaries through a myriad of categories comprising author, topic, place, collections etc. A selection of essays selected from the summaries by a group of editors will be published in volumes, starting with Ghana; one of the fifty-four African countries will be the focus each year.

The idea of the Cultural Encyclopaedia springs from the notion of countering the idea of development as catching up to or emulating the West. It is intended to provide a foundation for alternative narratives of development by generating, collecting and sharing knowledge, as well as by bringing the greatest minds from each country in Africa together in one place. The goal is to provide access, to collect and disseminate information about cultural knowledge and knowledge formation that can both affirm identities and narratives while also making critique, growth and collaboration more possible because of that information's availability and accessibility, to make a deepening of questions and answering them possible.

There has been a shift in the narrative of and on the African continent and its Diasporas. There is also still a kind of schism at play though, brought about by our hyper-accelerated entry into the capitalist sphere; by our idealistic, fated independence movements; and by the perhaps overstated, but also damaging cultural effects of the colonial encounter. W.E. B. DuBois spoke of a double consciousness when describing the African-American experience. Franz Fanon wrote of the alienated or divided state of the imperial subject. In a way, the Encyclopaedia wants to cast light on, perhaps heal, or rather bridge, this rupture of the twilight zone, of perception, of time, of the divided self. It wants to do this by building trajectories from past to present that gain in strength by being collated. It seeks to articulate hidden knowledge, similar to what Diderot attempted with his Encyclopedie and the effect it had on the Enlightenment, or what DuBois envisioned and Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates carried out with their Africana. The difference with this Encyclopaedia is first that it is not definitive.

The online version, in particular, is ever expanding and shifting. It is also trying in some sense to mirror in form, to validate, some of the classical ways of passing down history. Such as within Akan (Ghanaian) historical narrative structures,

which were not told from a single authoritative point of departure, but were more multi-layered, collaborative, open-ended, and therefore more spacious.

● **Please include a bio of the principal artist or collective who will be responsible for this project (this may be in the form of a CV):**
Nana Oforiatta Ayim was born and raised in Germany, England, and Ghana where she continues to live and work. In her work, she explores narratives of representation and becoming, as well as of inclusion and exclusion; and is particularly concerned with what are considered alternative historiographies. Her work creating spaces, films and text and research materials. She has been active in creating collective spaces to interrogate cultural narratives, particular those within and about Africa. For the Liverpool Biennial in 2002, she created a reinterpretation of a traditional Akan courtyard structure and invited Ghanaian sculptors, such as El Anatsui, painters, such as Owusu Ankomah, designers and musicians. In 2005, she inhabited the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine with a programme of events and talks around modes of healing connected with art in Africa, again inviting musicians and artists, such as Tracey Rose, Abdoulaye Konate and Zwelethu Methethwa. In 2005, she worked with Moroccan artist Hassan Hajjaj to create a mobile space, the Salon Afrique, at the Royal Festival Hall, to interrogate notions such as the idea of Africa in the future and Afrofuturism, and invited artists, such as The Otolith Group and Zina Saro-Wiwa, and musicians, such as Keziah Jones to participate. In 2007 and 2014, she interrogated and restaged historical performance forms from Ghana, such as the festival and the masquerade, for the Biennial of African Art. Most recently, she has sought to bring research on Ghana and other parts of Africa into an interactive forum, first in 2009 in The Atlas Project at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, where together with a research team, she traced the history of cultural production centres of seven African countries, inviting contemporary cultural centres from those countries to exhibit alongside the research; and finally in 2011, building a research centre within the Stavanger Kunsthall with film material, books, research materials and objects in order to investigate Ghana's recent oil find and relationship with Norway. She has made numerous films that play with the notion of duality, the idea of being multiple things, inhabiting sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflicting, multiple identities at the same time, and has shown them widely in venues, such as Witte de With, Netherlands (2015); LIAF, Norway (2013); Tate Modern, UK (2012); The New Museum, US (2012); and the Museum of African Diaspora, US (2008). In addition to this, she has written on the possibilities of creating new historiographies for publications, such as Manifesta (2014), Kaleidoscope (2012), frieze (2011), National Geographic (2008) and The Statesman (2006). She received an MA in Art History and an MPhil in African Languages and Cultures from the University of London.

● **Please describe the artist or creative merit of the proposed project (250 word maximum):**
The Cultural Encyclopaedia is an artwork that seeks to investigate the notion of art from a historical Ghanaian perspective, in which art is understood as a collective space where many can contribute, rather than the product of an individual artist. The project reassesses the idea of Nation is reassessed in a globalized era, and its impact on archive and heritage. It thinks through the relationships of «imaginary communities» described by Arjun Appadurai with material and immaterial heritage, with an understanding that today the most prominent way of accessing that heritage is through digital reproduction. It proposes possible alternatives to the national institution of the archive; employing the gestures, uses and networks at play to turn heritage into a tool for emancipation and knowledge. And thereby investigates the complex role that tools for preserving and circulating heritage (sometimes others' heritage) play in the identitarian and ideological construction of states within Africa

after independence.

● **Why do you consider this project to be a meaningful exploration of emerging technology? (250 word maximum):**
The Cultural Encyclopaedia is interested in the notion of education as a tool for self-knowledge, but also in the idea of the democracy of education. In Ghana and many other African countries, there is still a certain hierarchy of education, which is dependent to an extent on a privilege of access and means. But things like new technologies, the reach of mobile phones and internet cafes, are creating spaces for new ways of learning through sites like Uncollege, and apps like whatsapp. They make a whole new level of interactivity, of cross-platform learning, possible. Though the project hopes to open up the limits of learning within and of Africa, through new networks and spatial interfaces that invite participation, it also hopes to look into the possible disadvantages and shortcomings of education through technology.

● **In what ways does your project inspire dialogue about the issues at hand, including the relationship between technology and culture? (250 word maximum):**
The Cultural Encyclopaedia inspires dialogue about cultural responsiveness and the democratization of human expression, access to information, and the ability to connect, share, and collaborate, but rather than erasing point of view, or reduce identity and personal expression such as Wikipedia does, the Cultural Encyclopaedia seeks to preserve subjectivity through the authorship of the summaries, and the individualization of all uploaders. It also places technology at the core of a new forum of cultural knowledge and exchange, deploying the full creative capacity of a digital, open-source, networked and publicly accessible encyclopedic archive. It situates itself on the precipice of a new era of attention and cultural discussion about of and about the African continent, where it is more important than ever to ensure that cultural knowledges indigenous to the many regions of Africa will be able to synthesize with contemporary communications technologies as we move toward a future defined by networked space. In other words, it will serve as an innovative example of how new communications technologies can capture, communicate and integrated with ancestral knowledge and cultural history, sowing deep discussion about the meeting points between preservation, transformation and innovation for Africa.

● **Please describe your proposed plan for public engagement. What opportunities do you foresee to share prototypes, demonstrations and process with the public? (100 word maximum):**
The uploading to the digital platforms and archives will be done through open call from universities and research communities in Africa, but also Diaspora ones in the US and UK. In Ghana, mobile research centres will be set up (designed by Ghanaian architect D K Osseo-Asare), not just with research materials from the Encyclopaedia, but also objects, documents, photographs, and audio and visual testaments from the communities, that speak to new ways of cultural interaction, display and learning. Parallel centres can be held at Lacma and other institutions in the Diaspora (US & UK) in order to interrogate the idea of museology, of heritage, ownership, and how memory is shared.

● **What data will your project produce that may be of interest to other artists, technologists, or arts organizations? (250 word maximum):**
In Ghana and many parts of Africa, curriculums are still largely colonial remnants. More is known about Shakespeare than Ayi Kwei Armah, more about Elizabeth I than Nana Dokua. There are only a few architects incorporating the balances of vernacular design, doctors drawing on the panacea of traditional healers,

photographers being inspired by the iconographies of our photographic pioneers. The Cultural Encyclopaedia wants to make these different epistemologies, these forms of knowledge, co-exist and feed each other accessible and visible to artists, architects, doctors, scientists, technologists and all others interested in the vast cultural heritage of the continent. Because the project is entirely focused on gathering and networking cultural data, its purpose is precisely to serve the research interests of creative innovators such as artists and technologists, and arts organisations, but also focuses on content that is actionable, teachable and relevant to the needs of African countries today, whether it be in classrooms or governments. By creating an open-source, publicly accessible database that can be arranged and rearranged through advanced search options, and allowing participants to place different Encyclopaedia entries in relation to one another in the form of different learning modules, the Cultural Encyclopaedia will create a discursive space for African cultural history that has never existed before.

● **Please list any other sources of funding for this project, including in-kind support, and, if applicable, any conditions related to that funding or support:**
In June/July 2015, the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies in Germany has offered a residency within the Working Group 'Concepts of Future in Media Spaces' to develop the project further. The Kadist Art Foundation in Paris, France, has offered a residency for development for the fall of 2015.

● **Total amount requested:**
███████

● Detailed project budget (please include direct costs, including materials, software licenses, etc. and any artist fees as well as fees for any other contributors to the project):

Artist's Fee	████
Computer Scientist	████
Project Manager	████
Administrative Assistant	████
Web Manager	███
Graphics and Design	████
Webpage	███
Research Hubs	████
Marketing & Social Media Campaign	████
TOTAL	█████

● Please provide an implementation plan delineated in a chart similar to the one below:

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
KEY MILESTONES START DATE FUNDS NEEDED

(Major steps in the project development)	(Estimated date for each project step)	(Amount of funds that will be needed)
Establishment of core team	**APRIL – MAY 2015**	███
Research and Conceptualization of Website	**JUNE – JULY 2015**	███
Open Call & Marketing/Social Media Campaign	**AUG – DEC 2015**	███
Construction & Exhibition of Research Hubs	**JAN – APRIL 2016**	███