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The Postcolonial Museum

The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History

Edited by Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona and Michaela Quadraro

THE POSTCOLONIAL MUSEUM

MeLa – *European Museums in an age of migrations* is a four year long Research Project (March 2011–February 2015) funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme within the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities Sector (SSH-2010-5.2.2, Grant Agreement n° 266757). MeLa is an interdisciplinary programme aimed at analysing the role of museums in the contemporary multi-cultural context, characterized by an augmented migration of people and ideas, and at identifying innovative practices and strategies in order to foster their evolution.

The research activities developed by the MeLa Project are fostered by the cooperation of nine European Partners, and articulated through distinct Research Fields.

RF01: Museums and Identity in History and Contemporaneity
examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.
RF02: Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices
transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.
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investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.
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explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.
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RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums
fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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The aim is to propose a critical re-evaluation of the museum in the light of those transcultural and global migratory movements that question the historical and traditional frames of Occidental thought, complicating its assumption through the registration of heterogeneous planetary practices. Achille Mbembe's call for a radical humanism and a responsible attitude – capable of accounting for not only history and heritage, but especially for the present and the future of our planet suspended in a space of multiple belongings and visions – has deeply influenced this phase of our research, and is reflected in the contents of this volume. Within the MeLa project, which has promoted a search for new strategies and critical approaches in the fields of museum and heritage studies – and which we hope will renew and extend understandings of European citizenship – such a perspective leads to an inevitable re-evaluation of the concept of 'migration' in a so-called globalised and multicultural world.

Our thanks go to Lidia Curti for all her editorial, analytical and cultural input, Mark Weir for his linguistic fine-tuning, Dario Giugliano for critical advice, Beatrice Ferrara and Giulia Grechi for keeping the machinery running, and to Lida Viganoni, Rector of 'L'Orientale', for graciously providing us with the splendid space in which to discuss and debate all of these issues.

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Introduction: Disruptive Encounters – Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality

Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona and Michaela Quadraro

Postcolonial art is intimately linked to globalisation – that is, to a critical reflection on the planetary conditions of artistic production, circulation and reception. This implies focusing on the interweaving of the geographical, cultural, historical and economic contexts in which art takes place. The relationship between globalisation and art, as Okwi Enwezor observes, conceived and institutionalised by the European history of modern art in terms of separation or simply negation, here acquires fundamental importance (Enwezor 2003). It represents both the premise through which the relationship between art and the postcolonial can be conceptualised, and the matrix that helps to convey the cultural and political value of this relationship, together with its significance as a *disruptive encounter*. Far from being lost in the sterile and abstract, yet provincial, mirror of self-referentiality masked as universalism – with the implicit claim of the autonomy and independence of art from other cultural forms and activities – postcolonial art is deeply and consciously embedded in historicity, globalisation and social discourse. On one hand, it reminds us of how power is organic to the constitution of the diverse relations and asymmetries that shape our postcolonial world, and hence of how 'bringing contemporary art into the geopolitical framework that defines global relations offers a perspicacious view of the postcolonial constellation' (Enwezor 2003, 58). On the other hand, postcolonial art also shows how aesthetics today presents itself as an incisive critical instance. Postcolonial art proposes new paradigms of both signification and subjectivation, offering alternative interpretative tools that promote a reconfiguration of a planetary reality.

Analysing the link between modernity and this global reality, we can say that globalisation can be understood as the planetary 'expansion of trade and its grip on the totality of natural resources, of human production, in a word of living in its entirety' (Mbembe 2003). It was inaugurated by the Occident through a violent process of expropriation, appropriation and an exasperated defence of property, spread globally through capitalism and its imperialist extension. This is a political economy that is deeply rooted in, and sustained by, the humanist, rationalist, colonialist and nationalist culture of the West. The central phenomenon of modernity, born in a historical exercise of power, was fed by the religion of 'progress' and the racist ideology of 'white supremacy' imposing itself for centuries as a universal ontological category through the institutions of laws,

governance and the brutal instrumentalisation of lives and bodies (Spivak 1999). As Homi Bhabha insists, it is impossible to separate this past from the present. They are not disconnected: the former is not a mere predecessor of the latter. On the contrary, the past presents itself as a contingent, interstitial and 'intermediate' space that intervenes in the present, bringing newness with it. Remembering cannot be a quiet and introspective recollection: 'It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present' (Bhabha 1986, xxiii). Memory here becomes a search for the traces left behind by old and new imperialist strategies.

This is particularly evident if we consider the experience of colonialism not as a concluded chapter in global history, but as an intrinsic and indelible part of the contemporary world. Although the great empires of the past have officially ended, Europe can be observed through a postcolonial lens that unveils tensions and uneasy answers. Migratory movements and transcultural differences continually interrogate issues such as cultural heritage and national identity. People who have come from one-time colonies in search of a better life perform a perpetual and concrete re-membering of the deep interconnection between the former metropolitan centres of power and its disseminated peripheries.

The challenge of the postcolonial approach to contemporary society is to question the historiographical narrative as told from within the parameters of a univocal point of view. In this sense, Stuart Hall, in his 1996 essay 'When Was "the Post-colonial?" Thinking at the Limit', points out that postcolonial time is still a time of 'difference'. This condition is configured as a *postcolonial constellation*, and gives voice to multiple and heterogenous contexts that differ from each other. Nevertheless, the term 'postcolonial' has been particularly convincing in demonstrating that there are no neat distinctions between 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there'. Colonisation is read as 'part of an essentially transnational and transcultural global process' that produces de-centred and diasporic re-elaborations of the grand narratives (Hall 1996, 247). The global intertwines with the local, and marks the proliferation of multiple connections and migratory forms and forces.

From dislocated and disseminated spatialities, alternative narrations propose creative imaginaries, ideas and artworks that can belong to this or that place. Referring to Achille Mbembe's intuitions, our world could best be understood in terms of 'the interlacing of histories and the concatenation of distinct worlds' (Mbembe 2011, 86). Colonial experience is thus described as a complex and open-ended process that plays a crucial role for the circulation of goods, collective imaginations and human beings. This is to register the formation of a transnational and transcultural world characterised by contact zones, passages and interstices.

It is in this re-consideration of universal history that the postcolonial challenge takes place. However, rather than referring to what comes after, the prefix 'post' implies a critical analysis that deconstructs Western hegemony and reveals the consequences that are at the very heart of modernity. As Edward W. Said understood, the Western archive has to be analysed 'contrapuntally', taking into account simultaneously both the dominant historiography and the other histories

that are negated and repressed (Said 1994). Cultural forms need to be taken out of traditional enclosures and considered in a global process. This is to acknowledge an ever-changing world, crossed by 'overlapping territories' with less rigid barriers and 'intertwined histories' of productive relations. This implies a critical and radical distance from what Mbembe has defined as Western necropolitics – that is, the exercise of appropriation through dis-humanisation, based on a force 'which takes life for death and death for life', and is seemingly incapable of transformation.

Postcolonial art, which emerges from experiences of migration and hybridisation, displays how this deadly imposition of the 'proper' and the 'Same' (to put it in feminist terms) is necessarily confronted with its limits and failures. Aesthetics opens up the unexpected possibility for a different encounter with and conception of the world. Opposed to necropolitics, the experience of art itself is inscribed in an experience of transformation. Significantly, postcolonial art often manifests itself in forms of desiring and untameable forces, in expressions of interconnections, border-crossing, becoming. Art erupts into history and interrupts the totalising and exclusionary – in a word, colonial – understanding of the world, transposing us into the *living archive* of postcoloniality.

Therefore, if the history of modern art, like the history of modernity, is rooted in and ordered by imperial discourse, its narrative, which is historically linear, culturally homogeneous, geographically centralising and politically universal, is mined and exploded by the pressures of postcolonial narratives, discourses and expressions. What is at stake here is not a pacific integration of the missing chapters of the forgotten, excluded and subaltern voices into inherited accounts, but rather a deconstruction and rewriting of those very histories through the irrepressible presence of these other narrations. This helps us to disengage the relationship between contemporary art, cultural difference and global reality from the exclusive politics of museology. It also disseminates a dissonance with what Kobena Mercer defines as 'the politics of expedience', which often seems to dominate the 'multicultural' and racial-friendly approach of international art exhibitions (Mercer 2002). Avoiding the risk of reducing art to an expedience for inclusive and moribund accounts of the transcultural present, postcolonial aesthetics invites us to consider art as the possibility through which our connection with otherness, with present and past, belonging and memory – even with science and nature – is problematised and activated, in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

For example, at *Documenta 13*, the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir created a kind of personal museum from some Palestinian literary remains, where history, memory and belonging are intimately interconnected and interrogated. In her photographic installation *ex libris* (2012), the artist showed images drawn from more than 30,000 books coming from Palestinian homes, institutions and libraries looted by Israel in 1948, and then kept and catalogued as AP ('Abandoned Property') in the Jewish National Library, West Jerusalem. Jacir took pictures with her cell phone over the course of many visits. She showed the internal pages of those books, where the

Arabic is both in handwriting and typescript, sometimes clear in bold characters, but elsewhere has almost disappeared or is superimposed with other writing and hardly legible. Sometimes English words mingle with Arabic ones. In Kassel, where *Documenta* was hosted, the artist created a register of the traces and fragments she found, and translated some handwritten inscriptions of the former owners into German and English, exhibiting them on billboards, in public spaces, weaving a dialogue with history and place. *Ex libris*, in fact, takes place in the Zwehrenturm, the area of the Fridericiarum Museum where manuscripts were stored and that survived the 1941 American bombing that destroyed other volumes kept in the museum library. Jacir also concentrated on the postwar period when the region of Hessel-Kassel was occupied by American forces. Here, the Offenbach Archival Depot, which hosted the books and manuscripts looted by the Nazis, instituted a process of restitution, the largest in a US zone up until then. Interlacing past and present experiences of siege and destruction (perpetuated by the United States and Israel), and superseding the borders of different histories and geographies (North America, Central Europe, the Middle East), the artist appears to re-actualise the process of restitution, giving it a disruptive meaning that questions the very idea of ownership. The Palestinian books that were once brutally appropriated are now registered in a public vision and space, through a creative gesture that renders them unappropriable and uncontainable. What the artwork produces is not simply a recuperation of what was lost, but the transformation of the loss into a possibility of a potency that goes beyond colonial power towards a different re-collection that activates memory as difference.

Border-crossings

In the frame of a postcolonial constellation that is simultaneously theoretical and practical, we could think of a different configuration of space, based on the centrality of transits and transcultural movements. Zygmunt Bauman's ideas about a 'liquid modernity' emphasise the centrality of fluidity as a fitting metaphor to grasp the complexity of contemporary society (Bauman 2000). Modernity, according to him, has always been liquid. The absence of finishing lines attests to a permanent state of change with no clear destinations. His ideas do not merely celebrate this condition, but also envision a frightening scenario. Indeed, the melting of solid bonds into more precarious and individually conducted lives can generate the proliferation of private interests and feelings of anxiety over security. In this way, every incoming body can be a source of fear. This emotion registers the proximity of others and creates rigid boundaries in daily life: 'Fear works to align bodily and social space: it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained' (Ahmed 2004, 70).

Past histories of slavery and civilising missions survive in the present and activate a proliferation of stereotypes. In the context of migration, these ideas find a

striking example. If liquidity encourages the mobility of human beings and capital, it also involves many human beings experiencing a restriction on their right to move. This is particularly evident for migrants, asylum seekers and those seeking a 'better life', as the artist Isaac Julien puts it. In his audio-visual installation *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* (2007), contorted black bodies gasp in the foam or lie lifeless on the shores of the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. In this artwork memory becomes a strategy of aesthetic engagement. In order to dislocate the linearity of the narration and the authorial voice, the formal construction of Julien's installation, elaborated on multiple screens in museum spaces, shows the impossibility of presenting the fullness of memory. Floating histories of diasporic and subaltern bodies exceed any logic of framing.

The propagation of bodies in the critical space of the Mediterranean Sea is a source of fear in the racialised regime of global information. Such proximities are seen as a threat to the safety of the nation-states. Cultural differences are intensified and charged with danger, while those lives submerged beneath the waves of modernity are rarely registered. As Iain Chambers has suggested, the adoption of a 'critical mourning' is necessary – that is, a tracing of the continuous resonance between the past and the present (Chambers 2001). His 'maritime criticism' exposes existing knowledge to unsuspected questions and unauthorised interruptions, 'by folding it into other times, other textures, other ways of being in a multiple modernity' (Chambers 2008, 33). This means that we should take a heterogeneous modernity into account and adopt a postcolonial cartography that rethinks cultural places such as the Mediterranean as sites of stratification. The emphasis on human and cultural connections through and across the sea refines the ways in which global history is framed. A 'new thalassology' emerges, a cultural-historical framework based on the centrality of the sea in the making of global history (Horden and Purcell 2006). The Mediterranean is here rethought in terms of complexity and variability within an emerging critical connectivity. At the same time, Europe is unmade as a fixed space of exclusion and privilege, and remade as a fluid space of multiple contaminations and transcultural differences. So, European territories become a privileged terrain for the discussion of global flows and forces, and an exemplary site for investigating the question of migration in its material, historical, symbolic and creative developments.

A possibility or even necessity unfolds here: rethinking and overcoming the existing notions of heritage, patrimony, property, their embodiment in memory, history, place, belonging, and the multiple means and modes in which they are sustained. In this sense, the Mediterranean region, with its migrant histories, serves as a paradigm of border-crossings through artistic production, as in Julien's video installation cited above. Besides visual production, other artistic works express a contamination of sounds, languages and memories. For instance, a new musical genre has recently developed in the Mediterranean area, Harraga rap, a product of the current processes of migration that conducts us directly into the different currents of time. This music is created by North African migrant artists and takes its name from an Arabic word meaning literally 'burning': metaphorically, it

indicates travelling without documents. What these lyrics declare is a desire for life that translates into the challenge to burn the frontier. This rap music circulates in the suburbs of Tunis, Algiers and Tangiers, as well as in the Italian island of Lampedusa, which represents the first landing for many of the southern migrants in their passage to Europe. Emblematically, it is also known as 'Lampedusa rap'.

Border-crossing is the constitutive trait of Harraga music. It emerges from experiences of migration and the engendering processes of hybridisation through the mixture and conflation of various Mediterranean sounds and languages (Arabic, French, English and Italian). In a way, Harraga music reconnects to the tales of transit and cultural interlacing that have historically characterised the Mediterranean region, and even to the construction of modernity traced back to the Atlantic migrations. But it also reminds us of how in today's 'Fortress Europe', as with the Western imperialism of the past, the desire for border-crossing succumbs to the violence of security policies, thus often becoming an experience of refusal, exclusion, and even death. The bodies, the voices, the languages and the histories of the migrants immediately transpose us into an unexpected recognition of shared spaces and times, in the common, frequently silenced, history of migration.

If this music – that ultimately breaks up the discomforting continuity between the violence of past and present colonialisms – can contribute to rewrite (the aesthetics and ethics of) the frontier, in the form of chants of desire, it also functions as a cultural reminder not only of past, but also of present and future narratives of border-crossings and transmissions. It contributes to the reconceptualisation of institutionalised notions of heritage, memory, belonging and the archive. A memory of the future is announced. This undermines the conservative paradigms and apparatuses that sustain 'our' heritage, soliciting the question 'Whose heritage?' and undermining inherited pretensions of legitimate authorship and ownership (Hall 2002).

Such artistic experiences illustrate how postcolonial art emerges through an intertwining of art and life, articulating what Jacques Rancière ([2004] 2006) defines as the 'politics of the collage' between politics and aesthetics and, in the words of Edouard Glissant (1997), a 'poetics of relation', where points of connection are inseparable from interruptions, intervals and lines of flights. The postcolonial artwork, in other words, elaborates an ethical-aesthetic cut 'across and within an inherited Occidental art discourse that leads simultaneously to recovery and renewal … the autonomy of art and aesthetic suddenly becomes a pressing ethical and political issue' (Chambers 2012, 22–3).

Within the complex and contested cartography of global modernity, the encounter with postcolonial art reveals life emerging from processes of connection and disconnection, conjunctions and differences, territorialisation and deterritorialisation. We are critically confronted with a disorienting proximity between local and global, inside and outside, past and present, here and there, the self and the other, life and death. Art transposes us into an opaque zone where distinctions between spaces of tension and 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992), frictions and connections are blurred. In this sense, border-crossing is not simply the

methodology of a postcolonial aesthetics, but also and simultaneously an ethics, a politics, an epistemology.

The artworks described above can be considered as diffused traces of a shared migrant heritage. This is invariably repressed in the linearity of Occidental accounts of history and memory. Migrant aesthetics transposes us into an alternative cartography, where the injunction to 'burn the frontier', coming from subaltern voices, translates into a rejection of the Western legacy of limits and the confines of a specific cultural legacy. This is a map that stretches the cultural and geographical horizons drawn by both official historiography and museology. It goes beyond the 'white walls' of the museum (Curti 2012), to exceed its space and time. The postcolonial aesthetics dislocates and reinvents museum spaces and memorial practices, and disseminates alternative ways of elaborating and sharing memories. The conceptual limits and the physical boundaries of the archive are overcome, as art transforms the museum, recognising in public space, the streets and the sea a liquid and fluid archive of migrant memories.

The Museum of 'Cold and Old'

As Michel Foucault observed, museums function as 'heterotopias' – like other cultural institutions, they are places in the immediate 'beyond' of time and space. Here existing forms of social, political and biological rules, such as physical pleasure, corruption or decay, seem to fall into abeyance. The mirror is the material and symbolic icon of all heterotopias, in so far as it does not exist separately from the external world that it reflects and inverts. It manifests reality in a tiny synchronic space where the relations with the external world are visible but nevertheless turned upside down, protected and exposed at the same time, in each case non-modifiable. You can observe the codification of reality in a mirror, its appearing and disappearing, but you cannot intervene in the process of its reversed functioning (Foucault 1986).

An archive functions in much the same way: by storing 'real' objects (or ideas), it preserves them from the corruptions of reality. The discourse of the archive reflects the rules of the external world, yet maintains its own internal dynamics, its own language. The archive, as Foucault suggests, is 'the first *law of what can be said*, the system that governs the appearance [and disappearance] of statements as unique events' (Foucault 1972, 129). *Conditio sine qua non* for all the discourses that intersect the world at certain periods, crossed by interruptions, fissures and frictions, the archive functions precisely through this non-homogeneous texture. Outside its non-linear rules, nothing can manifest itself as a 'unique event', worthy of being remembered and celebrated. Therefore, the archive as a mirror of reality is also the set of rules that determines the memorial and aesthetic processes that are to be remembered and registered.

As Jacques Derrida points out, the archive is haunted by the risk of falling into the abyss of its own premises and ruins. There exists an 'archiviolithic drive'

towards suffocation (Derrida 1995), a sort of centripetal force that is always prone to destroying the living quality of memory. The compulsion to store and preserve memory kills every attempt at re-qualifying the present and taking responsibility for the future.

In Leila Aboulela's 1999 short story 'The Museum', published in her collection *Coloured Lights* (Aboulela 2001), such premises appear in all their force.[1] Shadia, a clever yet confused Sudanese student in Scotland studying for a Master's, finds herself ill at ease, stuck in a country imbued with both racist prejudices and orientalistic images of Africa. The difficulties of the migrant condition and of the courses, as well as the pervasive pessimism that circulates among the non-European students, undermine their self-esteem and their capacities:

> The course required a certain background, a background she didn't have. So she floundered, she and the other African students ….
>
> Us and them, she thought. The ones who would do well, the ones who would crawl and sweat and barely pass. Two predetermined groups. … 'These people think they own the world.' (Aboulela 2001, 100)

Thanks to the initially difficult, yet enriching, friendship with Bryan, a Scottish course-mate who helps her survive the classes, Shadia manages to experience this difficult situation diversely. She finds moments of real communication, or at least of intercultural dialogue and translation, we might argue, even in the close-minded Aberdeen college: a heterotopia, yet one of the saddest types. Towards the end of the story, though, she is overwhelmed by the same negative feelings of surrender that are drastically debilitating the African students. One day, invited by Bryan, who is eager to demonstrate his willingness to learn about her country, to an African museum in Aberdeen, she experiences the disappointment and the almost physical sensation of collapse and being 'scotomised', as a living African, under the aseptically false descriptions of her country that she discovers in the museum. This is a prototype of the 'exhibitionary complex' described by Tony Bennett (1988), where the young woman is disturbed by her own interiorisation of the gaze of the powerful others, and yet opposes it:

> During the 18th and 19th centuries, north-east Scotland made a disproportionate impact on the world at large by contributing so many skilled and committed individuals …. In serving an empire they gave and received, changed others and were themselves changed and often returned home with tangible reminders of their experiences.
>
> The tangible reminders were there to see, preserved in spite of the years. Her eyes skimmed over the disconnected objects out of place and time. … Nothing

1 'The Museum' received the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000.

> was of her, nothing belonged to her life at home, what she missed. Here was Europe's vision, the clichés about Africa: cold and old. (Aboulela 2001, 115)

The museum seems to have accomplished its task, at least according to Shadia's fears: it proves to be a mausoleum that consolidates not only the distance between the hosting/hostile milieu and her mother country, but also her own cultural prejudices, her gaze on herself and her situation. Nothing is expected to change. No space is left to allow the cultural institution to fill the gap – or try to take notice of it – between the migrant's expectations of integrating and improving her life and the delusive experience of cultural dominance or the erasing of difference. In much the same way, the college fails to help the African students fill their gaps in mathematics: lacunas due to the educational system that Britain's supremacy had exported to Africa. 'Museums change, I can change,' Bryan pleads with her when noticing the discouragement clouding her beautiful face (Aboulela 2001, 119), but nothing seems to change at all. Social, political, educational circumstances overwhelm an already worn-out girl, lost in between the mirage of home – where she was unhappy and unsatisfied – and the nightmare (at least, so it seems) of an inhospitable, racist country.

Although published eight years after the hopeful, vibrant book *Imaginary Homelands* in which Salman Rushdie surely changed the discourse and perceptions on migrations, Aboulela's story is paradigmatic of an experience of delusion and immutableness. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes: 'to migrate is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul, but the migrant is not simply transformed by his act, he also transforms the new world. Migrants might well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridisation that newness can emerge' (Rushdie 1991, 210).[2] Compared to this visionary theory, Bryan's words of change seem ingenuous and superficial: from the very beginning of this short story we are confronted with his orientalistic perceptions.[3] Shadia's reactions to the spectacle of Africa as a place both 'cold and old' are comprehensible: the offensive simplifications of a massive memorial archive of conquest and national self-celebration threaten her living memories, reducing them to mere opposition and sterile nostalgia that proves unable to change the situation. The display of savagery and passivity she is compelled to stare at is symptomatic of a whole discourse: an archive of prejudices, we might say, based on ignorance, indifference and carelessness: full of *holes*; an archive constructed on voids, oblivion, erasures, on worlds that are rendered non-existent, both in the past

2 This idea of 'newness' emerging out of the migrant condition is reworked by Homi Bhabha (1994), who brings out Rushdie's words further, theorising on a radical position of 'in-betweenness' of the postcolonial and the migrant subject, capable of inventing new positions and strategies for survival.

3 His 'positive' orientalism sees Shadia as a princess, and Sudan as nothing more than a remote country that he is unable to locate in Africa. As for La Mecca, it is a place he says he is fond of, but then he naively confesses to have only seen it in a book.

and the present, as the Bangladeshi artist and curator Ebadur Rahman seems to remind us in 'There is Not Yet a World' (Chapter 5 of this volume).

Foucault suggests that it is precisely around these holes – fissured, interrupted networks of discourse and reality – that the archive can both validate itself and, conversely, be seriously threatened by the difference(s) it can neither control nor store. The present is likely to change, if accepted for what it is. The present as a *present* is a gift, but also a responsibility we are invited to respond to in order to preserve life from the ghosts, the remnants and the discursive limits inherited from the past.

Change inscribes itself in the very nature of the archive: a *dispositif*, a technology of power that we are always able to subvert. According to Foucault, power is a 'strategic game', a relationship that, unlike sheer violence and domination, is always subjected to change:[4]

> [It] can only be articulated on the basis … that 'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognised and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, effects and possible inventions may open up. (Foucault 1982, 789)

Therefore, as Maurizio Lazzarato underlines in analysing Foucault, 'the analysis of power dispositifs should then begin … with the dynamic of forces and the "freedom" of subjects' (Lazzarato 2002, 107). What postcolonial subjects often experience in the ethnographic museum is still the political dominance of the cultural institution, the silent violence of hermeneutics and display that they may feel unable not only to bear, but also to confront, owing to personal and political frailty. As subjects, though, they always have the potential to subvert this relationship and free themselves through creation, *unpredictability* and even *chaos*, rather than continue the charade of an imposed identity. Nevertheless, as in this short story, intense social, economic and cultural yokes may overwhelm them. In this asphyxiating and tiny *margin* of space and action, are inventions and creations likely to happen? Is it possible to change one's political position from the 'exotic other' to the subject of change and political creativity, to change museums from within?

As bell hooks puts it, margins are precisely the locations in which change happens, where those people 'who are unwilling to play the role of "exotic Other"' have to 'invent spaces of radical openness' (hooks 1990, 148). And this is both an ethical and an aesthetical praxis, as she further explains:

> Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

4 See also Antonio Gramsci's distinctions between 'cultural hegemony' (power, in a Foucauldian sense) and coercive dominance.

> For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance. (hooks 1990, 149)

In the margins of culture, where the totalising and homogenising project of the archive fails and reveals itself as a discourse in the making, resistance is always possible. For hooks, as for Hall, with whom she discusses his notion of the 'politics of articulation', creative resistance is also a question of language: for her, speaking with one's own words, while for Hall, it involves inventing new forms of expression out of encounters and conflict.[5] Even museums will have to reinvent their language to face the challenge of the contemporary, an epoch massively informed by migrations, planetary interdependence and networks of fluxes and information, and yet still deeply scarred by old and new colonialisms, marginalisation, economic and political inequality, racisms and sexisms.

How do museums 'de-colonialise' themselves, not so much to ingenuously get rid of the burden of the past and the stereotypes of 'First-Worldism', but rather to undo and radically interrogate the more subtle and widespread mono-cultural perspectives of culture and the encompassing *épistémè* which imbues their language, self-perception and discourses? How will European museums succeed in 'marginalising' themselves, not merely to offer space to the 'periphery', or to tacitly 'host' and acculturate the others that come from the 'margins', but rather to recover creativity and new energy? How can museums cease being a 'curated' place, a space rendered anaesthetised, immune and impermeable to the story of traumas and wounds, a place that, as the Moroccan curator and anthropologist Tarek Elhaik suggests in Chapter 12 of this volume, is incapable of hosting the problematic instance of 'incurable images' coming from elsewhere? In the light of these questions, museums become unstable, marginal, exceed their white walls, and open themselves to the possibility of a postcolonial museum yet to come.

Unexpected Visions

Museum narratives build national and cultural identity through framing. As Ursula Biemann suggests in Chapter 16 of this volume, the museum does not

5 This importance of community and encounters, translated into the museal space, recalls recent studies based on community museums, in particular *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Karp et al. 2006) and *Museums and Their Communities* (Watson 2007). Recognising the power relationships and the frictions that inform museum and representation, seen as arenas of conflictive perspectives and battles, these studies call for forms of co-operative, participating, more equal relationships, based on respect and trust between curators and source communities, as well as consultation, co-curatorship, listening. In particular, the essays in *Museum Frictions* insist on the margins as places of change.

merely store artefacts and exhibit facts, it is the very apparatus of difference – in other words, a 'boundary-drawing device'. Many of the frames of thought that form the essential foundation of the museum represent the legacy of nineteenth-century ideas and have to be re-imagined. The neutrality of museums needs to be deconstructed in order to advocate a new museum theory, or critical museum theory, that is about decolonising and cross-cultural exchange (Marstine 2010). The very idea of 'authenticity', as Aboulela's short story reminds us, is an illusion, an idea conceived in the late eighteenth century, when the museum was born in Europe and then developed as an exhibitionary *dispositif* of the civilising mission. The strategies of archiving and classifying lie at the very heart of Western modernity; in this context, museums were means of power and knowledge exhibiting cultural forms and the regulation of bodies and discourses (Bal 1996). The modern museum is part of an institutional 'exhibitionary complex' that has allowed the development and circulation of disciplines such as biology, history, and anthropology (Bennett 1988). This complex of institutions with their practice of 'showing and telling' – that is, the exhibition of objects and the construction of cultural meanings and values – is a pedagogy. The organisation of space and of the relation between the viewing subject and the viewed object were central to this complex for establishing norms of public conduct and strategies of surveillance.

In the formation of the museum, vision has a central role. Here, we can use the theoretical tools of visual culture to reveal the frictions and tensions that constitute that formation. Considered as a field of study, visual culture is concerned with the cultural practices of looking and seeing; it considers the image as a sign or text that produces meaning (Hall and Evans 1999). However, since these meanings cannot be completed within the text, they require the subjective capacities of the viewer to make the images signify. This leads to a theory of visuality that investigates and indeed questions the relation between subject and object. Visuality focuses on questions of visibility, knowledge and power. We know that the gaze produces the subject through complex processes which are both social and psychic. If we think of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1986), this dynamics becomes very clear. It is through the power of the gaze that Fanon understands himself as a black subaltern subject.

Nicholas Mirzoeff elaborates the visual as an interdisciplinary and 'challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialized identities' (Mirzoeff 1999, 4). Visuality is developed as a problematic space, where it is possible to re-think the consolidation of power in a visualised model and with the logic of belongingness and location. Subjects, as Mirzoeff reminds us, are defined both as agents of sight and as objects of a visual discourse. In the context of museum studies, the interpretive frame of visual culture makes it possible to investigate vision in its social and cultural dimension and to declare a critical approach to the objects, collections, and so on. Considered in its cultural politics, the museum raises important questions of interpretation. In particular, attention is devoted to the construction of

meanings and values that take place in its space. As Hooper-Greenhill suggests, museums are deeply related to questions of representation and power, especially 'the power to name, to represent common sense, to create official versions, to represent the social world, and to represent the past' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 19). So questions need to be asked about meanings: since they are always plural, there cannot be a single way of framing objects.

The museum vision, far from referring only to the mere capacity of the eyes, works as a technology of power and becomes controversial given the strategies of inclusion and exclusion that are drawn upon. It is also in this deep interrelation between visuality and power within the museum that the postcolonial challenge occurs. This development in critical theory suggests an enhanced significance of spatiality. As Irit Rogoff suggests, the critical process of spatiality insists on 'the multi-inhabitation of spaces through bodies, social relations and psychic dynamics' (Rogoff 2000, 23). This is in contrast with nation-states which insist on a singular inhabitation under one dominant rule. Since space is always differentiated and characterised by boundary lines, visual culture aims to repopulate space with all the unknown images removed by the illusion of a transparent locality.

In this sense, the visual arts suggest ways to experiment and reconfigure theories because they register the differentiation of space and the coexistence of multiple belongings. For example, Isaac Julien's *The Attendant* (1993) is a provocative short film that is set in a museum. In this artwork, after the ambiguous and sensual encounter between the middle-aged black attendant of the museum and a younger white man, a nineteenth-century painting that depicts a slave's capture comes to life. The attendant expresses a homosexual desire, materialised in his fantasies about the young visitor and his imagination of real bodies that replace the paintings exhibited in a cold and institutionalised museum. The logic of the viewing subject and the viewed object is subverted as the characters of the paintings look at the attendant and populate the space with hidden histories of race and gay male sexuality. Therefore, this short film allows not only the return of a repressed unconscious, but also interrupts the monumental sacrality of the museum. In *The Attendant*, as in Julien's subsequent installations *Vagabondia* (2000) and *Baltimore* (2003), the museum is the key theme and location of an artistic strategy that contributes to a theoretical reflection on the transformation of this institution. Contemporary exhibitionary complexes are set in motion by the circulation of hidden and border-crossing realities. At the same time, the museum becomes a space of intervention that engenders productive and experimental encounters. Art confirms itself as a possibility of change. Far from being the place of the already known, ready to be transmitted, or the place where the spectacle of 'the contemporary' is consumed (Debord 1990), it becomes the space of imagination and desire, where the unexpected comes into being, but is also the space of questioning, and even silences. The museum becomes a disrupting, 'incurable' space of both hospitality and hostility.

Living the Place, Archiving the Space

At this point, the question of spatiality needs to be explored. Michel de Certeau talks about the difference between place and space defining the first as 'the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence'. He adds: 'space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of directions, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements …. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it' (de Certeau 1984, 117). As a place for the collection of objects, the museum is now experiencing new possibilities of co-existence, mainly via the production of social conditions rather than through the disposition of artworks. It becomes a space composed of mobile elements and new intersections. Here the 'place', where objects are pre-ordered, is experienced as a new *medium* meeting the needs of different public subjects.

An alternative way to inhabit the space of the museum, through encounter and live experiences, questions the traditional understandings of museum collections and the laws of the 'place'. New artistic practices inhabit the museum as a space of political and social encounters aiming at producing the conditions of a heterogeneous new audience. They engage in a process of co-individuation (Simondon 1989; Stiegler 1998) where both the 'I' (the artist) and the 'we' (the audiences) are socially and politically transformed by real-world issues such as the impact of financial crises and the subsequent social and labour conditions of life and work.

Many of these practices are experiencing a shared process of *becoming collectivity* as 'a coexistence of being singular plural' (Nancy 2000, 3). Jean-Luc Nancy talks of the impossibility of existing singularly without the plural: 'Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence' (Nancy 2000, 3). Taking Nancy's formulation of coexistence in its literal meaning as an existing together interval, a *being in common* moment – at the same time and in the same place – the production of collectivity is experienced as a relational approach and as a different modality for inhabiting space, disrupting the dominant uses of the museum.

Focusing on the transformative potentialities of the spatiality of the museum, the concept of coexistence allows a re-articulation of the traditional role of the museum as a display machine. It produces an altogether more powerful 'social technology', imagining possible connections between producers and receivers that are not mediated by the traditional form of the artwork (Karp et al. 2006). Taking into account a critical reflection on global capitalism and neo-liberalism in order to explore the complexity of the dynamics involved in the relation between the artist, the institution and the audience, it is worth underlining that the concept of collectivity occupies an important role in many contemporary theoretical works: from Paolo Virno to Giorgio Agamben, Nancy, Hannah Arendt, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri. Understanding how this concept enters the museum space in order to change its *exhibitionary function* means tracing the way in which these critical

approaches have dealt with such a concept in the light of the social transformations of neo-liberal society.

Virno, for example, speaks of the necessity of a new articulation of the relations between the collective and the individual. In order to understand our singularity, we have to look at the collective as a field of radical individualisation. His approach focuses on a *set of relationships* that define us as collectivity, from the social to the individual:

> Instead of connecting given singularities, this 'set of relationships' constitutes these single individuals as such. Human nature is located in such a thing that – not belonging to any individual mind – only exists in the relation between the many. To speak of human means to develop a philosophy of the preposition 'between'. (Virno 2002)

In the recent past, a search for unity as a *coexistence of different singularities* has been actualised by collaborative actions, co-working activities, newly formed communities informed by the idea that a collective 'set of relationships' between different people, a social engagement of *being in common*, follows all the economical and political shifts of capitalist society. Within this overall frame, the museum experiences new conditions of artistic production. These lead to stressing the importance of the transformative centrality of social production as a sharper separation between the artist as a producer, the institution as a hegemonic model of social organisation, the consumption and circulation of the artworks, comes into play. New economic practices involve different collectivities in the museum space, defining what elsewhere has been called *immaterial labour* (Lazzarato 1996).

Among the different public and private cultural institutions where immaterial labour takes place, the museum has a prominent position. It involves irregular forms of working experiences, intermittent and without a guarantee of a future income, often without an income at all, or else forms of attachment to work as a 'mode of contemporary self-disciplining' (McRobbie 2007). In other words, work increasingly replaces life itself. It defines contemporary life as a precarious social condition, essential to new neo-liberal strategies for dealing with immaterial labour. As it becomes the capitalist norm, 'precariousness', as a new contemporary concept, is experienced in multiple forms of immaterial and affective labour, especially in contemporary art practices. In order to understand how precariousness has changed the rules of the game in cultural institutions, it is necessary to consider the generational transformations of the social condition of work.

Precariousness presents itself as a generational social condition that obliges a deeper understanding of the relations between capital and the new creative forms of labour. Rather than a biological phenomenon, the concept of generations is identified as a technological one with its limits and possibilities (Berardi 2009). Those limits and possibilities are the basis for a new process of social recomposition of social subjectivities, of alternative ways to experience work not in opposition to capital, but as an independent form of precariousness (Lazzarato

1997).[6] New subjectivities are in transition along the razor-thin border between the spheres of work and life. The limits and possibilities of labour, framed in the wider understanding of creative labour inside and outside the museum, leads to rethinking the production of subjectivity as the 'raw material' of immaterial labour (Lazzarato 1990).[7]

In 2012, the Unilever Turbine Hall at Tate Modern was crowded every day with the same bunch of 70 people.[8] This swarm participated in a collective performance by the British-German artist Tino Sehgal, whose work deals with questions of attention and encounter beyond cultural belongings in public spaces such as the museum. For his new artwork, Sehgal held some collective workshops that explored, with participants of all ages, cultural background and experience, the relational encounters between people inside the 'social technology' of the museum. The artist is well known for his objectless art practice. He does not allow documentation of his work at any stage. This strategy has been developed in order to avoid adding more objects to the world of consumer society. Through gestures, actions and speeches, he creates *tableaux vivants* that he calls 'constructed situations'. These are subject to the radical temporality of their duration and intensity. Museum visitors, as well as people dressed as museum attendants, chant, scream, walk towards other visitors or just interact with each other in a play in which there should be no rules and interpreters.

The result is often unpredictable. A dynamic interplay of 'constructed' chaos emerges from the affective presence of the collectivity. Sehgal's way of conceiving a *becoming collectivity* again recalls Nancy in the sense of being exposed to others. The constructed situation seems to be precisely the 'set of relationships' in a swarm of people literally occupying the cultural, social and economic spatiality of Tate Modern, one of the sanctuaries of contemporary art. We could possibly criticise this aim to create 'experimental encounters' in terms of conservative strategies, for they conceive of artistic production as a compensatory activity, an activity where individuals communicate their personal emotions, experiences, memories and desires without linking them critically to the matrix of social and cultural forces from which they emerge. Still, there is an unpredictable force that emerges from this chaos.

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6 In particular on the possibility to envisage a process of collective subjectivation and social solidarity and imagine a movement in the sense of a collective process of intellectual and political transformation of reality (Berardi 2009).

7 The production of subjectivity recalls the Foucauldian technology of the self: modes of 'subjectivation' and of 'subjectification' explore how selves are forged and how they live in ways which are both heteronomously and autonomously determined. They pose questions about the limits and possibilities of human activities (Foucault 2007).

8 Sehgal's artwork is conceived as part of Tate Modern's wider project called *The Tanks*, a lived space hosting performative experiments such as *Art in Action Festival*, which inaugurated *The Tanks* last July. A new 'model' of experiencing the museum as a 'mass medium', 'emphasizing the visitor's own physical presence', has been stated in the *Open Manifesto* of the programme (Grant and Danby 2012, 2).

The intangible rather than compensatory activity of Sehgal's storytellers produces a new space of disturbance, an experiential memory where different singularities interact through an event that cannot be planned in advance. You never know what is going to happen. In a 'regime of total immateriality', as Claire Bishop (2004) has defined Sehgal's approach, the artist aims to provoke a critique both of the way in which we collectively inhabit the spatiality of the museum, what Hannah Arendt (1998) calls the 'space of appearance', and its blurred material boundaries. This is linked to the assumption that where a consistent swarm of singularities converges, with access to different types of stories and actions, a situation is created whose complexity is impossible for single individuals to attain. Arendt argued: 'Only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others' (Arendt 1998, 22–3). Human action is both contingent and unpredictable, as is the case in Tino Sehgal's intangible performative act.

The open-ended result is a collective production of desires, a transformation of actions, rather than a transformation of material, sustained through the audience's experiential memories. The boundaries of the exhibition space are blurred even though the scene is inconceivable without its museum stage. The 'exhibition' of an un-restricted space, as a territory of political, cultural and social encounter, becomes a living archive where the 'experimental community', the artwork itself, is created. There is, as Rogoff would term it, the emergence of other possibilities for the exchange of shared perspectives or subjectivities. These are forms of emergent and performative collectivity 'beyond all the roles that are allotted to us in culture-roles such as those of being viewers, listeners or audience members' (Rogoff 2004). Sehgal's creative practice can also be perceived as a critique of the pastoral modality of power that refers to the Foucauldian metaphor of the shepherd guiding his flock of sheep (Foucault 1982). This is to explore how selves are forged and how they live in ways which are both heteronomously and autonomously determined. It poses questions about the nature of contemporary social order, the conceptualisation of power, human freedom and the limits, possibilities and sources of human action.

Sehgal is an example of experimental collective art, an artistic attempt that goes beyond the temptation that characterised many earlier community projects: the desire for a 'lost belonging'. He uses the space and the institutions of art as channels for producing his work. The *space of appearance* created from the coexistence of the participants is loaded with the power conceptualised by Arendt as the 'fleeting coming together' in a moment of action and mutuality by a group of people, an experimental community. The encounters between people are mental displacements that allow the audience to establish an imaginary and physical journey inside a 'boundless space'. This is to engage with the memories of others, investigating, at the same time, your own memory. The whole performance seems to ask the audiences to experience the memories of others in order to develop their own comprehension of the experimental encounter.

Conclusion

It is possible to register a passage here: from the museum as the place where objects (artworks, books, archaeological remains) are stored and exposed as sacred historical signifiers that embody Memory to the museum as a space that generates narratives, events, experiences, new memories. This is the postcolonial museum such as the 'Museum Without Objects' proposed by Françoise Vergès on Réunion Island in Chapter 1 of this volume, or the *museo diffuso*, a museum that spreads through the public space of the city evoked by Viviana Gravano in Chapter 8 of this volume. History can be remembered differently. As Vergès suggests, it is possible to overcome the accumulative palimpsests of colonial culture, opposed by the power of a migrant poetics made up of voices, sounds and gestures. The museum *dispositif* is now faced with the challenge of re-proposing its discourses and practices of representation. The difficulty lies in establishing what is 'representable' and how this can be proposed when, as postcolonial aesthetics underlines, images and sounds do not simply *stand for* life, but rather can themselves be considered *as* life. They emerge as a force that exceeds the status of representation and visuality itself.

The very existence of post-representative languages can be interpreted as an invitation to consider the possibility of alternative archives, able to account for a different humanism, a different political economy. The archives of the future should be able to register, as Ursula Biemann's video-essay *Egyptian Chemistry* (2012) suggests, the elements of an untameable and unrepresentable ecology that reconnect to life as difference, unfolding from the encounter between nature and culture, *bios* and *zoe*, matter and technology, chemistry and magic. Perhaps a move from the limits of an anthropocentric vision to the possibilities of a post-humanist narrative, based on the recognition of an ecology of multiple belonging, is the path through which we can approach the dream of postcolonial thought. Strongly advocated by Mbembe, this is the dream of a radical humanism, emerging from a responsibility toward our historical inheritance, and founded, above all, on the distinctions that differentiate us.

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PART I
Global Migrations, Transcultural Heritage

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Chapter 1
A Museum Without Objects

Françoise Vergès

This is the history of a project and of its defeat. The project: the Maison des civilisations et de l'unité réunionnaise (MCUR), a museum in a French postcolony of the Indian Ocean, Réunion Island, launched in 2000 by Réunion Regional Council.[1] The defeat: the end of a utopia, a Museum Without Objects. In April 2010, the local Conservatives came to power in Réunion Regional Council. One of their first acts was to put an end to the MCUR project and to disband its team. The decision meant that the project was killed, since two thirds of its funding came from the Regional Council (the French state and the European Community sharing the rest of the 60 million euro budget, covering studies, building and museography).

In this chapter, I will explain how and why the notion of a *museum without objects* was chosen and why I think today that the notion of creolisation that was central to the project needs to be revisited. In my conclusion, I will suggest new ways of developing the notion of a museum without objects and why the notion can still be useful. In the text, I use large excerpts from the scientific and cultural programme I wrote with Carpanin Marimoutou in 2004 and which became the basis for planning the architecture, the exhibitions and the different spaces of the museum. It was for this programme that I developed the notion of the museum without objects – neither a virtual museum nor a museum of images and sounds, but a museum that would not be founded on a collection of objects, where the objects would be one element among others, where the absence of material objects through which to visualise the lives of the oppressed, the migrants, the marginal, would be confronted. We would not seek to fill up a void, to compensate for the absence, we would work from the absence, embracing it fully, for we understood that this absence was paradoxically affirming a presence. To us, the accumulation of objects destined to celebrate the wealth of a nation belonged to an economy of predation, looting defeated peoples or exploiting the riches of others. It belonged to an economy of consumption that invested the object with narcissistic meaning, making visible one's identity and social status. We turned to small objects, *objets de rien*, devoid of economic value in the market economy – objects that had a biography and had travelled.

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1 I worked on the project during 2000–2010, by participating in seminars and meetings of artists, museum professionals, curators, heritage specialists and scholars organised by the Regional Council, and by directing the MCUR team, 2003–2010.

In recent decades, a vast and diverse literature has been produced on the museum. We benefited greatly from this debate, though most contributions were critical appraisals of projects and few were written by people who had built a museum and who openly discussed the problems raised by building a postcolonial museum. The dominant position was how to create a museum with the Western museum as a counter-example. The Western model remained the reference. We wanted to question the logic both of inversion and of catching up. Both could reinforce the hegemonic position of the West. Could we take the Western model as one among others, neither imitating it nor fully rejecting it? Could we take it as a proposition that could be mixed with others, playing freely with its modes of presentation? We also benefited from our encounters with museum professionals we met in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. We learned a lot from the conversation we had following the presentation of the project at colloquiums in Japan, the USA, Italy, France, Germany, India and South Africa, as well as from our visits to museums. But our first reference was the people of Réunion to whom we presented the project as it moved along. We discussed it with local artists and with cultural associations. We tested our choices during the cultural manifestations we organised: the annual ceremony honouring Zarboutan Nout Kiltir, women and men who had safeguarded and developed vernacular knowledge and practices, the series of conferences with international scholars on the history and culture of the Indian Ocean and on contemporary issues – climate, economy, geopolitics, the work we did with schools, the seminars we put together, the meetings with our Scientific Council – Marc Augé, Achille Mbembe, Simon Njami and Germain Viatte, the work we did with the architects Anouk Legendre and Nicolas Démazières, whose project had been chosen following an international competition, and with the team which was developing the permanent exhibition.[2]

What Kind of Museum?

In France, museums are top-down affairs. Whether private or public, they are a *fait du prince*. The polemics and controversies surrounding the building of I.M. Pei's pyramids for the Louvre, the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and the Musée du quai Branly did not stop their completion. They were projects carried out by a President of the French Republic, who remained in power long enough to see their opening, ensuring they received the financial, administrative and political support they required. The MCUR project was a regional affair, and as such it sought to work with the local terrain. Seminars were organised with artists, associations and researchers in 2000–2001. What emerged from these meetings was a conception of the island's history divided into ethno-cultural chapters. The participants, who had all been educated through the French system, imagined a

2 A description of the project is available at http://www.x-tu.com/ (accessed 10 March 2013).

succession of 'houses': 'House of Africa', 'House of India', 'House of China' and 'Creole House'. What was remarkable was the absence of France, whose role could not be ignored, and of Madagascar, often forgotten. The narrative was one of linear progress, from slavery to integration within the French Republic. There was much talk about 'identity' and safeguarding 'tradition'. The ways in which the restaurant was imagined embodied the idea of creolisation as offering a series of coexisting forms: a buffet with 'Indian', 'Chinese' and 'Creole' food. The team in charge of turning the conclusions of the seminars into a programme proposed to follow the timeline of French colonisation through a series of chapters that would visualise the transformations of Réunion society with regard to events in France.

During these seminars, we measured the weight of the French policies of assimilation. A few of us defended an approach designed to emancipate the island's history from the temporality and spatiality imposed by French colonialism. We suggested that Réunion's history was the history of the unexpected (Creole language and culture), of the intangible, of sorrows and struggles. Few objects had survived that would testify for the lives of women and men brought to the island since 1663. Official history did not record their lives. To recover this past, we had first to acknowledge an *absence*, an unknown past. To Walter Benjamin, the recovery of the unknown past – 'the awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been' (Benjamin 1999, 458) – is the battlefield where the future is decided. What would produce a shifting of the gaze, what small displacement would open up new vistas? The map drawn by the Arab geographer Abu Abdullah Ibn Idrisi in the eleventh century was an inspiration. In accordance with Arab convention, the north was at the bottom of the map and the south at the top. This convention transformed the ways in which French schooling has imposed the cartography of the world; as a device, it helped us suggest that, living in an island on an African–Asian axis, we could question the notions of North, South, West and East.

Where did we start? With the island, with the physical territory: an active volcano, a small island on an African–Asian axis. It was known to Arab navigators, identified by the Portuguese in the seventeenth century as a place to replenish ships with fresh water. It became a colony by accident in 1663. The French were looking for a port of call on their journeys to India. They were unable to conquer Madagascar, but there were two islands without a native population, offering fresh water, great forests, and one of them natural harbours, so the French took possession of these. They were called Bourbon (present-day Réunion) and Île de France (Mauritius). The latter had been abandoned six years earlier by the Dutch, who had colonised the island following a decision taken by the directors of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie – VOC) in 1637. But in 1657 the company decided to dismantle Mauritius's garrison and abandon the island. The country was no longer viable. No precious metals had been found in its soil, and the ebony forests were almost completely depleted. The French took over, and soon populated both islands with settlers and enslaved labour from Madagascar and Africa. France 'lost' the colony of Mauritius in 1815.

In Réunion, slavery was abolished in 1848: out of a population of 100,000, some 60,000 were enslaved. They became citizens, but remained under colonial status, which was abolished in 1946 when it became a French department.

After 1946, local struggles for social equality led to the emergence of a middle class. Four generations have had access to education. The development of public services offered jobs to the children of people who had often been poor. Since in the overseas departments all civil servants benefit from privileges inherited from colonial times – higher salaries and lower taxes than in France for the same jobs, as well as other important benefits inherited from colonialism – private property and other forms of consumption became accessible. Consumption and assimilation to whatever was fantasised as 'being like the French' were now the goals of the middle class. Within a few decades, the island went from being dominated by an economy inherited from the plantation economy where sugar cane reigned supreme to an economy of services with an unemployment rate of 36.5 per cent (the female rate was nearly five points higher than the male rate), and with 60.8 per cent of under-twenties being unemployed. Exports were less than 10 per cent of imports. The population tripled while the economy crumbled. The rate of unemployment has stayed around 37 per cent for decades (60 per cent among the young); 21 per cent of the population is illiterate; the island imports more than 3 million tons of goods from France and exports 300,000 tons, mostly of sugar. It is highly dependent on France; more than 50 per cent of the population live below the poverty line (800 euros per month in an island where the cost of living is equal to that of Paris, the most expensive city in France). People travel abroad more and more, and an important middle class has emerged which sends its children to universities in France and elsewhere. Few graduates want to come back. The signs of the politics and culture of consumption abound: commercial malls, cars, cell phones; the island has its own celebrities, its own gossip, its own social networks, its own private radios. Many worlds cohabit, often blind and deaf to each other.

New cultural identities have been reclaiming the colonial categories to transform, subvert and modify them to their own ends. These new identities serve to diversify the nomenclature of society by calling for a unique origin and a special place in the historical narratives of Réunion Island and its contemporary society. To be of African (Kaf), Indian (Malbar), Chinese (Sinwa) or European (Pti Blanc) descent takes on a new dimension, with each ethnic group laying claim to its own history as part of Réunionese history, recalling the impact of slavery and of the colonial orders in their lives.

The Object of the Intangible

The history and culture of the vanquished and the oppressed is rarely embodied in material objects. They bequeath words rather than palaces, hope rather than private property, words, texts and music rather than monuments. They leave heritages embodied in people rather than stones. Songs, words, poems, declarations, texts

often constitute the archive through which to evoke their past. Their itineraries retrace the history of struggles, of migrations, of the global organisation of the workforce rather than the accumulation of wealth. It is a world of the intangible, of the unexpected, of what has been untimely, sorrowful, hopeful.

The ideological fabrication of the noticeable and unnoticeable, of the visible and the invisible, of what matters and does not matter, obeys rules and laws that are constantly being elaborated, reconfigured, deconstructed, reconstructed. Narratives become significant when they enter a field of recognition, constructed through a series of legitimised gestures (grants, works by 'recognised' authors, conferences, construction of a vocabulary that acquires prestige and wide currency – such as hybridity, in-between, creolisation). Marginalised groups have always understood the importance of making their vision of the world, rituals, traditions, practices, *noticeable*. Scholars have explored the processes whereby continents, regions, practices, groups are 'discovered', questioning the very notion of *discovery* in the humanities and social sciences. What is discovered? What makes the gesture of unmasking, unveiling so attractive? Can we read in the continuous use of the notion of 'unmasking' the desire to unveil a 'true core'? What can we learn from the representation of the explorer? The gesture of 'discovery' remains a potent trope and has gained new value in what Barbara Christian has called the 'race for theory'.

Hence we asked how practices and processes that belonged for the most part to 'immaterial' or 'intangible' culture could be expressed visually without falling into a reductive ethnology. How could the maps of exchanges, contacts and conflicts in the Indoceanic world, where seven worlds converged (African, Chinese, European, Indian, Muslim, and Malagasy and Comorian), render the contact zones, the cultural interactions, the modes of interpenetration, diffusion, dissemination and dispersion? How could the processes and practices of creolisation at work in the creation of Réunionese unity be expressed visually? How could yesterday's routes of slavery and indentured labour and today's migrations, power relationships, inequalities, discriminations be depicted, concurrently with the resistances, struggles and collective imaginations? How could we make the museum a space of discussion open to reinterpretations, to local and global transformations?

The study of Réunionese society has all too often been reduced to drawing up a chronological order that arranges interlocking temporalities, neglecting singularity in favour of generality, repeating the eternal opposition between elite culture and popular culture, between written and oral, between reality and representations. One of our aims was the *critical contextualising and transmission* of Réunionese culture that, we insist, is outstanding for its intercultural character. We did not want to merely safeguard the heritage; naturally, the desire and need to preserve are justified, but we did not want this to rule our thinking.

We wanted to call attention to the contingencies, the accidents of history, challenging the fiction of a linear course presented as inevitably progressive, marked by a modernism defined by Europe in which every event could be explained by a structuring causality. We used 'Europe' to designate a historical

and cultural construction that can be better seen from the colonial world but which has had consequences on the Continent itself. To us, the museum was not a space for dead cultures, pretending to represent 'truth' or marketing itself as 'heritage' sites and theme parks; it would be a space for social change, a transformative space where stereotypes were countered and alternative narratives suggested and discussed. We had to invent a space that did not fossilise history or memory, that remained open toward revisions and reinterpretations, that showed creolisation processes and practices while restoring the spaces and histories that led up to this creolisation. The spirit was that of a nonlinear interpretation where the viewer would be invited to 'dialogue' with what she saw, where she would be able to suggest other meanings for things and events.

The MCUR was designed to reflect on the *issues of a museum of the present time*, a space that would display episodes where violence, brutality and poverty prevail, without becoming a space of expiation. We had few examples of visual representation of Réunion's culture and history to examine, analyse, counter or challenge. Réunion's culture did not even belong to the infamous genre of 'primitivism'. At colonial exhibitions, the island's culture and history were shown through goods (sugar, coffee) or through the *Creole art de vivre,* an imagined gentle way of life in the colony, masking its brutality. French universalism invented an abstract aesthetics to refigure the empire, which concealed the social and historical context. Rather than looking at what had been done, we concluded that it was by *starting from the present* that another future could be imagined.

The Economy of the Museum

We have no oil, diamonds, uranium. We have no palaces, statues, great works of art. We said that Réunion's economy is fragile and there are important inequalities. We did not want to live beyond our means. We shared the criticism of an economy of squandering and wastefulness geared towards the destruction of local economies of vernacular culture as 'ethnic chic'. It would be absurd to build a space that would prove too expensive; it would be pure madness. In fifteen, twenty years, on what economy would the project rest? If we turned to multimedia techniques, was it necessary to dazzle the visitor with high technology, or was it better to mix bits of high technology with *bricolage*, to have an economy of recycling and recuperation? A reflection on economy proved inseparable from our reflection on content.

The economy of the MCUR rested on a reflection of the island's economy seen in relation to its environment and the ways in which inequalities had been widening throughout the world and the region. We had to confront the logic of catching up, with its vocabulary that stemmed from anti-colonial struggles and the discourse of progress. They were based on an acknowledgment of the wretched condition of the infrastructures, non-application of labour legislation, extremely brutal employers, racist schools and churches, malnutrition. In 1946, the anti-colonial

Left denounced the state of neglect of the population and the rule of the colonial oligarchy and its henchmen during the debate on the end of the colonial status at the National Assembly. Equality was the key notion in the struggle for social and political emancipation. This notion, drawn from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, assumed a special dimension in the colonies where inequality was an organisational principle based on race. The demand for emancipation was a demand for social equality (application of the social and labour legislation) and for civil rights (the end of electoral fraud, of censorship and repression). It went hand in hand with a demand to catch up, and the anti-colonial movement was the first to emphasise its urgency. In the 1960s, under pressure from unrest, the state adopted and adapted the expression 'catching up'. Since then, that notion and its representations have become the framework and central issue of public discussion. The economy of making up for lost time met several demands – of the state, of elected representatives, of the population. In just a few years, 'providing' became the key issue. The gap between the different worlds in Réunion – the haves and have-nots, those who have a permanent job and those who have a temporary one, those who work and those who do not – the legacy of a colonial system, a deeply unequal development, all this legitimised a policy of 'catching up'. But the notion has also imposed a rhetoric of urgency within the economy of consumption.

The goal of the MCUR was not to begin by searching for lost origins, trying to restore an imaginary authenticity, to defend a nostalgia that 'things used to be better'. We claimed that there was nothing in our heritages, no matter how painful they were, that gave us the right to claim a moral superiority. What should be preserved? How? Why? Confronted with heritage, one often has an impulse to preserve, reassert, defend – that is, to preserve from forgetfulness, from denial, from the policies of silence and amnesia set up by the authorities who seek to impose *one* story, *one* tradition; to reassert what happened; to defend heritages because they gave rise to stories, myths, because they constitute landmarks that we need. But we also need to choose, because not everything is worth preserving, because we have to preserve and reassert, but without melancholy, without nostalgia. We have to *reinterpret our heritages, subject them to a critical appraisal*, so that something new can happen – that is, history. *Rather than be victims of our heritage*, *we have to reclaim it from a critical position and be able to pass it on.* We have to give meaning to our heritages, to be active heirs, because to quote René Char, 'no testament precedes our heritage'.

But why use the term 'museum'? Usually, cultural centres are for the 'South', museums for the 'North'. We wanted to break this dichotomy and suggest that a new kind of museum was possible, and that a small island was capable of doing it. The reappropriation of the term was for us a political gesture. The colonised and the oppressed have always seized what the West invented, to transform and adapt it. When it is blind imitation, it leads to tragic consequences, but when it is done to engage critically with the tools, it can be inventive and creative. I remember Aimé Césaire telling me that it is important to grasp all the tools available to transform the world. Telling Réunion people that they deserved a museum with all the elitist

representations associated with this space was a very important gesture: 'Yes, your "poor" lives deserve a museum, your creations and practices deserve a museum.' Some people opposed to the project understood it intuitively when they claimed that there was nothing in Réunion that could justify a museum, no culture worthy of such space.

A Museum without Objects

We considered the archive not as a talisman or a fetish, but as a *document*. The archive is meaningful in its context, it is not 'truth', it belongs to an entire social environment. Thus the notarised deed of the sale of a slave is meaningful when it is placed in a social and historical framework; the deed itself is merely a notarised deed. The *Code Noir* ('Black Code') has to be presented in a context where the foundations of law in France and Europe are explained, and put in perspective with other codes regulating slavery. It must not become a 'sacred' text that cannot be discussed, but a testimonial to specific laws, on the justification of exclusion.

Rather than looking for the lost object, trying to fill a gap, we started with the following challenge: if there are no objects, how do we imagine a museum without objects? The object could not be central to the MCUR. We knew how important it has been for non-Western countries to impose a new reading so that objects (African masks, Inuit sculptures, Aborigines' paintings) were seen as legitimate as a sculpture or painting by a European artist. The importance of that movement is still being tested. Yet we thought it was better to start with an *accepted absence*. No vernacular object before 1848 has survived, and we wish to underline that: there was *no* collection of testimonies of slaves after the abolition of slavery. No one (emancipated slaves, abolitionists, writers) thought of collecting oral testimonies of the freed slaves. The desire to forget and a policy of silence prevailed.

Starting from an absence led to revisiting the notion of the object and then integrating what exists – the memory of the object, its reconstruction – within that approach. Thus the object was treated as a trace whose meaning emerges from a *landscape*, whether social, literary, imaginary, musical or whatever. We were not partisans of the sacralisation of the object as the authentic marker of human action. We thought that violence and resistance, passions and interest had also to be shown through sounds, images, plays, narratives. The object was a tool among others, and it did not have to be authentic. When the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean in 1498, they brought with them the violence of the brutal religious wars in Europe. Negotiation was not an option. Peoples construed as enemies had to be crushed, massacred, destroyed. The Portuguese imposed their monopoly on trade in an ocean where free mercantile capitalism was the rule. How could we show that moment? The object was not the only reference; we worked from an installation of sounds, images, objects and acting to *evoke* a moment.

The Creole language was to have a major role in the MCUR as an itinerary of a constantly vivified archive. It is *a vector of knowledge about practices and people's imaginations*. It is the space of a common heritage constantly enriched by practices and contributions. In the very heterogeneity presiding over its formation, the Creole language necessarily bears the stamp of the languages, dreams, imaginations that presided over its birth – unconscious, underground, cryptic. But one way or another, it surfaces in the everyday speech of exchange, in poetic speech, in the texts of the *ségas* and the *maloyas*, proverbs, puns, riddles. It does indeed surface, but altered by encounters that shape the image of the place; it surfaces in crossings and appropriations. A legend, 'Granmer Kal', was developed by blending myths from India, Madagascar, Africa, with the ongoing and changing popular oral traditions. This memory is linked to the slaves' fear of the master and his powers, a specific perception of the supernatural.

Immaterial culture could not be limited to memory or tradition. Along with past practices, it was important to take in new ones like hip-hop, rap, contemporary dance and so on, the transformation of older existing practices (christenings, wakes, weddings, carnival) and the creolisation of imported practices (table manners, French cuisine, world music). We chose the path as the metaphor of exile that crosses routes of trade and empire. It evokes the trails of the maroons and their resistance, the appropriation of the territory by the trails of fishermen, farmhands, market women, vagabonds. These paths and trails outlined another cartography, another archive of the island. The path drew the ancestor's course: the one leading from him to us and the one leading us back to him. The display of the itineraries of persons, objects, rites, culinary practices, ingredients of recipes, of sounds, show the routes of multiple levels of culture. Reality is polymorphic, formed by multiple identities and constant metamorphoses. From the place of origin, whence the ancestor came, to the world she contributed to build and bequeathed to us, the itinerary brings back a life. The richness of a world is restored, and the neutral category ('Slave', '*engagé*', 'Kaf', 'Malbar', 'Muslim'), one that negates singularity (How old? What gender? What place of origin: city, country, coast?), fades away before the combined individual *and* collective experience that shaped the Réunionese world.

The Museum Without Objects would have been a space where other cartographies of the world could have been evoked, other futures imagined. Réunion's history emerged within the history of the organisation of a racialised workforce on a global scale, within the history of rivalries among European powers to grab the riches of the world, but also within the history of South–South exchanges of the Indoceanic world and its dynamics. Thus, temporality and spatiality were those of the millenary space of the Indoceanic world. We did not idealise this world: by inscribing Réunion within that space, we wanted to unmask the lie of European cartography, to question the fact that the only meaningful link of the island with the world was the link to France. We wanted to remind Réunion society of its environment. By inscribing the island within the long history of the organisation of the workforce and exploitation, we wanted to denationalise the history of colonialism.

Going back to the history of labour and looking at the figure of the body as a commodity to exchange, sell, exploit, own and kill (colonial slavery, forced labour, indentured work) meant examining the predatory economy. It was an economy based on the raw exploitation of resources (human and others) that linked networks – financial, cultural, political – across borders. The predatory economy fabricated people who did not matter. It had a destructive force which in order to be constrained must meet an organised counter-force. As Machiavelli wrote, it is an illusion to believe that those who dominate would ever be satisfied with what they own, that their superiority warrants wisdom. The avidity of the powerful is limitless, and is only contained by the resistance of others. It was an economy whose 'processes inevitably interact with systems for the governance of national economies' (Sassen 1999, 214). It constructed a 'transnational geography of centrality consisting of multiple linkages and strategic concentrations of material infrastructures' (Sassen 1999, 214).

We were wary of a narrative that situated slavery and postcolonial status in a foreclosed past ignoring its contemporary traces. The narrative of linear progress contained in the abstract rhetoric of human rights that had prevailed in the discourse of French abolitionism and paternalistic republicanism was cutting Réunion off from the history of regional emancipation, from the circulation of revolutionary ideas. It reinforced Réunion's dependency on France: all that was meaningful and progressive had come from France. Yet, by looking at the ways in which Réunion had featured on the map of a predatory economy, the island's history was no longer contained within the narrow borders of the French national narrative. A cartography of South–South struggles, circulations, migrations and movements of goods, ideas, beliefs would inscribe the island within complex networks. Further, a reflection on the predatory economy would lead to an exploration of the culture of terror and a rhetoric of protection from barbarism that seeks to humanise what cannot be humanised. When a predatory economy sets up rules of protection, they are put in place to enforce submission: the protégé *always* lives by the rules imposed by its protector. The protégé must insist on its victimisation and embody powerlessness. In *Inhuman Conditions* (2007), Pheng Cheah has analysed how the discourse of human rights follows that logic and seeks thus to 'humanise' what cannot be humanised: capitalist exploitation. Human rights do not seem to offer the grounds for conceiving of a new humanism.

Concretely, these remarks meant that, rather than start in 1663 when the French took possession of the island, Réunionese history would stretch back to the fifth century AD, when the Indian Ocean became a cultural and commercial space linking cities along the eastern coast of Africa with the Arabic Peninsula, India, Indonesia and China; that its space would be the Indian Ocean; that the lives of the poor, settlers, enslaved, indentured, migrants would be evoked; that the languages that had been spoken on the island throughout its history would be heard – Malagasy, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, Bantu, Shigazinge, Chinese, seventeenth-century French; that ideas that had sprung up here – republicanism, fascism, communism,

anti-colonialism, and politics of assimilation – would be explored; that the library would be dedicated to poetry; that spaces for oral exchange would be integrated within the visit; that silence and meditation, looking at clouds, at the ocean would be possible, but also noise and laughter; that plants and 'Nature' would be taken as actors of history; that part of the garden would be left to the care of visitors; that there would be workshops on video and films so that the Réunionese would develop their own visual culture; that the permanent exhibition would conclude with 'Réunion in the present', where visitors would construct the ever-changing present. The object of the museum was the moment of encounter, of exchange and conflict. It required mobilising the 'necessary intellectual and existential resources enabling us to confront the indescribable agony and unnameable anguish' (West 1997, 56) that has been unleashed on the world.

The Notion of Creolisation

Heterogeneity and unpredictability characterise the process of creolisation. For Edouard Glissant, 'creolization requires that heterogeneous elements that are put into contact enhance each other, that there is no degradation or diminishing of the being in the contact and mixing' (Glissant 1996, 18; my translation). Creolisation occurred in a situation of deep constraints, under the yoke of slavery, colonialism and racism, involving deep inequalities, forced circumstances and survival strategies. Outside the United States, slaves were largely men – data show that cargoes of slaves generally amounted to two-thirds men and one-third women.[3] Creolisation was the creation of a world of men, of a majority of men enslaved by a minority of men. These elements – deportation, forced exile, a world of men, a deeply unequal and violent society, institutionalised racial hierarchy – contributed to the creation of Creole *worlds*: plural, since no Creole society is exactly similar to another. Creolisation was an unexpected, unpredictable consequence of the colonial slave trade and slavery. It was not a return to 'roots', a re-creation of a lost world, but a creation. As an expression of groups who experienced brutal exploitation, creolisation reflects an ethos of resistance. Creolisation can thus become 'a tool capable of challenging nationalist projects, forging a more supple theory of non-essentialist identity formation and transnational belonging' (Ahmed et al. 2003, 279). If the outcomes of creolisation are unforeseeable and if current contacts could be said to lead to processes of creolisation, one must be aware that creolisation is not the only foreseeable outcome of a contact zone.

3 On the ratio of men to women among the enslaved in the Transatlantic and Indian Ocean trade, see Bush (1990) and Morrissey (1989). Roughly one African woman was carried across the Atlantic for every two men. European slave traders preferred to buy men. The captains of slave ships were usually instructed to buy as high a proportion of men as they could, because men could be sold for more in the Americas. On the situation in Réunion, see Vergès (2006).

In March 2009, in response to the largest social mobilisation in the French Caribbean, Edouard Glissant et al. published *Manifeste pour les 'produits' de haute nécessité* ('Manifesto for the "Products" of High Necessity'), arguing that the legitimate demand for better purchasing power could not be understood without an articulation with a new poetics. Their title mirrored the unions' demand that the government fix the price of the products deemed highly necessary for day-to-day life – oil, rice, bread – and intervene if distributors exceed the fixed price. The authors declared that besides the 'necessary products of living' (*les produits de première nécessité*), there were other products of high necessity that appeared just as important: political responsibility, criticism of the free market, a radical contestation of contemporary capitalism, rethinking work as a place for self-accomplishment and social invention (Breleur et al. 2009). If the amount of despair and resentment among the populations of the Antilles was underestimated, the hopes of intellectuals and activists were also hindered by social and economic reality. To Patrick Chamoiseau, the ambivalence of this 'post-capitalist movement' lay in the tension between the illusion that consumption gives meaning to life and the desire to go beyond consumption as giving meaning (Chamoiseau 2011, 155). The poetics deployed with chants, dance, gestures, reactivation of tradition, were the expressions of a fraternity, of an aspiration for new relations on the island and between the island and France that did not find a place within the social movement. There were many obstacles to a radical movement. Chamoiseau argued that there had not been enough engagement by local intellectuals, too much cowardice, a lack of democratic culture inherited from slavery and the fear of a future without France (Chamoiseau 2011, 173).

It is important to bring back the slave as a *political* figure – not just as the figure of suffering, exile, deportation, but as a figure that radically contests with 'his' life an economic, cultural and political system that fabricates fragile and precarious lives for profit. If the plantation, as Glissant reminds us, is the womb of creolisation, we need to bring back the plantation as a site of economic and political power. The slaves challenged an economy based on a geopolitics of brutal exploitation, on the transformation of the human body into a mere object, on laws and regulations that justified the racialisation of work, that gave a minority the right to punish, maim and torture enslaved women and men. Creolised expressions and practices radically questioned a world which sought to organise society according to rigid and fixed identities based on skin colour. It showed the capacity of the oppressed to create meaning in intra-cultural exchanges. We uncritically adopted the narrative of loss of native languages, of creolisation as a hegemonic process through which every one would become 'Réunionese'. The publication in 2009 of research by Pier Larson deeply challenged this approach. Larson questioned the ways in which creolisation has been seen in the Indian Ocean. African and Malagasy slaves did not look to 'sociocultural integration into the societies of their forced migration', but rather sought to maintain 'separated identities', he convincingly argues (Larson 2009, 19). The emphasis on 'hybridity and cultural mixing has marginalised the ancestral languages of "enslaved persons" from colonial histories' (Larson 2009, 19). Larson

insists on the 'simultaneous processes of ethnic distinction' and creolisation because 'Francophone *créolité* and Malagasy identity were entangled in each other, sometimes mutually constituting' (Larson 2009, 19).

The longest social mobilisation in the French overseas departments in 2009, the end of the museum project, the increasing emergence of 'Blackness' in hexagonal France, the entry of Aimé Césaire into the Pantheon, the debate on national identity, led me to explore anew the notion of creolisation. I concluded that creolisation was a subversive concept if it remained linked to the subterranean struggle and resistance of populations confronted with brutal and raw power, with monolingualism and monoculturalism. Creolisation must enhance vernacular practices and solidarity among the oppressed. Its roots in slavery and plantation economies imply an ethics of responsibility for fragile lives, seeking common ground. Creolisation means inventing new forms of radical subaltern heterogeneity, undermining the hegemonic space from within; not a nativist nostalgia, but a radical critical position and practice; no mere cultural translation, but political practices and movements. Beyond the emptiness of declarations about the values of multiculturalism, a form of soft management of diversity, creolisation can lead to the invention of a new radicalism, whose inspiration could be found in subversive anti-slavery politics. This is what was lost in Réunion when the petty bourgeoisie chose the current form of French assimilation, allowing for an expression of regional culture in so far as it does not challenge the superiority of French language and culture.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, in a Europe undergoing massive upheaval, the German poet Hölderlin pondered the question, 'Why poets in times of distress?' Today, we may reformulate the question, and ask, 'Why culture in times of distress?' The MCUR was deemed useless and unnecessary, a waste of money when housing and jobs were urgently needed. Even though no money has been invested in housing or jobs since 2010, the argument was powerful. It described the museum project as elitist and egotistic; the project was also derided for its idea of being a museum without objects. What was the point? We were accused of being 'intellectuals', unable to comprehend the 'people', lost in our narcissistic dreams. Were our propositions merely rhetorical claims devoid of pragmatism, mere intellectual reveries?

We thought that the hegemony of economic discourse, the hegemony of ideas inspired by Ayn Rand's belief in the superiority of the individual, was destructive and had to be countered by a space where the intensity of mutations that Réunion had experienced over four decades and the changes produced in the world by an economy that posited infinite resources, by the belief in endless progress and in the total domination of man over the environment, would be questioned.

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Chapter 2

Decolonising National Museums of Ethnography in Europe: Exposing and Reshaping Colonial Heritage (2000–2012)

Felicity Bodenstein and Camilla Pagani

The postcolonial turn has been accompanied by the claims of cultural minorities for identity recognition all around the world, subjecting ethnography museums to new critical perspectives in terms of their goals and roles (Mauzé and Rostkowski 2007). Hence, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, several museums have taken different paths towards postcoloniality (Lebovics 2007) adopting a range of strategies with the aim of cancelling out, neutralising or indeed critically exposing colonial roots – it is this last option that we will consider here in its widest sense.

Undeniably, since the late 1980s, a wave of refurbishments, new displays, message renovations, name modifications, new foundations, relocations and so forth has to a large extent reshaped the ethnography museum landscape in Europe. In attempting to come out of the shadow of the colonial legacy, many ethnography museums now reinvent themselves by implementing policies of recognition for previously marginalised groups and attempt to repair historical wrongs. As Tony Bennett explains, the challenge is to create 'new relations and perceptions of difference that break free from the hierarchically organised form of stigmatic othering' (Bennett 2006, 59).

This chapter will focus on how museums reshape their colonial heritage using the museum as a space for recognition (Taylor 1992) and historical reconciliation. In analysing the strategies that ethnography and former colonial museums in Europe adopt in order to go beyond the colonial legacy, two essential kinds of effort can be identified. They may loosely be defined as museological and institutional, and though intrinsically linked, they will be dealt with here by considering four cases that illustrate the different scales of transformation that can be observed: two current permanent exhibits, and two major projects involving a policy-oriented reframing of colonial heritage.

Whose Objects? in the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm

The reinstallation of the Benin collection of artefacts at the Ethnographical Museum of Stockholm in 2010 gave the curators the opportunity to formulate

Figure 2.1 ***Whose Objects?*** **Photograph by Camilla Pagani, June 2012**

the fundamental question of the legitimate ownership and guardianship of objects taken from foreign lands. Museographically, the reinstallation, which has since become part of the permanent exhibition, brings together 'rhetorics' of value (Kratz 2011) that have increasingly become related to ethnographic art collections, but which are rarely confronted in displays themselves. The first is produced by the increasing attention given to the biography of the object; the individualisation of its career before entering the museum serves to negate its status as 'specimen'. The second is the ever-stronger aestheticisation of the ethnographic object in museum displays, described by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as an 'art of detachment' that works 'by suppressing contingency and presenting the objects on their own' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 25).

Yet it is precisely this contingency that *Whose Objects?* incorporates into its presentation by surrounding a highly aesthetic and attentive exhibition of the bronzes with the historical and contemporary terms of the debate concerning the restitution of the Benin works of art. The iconic image of the Queen Mother India that is reproduced at the exhibition's entrance, a coveted piece in the British Museum, sets the tone for a presentation that takes a 'glocal' point of view, inasmuch as it is relative on the one hand to the museum's own collection, but questioned as part of a general European and even worldwide issue (Östberg 2010, 52). In terms of exhibition design, it is a date rather than any single object that

occupies a key position, monumentally blown up to cover a large part of the main wall of the exhibition space (Figure 2.1).

In 1897, British troops invaded the Benin royal palace – bringing about the single greatest departure of precious objects from its soil. Presented in conjunction with elements on how these objects circulated in Europe to reach Stockholm, it becomes key to understanding the presence of the Benin pieces in Sweden.

This reinstallation came about three years after the very large temporary exhibition *Benin: Five Centuries of Royal Art* toured Europe in 2007 from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, to Berlin, Chicago and Paris. The modest scale of the Stockholm collection, made up of 74 pieces, is probably what has allowed the museum to confront the problem of the Benin claims to the objects in such a frontal, direct way. A series of labels present 'voices in the ongoing debate', beginning with a quotation from the Oba Erediauwa's preface text in the 2007 exhibition catalogue: 'It is our prayer that the people and the government of Austria will show humaneness and magnanimity and return to us some of these objects which found their way to your country' (Erediauwa 2007, 13).

The curator of the presentation, Wilhelm Östberg, uses a chorus of viewpoints, from Neil MacGregor to the West African Museums Programme to ICOM (International Council of Museums), as an initial measure of how the renegotiation of power relations in the world is expressed in this debate. But room is also made for the voices of more modest stakeholders concerned locally, present in the video installations that question five members of the Nigerian community living in Stockholm.

Significantly, the objects themselves occupy an 'island' of display cases in the centre, as the main purpose of the exhibit remains to show them to their best advantage (Östberg 2010, 6), and the visitor cannot simultaneously consider the terms of the debate and contemplate the artworks. However, the visitor also gains information about the situation of Benin today and how the role played by these pieces, in reproductions and popular imagery, contributes to the identity of a community for whom their function and political significance is historically specific and unique (HRH Prince Edun Akenzua, in Östberg 2010). This sense of negotiation can also be observed in the way communications concerning the exhibition were handled, and the exhibition opening was conceived of as both a cultural and a diplomatic event.

It is not a new debate, even to the general public, but the merit of this exhibit is to have clearly exposed it in the museum itself. In the conclusion of the catalogue, the curator himself admits that Stockholm cannot really afford to lose its Benin collection; indeed, the prestige that these objects bestow on anyone who holds them, owns them and exhibits them stands out as the one common value that is sought by all the participants of the debate that surrounds them (Östberg 2010, 68). The juxtaposition of values expressed by this exhibition allows the museum to offer a form of partial reparation, as it demonstrates its respect or at the very least its awareness of other claims to the interpretation of the object's place, its cultural, social and political importance, although it cannot offer, at least in the near future, any promise of actual restitution.

From the Object to the Subject: *The Colonial Theatre* at the Tropenmuseum

Alongside the issue of the material heritage of appropriations in colonial contexts, there is the even more complex question of the intangible heritage of the colonial experience. The renovation of the permanent displays of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam undertaken between 1995 and 2009 explicitly attempted to provide a visual and narrative expression of the intangible heritage that was the culture of collectionism and its relationship to colonialism both inside and outside the museum. Interpreted as a way of thinking about the world and about alterity, colonialism had to become an identifiable aspect of the museum's narrative, as a part of Dutch culture which at the height of its influence was, according to Susan Legêne, director of the renovation scheme, 'based on a mix of enlightenment ideals *and* repressive actions' (Legêne 2009, 12).

Key to this project has been the establishment of a display known as *The Colonial Theatre*, characterised by the museum website as 'an interactive presentation of lifelike mannequins representing characteristic figures from colonial history'.[1] It offers an ironic materialisation of the idea formulated by Nicholas B. Dirks (1992, 3) that 'the anthropological concept of culture might never have been invented without a colonial theatre'.

Indeed, *The Colonial Theatre* offers an inversion of how the world was visualised in colonial museum culture by adopting the use of the diorama to stage anew the layout introduced into the museum in 1938 to celebrate the forty-year reign of Queen Wilhelmina. An empty throne provided the metonymical presence of the queen herself surrounded by wax figures representing different categories of colonial subjects in traditional native costumes. When the museum decided to recreate this scene, it replaced 'the ethnic types' by 'some historical archetypes of people who contributed to the very creation of these images of otherness. … And as founders of the museum, they also speak for the museum about the past of its collections' (Legêne 2009, 18).

Yet perhaps the most interesting point here is the critical relationship to the museum's own strategies of representation – the diorama. It is all the more remarkable as it is a mode of display that more than any other directly engages the public, as it is capable of provoking a strong sense of 'recognition' (Schiele 1996, 11). This recognition is attained by looking through the glass box that separates the viewer from the object/subject on display. First developed for use in natural history museums, the diorama's origins are used here to cast an ironic gaze on the actors of its own past, as the coloniser is presented in his 'natural habitat', successfully inverting another usage of the colonial museum – its tendency to represent 'nature and culture' together in the display of indigenous people (Dias 2000, 19).

The glass cases are shaped like scientific test tubes, and thus apt for the presentation of 'specimens'; they also echo the stone columns in this monumental display hall. The figures that represent the Dutch actors of this 'colonial theatre'

1 See http://www.tropenmuseum.nl/5870 (accessed 10 March 2013).

are placed inside these glass boxes; however, some of the original mannequins from the 1938 exhibition have been reused to represent native workers in the colonial system – a civil servant and a textile worker, this time wearing clothes that bear witness to their acculturation and placed outside the glass cases. Though obviously ironic, the display is not devoid of a certain sense of nostalgia that is at once contradictory and fitting for such a paradoxical exercise in self-reflexive museum representation. Indeed, the actors of colonialism – specimens and pillars of the museum's history – are displayed alongside their individual stories that allow them to appear as the museum's own ancestors, thus becoming an accepted part of how the institution understands its colonial past.

The Museum as a Place for Shared Memory

In order to understand how colonial memory and heritage are becoming part of institutional museum culture itself, one can consider the ongoing project for the renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium, due to reopen by 2016. The renovation process began in 2001, when the museum initiated a policy of consultation with international experts, scholars, members of African associations and the African diaspora in order to reshape the permanent exhibition and to critically contextualise the colonial roots of the building and collections.

As a colonial museum in the most literal sense, the Royal Museum for Central Africa was founded following the 1897 Colonial Exhibition in Tervuren, and displays objects collected throughout the colonial period until the Republic of Congo gained its independence in 1960 (Figure 2.2). The main idea that has driven this renovation process since 2001 is that 'the history of the institution and its collections belongs to Belgians as much as it does to the peoples of Central Africa and their diasporas' (RMCA 2007–2008, 46).

Since 2003, the museum has developed a policy of consultation and mediation with African associations and diasporas through the institution of COMRAF (Comité consultative du RMCA – Associations Africaines), an elected committee composed of five professionals of RMCA, nine members of African associations and three 'resource persons' (RMCA 2007–2008, 46). The mediation with the Congolese diaspora within the project of renovation is crucial, since the museum intends to build a place for shared memory.

Undeniably, this approach has already influenced the dynamic temporary exhibitions policy that specifically intends to make visitors aware of this shared history by offering interpretations of the past that refer to multiple voices. For example, the exhibition *Indépendance! Congolese Tell their Stories of 50 Years of Independence* (2010) was interpreted from the Congolese point of view. Similarly, *Fetish Modernity* (2011) implied: 'a process of reflection about the function and the future of the 'ethnological' museum, in the knowledge that this description, which is often controversial these days, relates to a form of identity

Figure 2.2 'L'homme léopard' at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren. Photograph by Felicity Bodenstein, January 2012

connected with the colonial past of the West, and the meeting with "other" cultures' (Bouttiaux and Seiderer 2011, 18).

The renovation project is about modernising, renovating and adapting the museum structure and building for the needs of the twenty-first century. This implies a significant architectural intervention, led by Stephan Beel's cabinet. Of the changes to be undertaken, one point appears particularly relevant to this

discussion. The museum's entrance itself will no longer be through the main door at the front of the historical building. A new building will provide an entry that centralises all the visitor facilities. Once inside, a path will lead visitors into an underground gallery, where there will be two spaces for temporary exhibitions, an auditorium and rooms for workshops. The provisional plan specifies that this will allow for visitors to be *warned* before accessing the historical building, which will become part of the exhibition. Therefore, the public will be able to look at the museum as an object in itself from a critical and detached perspective[2] that is made possible by this *metahistorical* strategy.

Another challenge for the project is to describe contemporary Central Africa through collections that date back to the 1960s and are explicitly linked to the colonial past.[3] Since the building and the permanent collection belong to the Belgian Federal Heritage, 60 per cent of the permanent exhibition displays will not change. Aware of this limitation, the museum can attempt, through its historical building and collection, to play the role of what Pierre Nora (1984) defined as 'un lieu de mémoire'. It aims, however, to be a *lieu* of a different kind, pertaining not only to a national and exclusive memory, but to a transnational relationship between two communities, united by a common but undoubtedly difficult past.

As well as becoming a metahistorical object to provide a critical distance to the history and the stereotypes of Africa that were showcased by the museum during colonial times, the permanent exhibition will also be transformed through an interdisciplinary approach, which explicitly proposes to deconstruct traditional ethnographic and scientific categorisation in order to have a closer impact on the public. It is hoped that this pluridisciplinary perspective will contribute to opening up the permanent collection to themes that deal with Central Africa in a contemporary, diversified and dynamic way.

Beyond Self/other Dualism: 'Glocal' Paradigm, Multiple Voices

By adopting an interdisciplinary approach and a policy of temporary exhibitions, the brand-new institution the Museum of World Culture, which was inaugurated in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2004, illustrates a very different kind of strategy to question the colonial heritage of ethnography museums and to relate it to contemporary topics. It is part of the state-owned National Museums of World Culture, which includes three other museums: the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, and the Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm. In 1999, the Swedish government decided to create:

2 Interview with Christine Bluard conducted by Camilla Pagani, Royal Museum for Central Africa, 29 October 2012.

3 Ibid.

> something new in the world of museums …. It will mirror similarities and differences in ways of thinking, lifestyles and living conditions, as well as cultural change in Sweden and in the world. Visitors will be given the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural identity and those of others. (Lagerkvist 2008, 89)

Indeed, the National Museums of World Culture have been established 'to play a specific role in dealing with the challenges of multicultural Sweden, through their international collections and networks' (Swedish Government 1998, 25). According to the official statement: 'the Museum of World Culture is a forum for emotional and intellectual encounters that helps people feel at home wherever they are, trust each other and accept joint responsibility for the planet's constantly changing future' (Swedish Government 1998, 25).

The museum houses the collections from the old Ethnographic Museum of Gothenburg, consisting of about 100,000 items, most of which come from Latin America, but intentionally it has chosen not to define itself as an ethnography museum. It does not have any permanent exhibitions, but hosts temporary exhibitions in its five halls. Alongside the exhibit halls there is a large and diverse programme of experimental music, dance, theatre and conferences.

The museum focuses on the concept of 'world culture' – which is the translation of the Swedish neologism *världskultur*. For the English translation, according to museum curator Cajsa Lagerkvist, it was decided to adopt the singular instead of the plural form in order to break with the ethnographic tradition, where different cultures were displayed as distinctly identifiable. Thus 'world culture' is interpreted 'in a dynamic and open-ended manner' (Museum of World Culture 2004), dealing with contemporary issues such as globalisation, migration, cultural diversity, hybridity, postcoloniality and gender studies through a multiple-voice and interdisciplinary perspective (Lagerkvist 2006). According to the official website, 'world culture is not only about communication, reciprocity, and interdependence, but the specificity, concretion and uniqueness of each and every individual'. From a regional focus, the museum investigates global contemporary issues, using a transnational and 'glocal' paradigm (Lagerkvist 2008).

The strategy it adopts is an intense policy of idea-oriented temporary exhibitions (lasting from a few months up to three years) where it is possible to offer a take on different sensitive topics that can be discussed by visitors inside the exhibition space or during specific conferences. Since the opening, 37 exhibitions have featured contemporary global issues such as migrations, HIV, inter-religious dialogue, cultural diversity, and gender and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) issues. A telling example was *Jerusalem*, an exhibition of pictures portraying LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) persons from the three monotheist faiths living in Jerusalem, representing naked people or homosexual activities next to quotations from the sacred texts which condemn LGBTQ habits. As reported by the curator of contemporary global issues Klas Grinell, this case 'is important and worthwhile' because 'the sensitive issues are forced to the surface' (Grinell 2011, 228). In particular, he highlights the

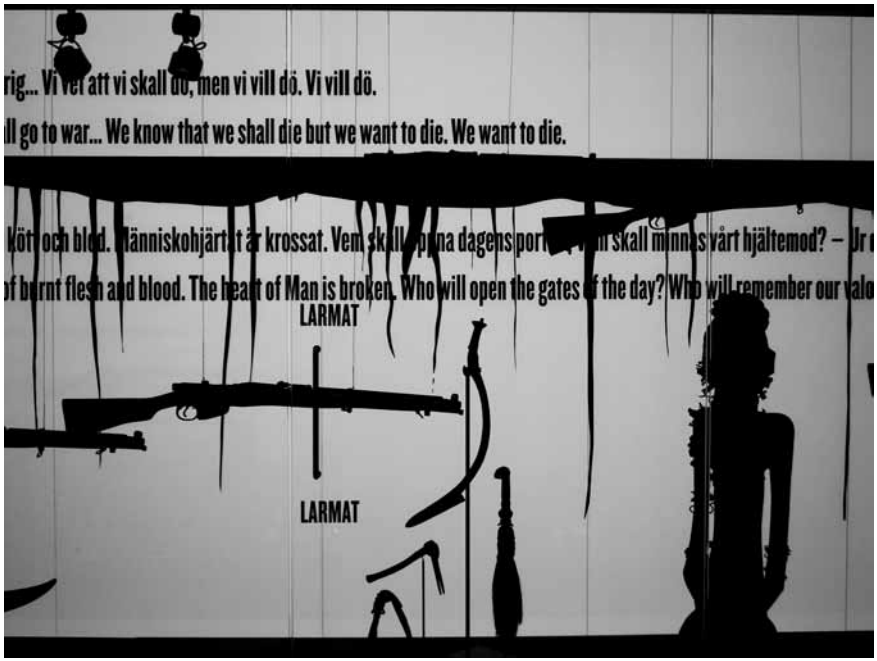

Figure 2.3 Detail of permanent installation, National Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg. Photograph by Camilla Pagani, June 2012

complexity of conceiving an exhibition where there is 'intersectionality' between different sensitive topics belonging to different frameworks such as sexuality and religion.

The museum also offers the possibility for reflection on collecting in the former colonial context, through some rare permanent installations situated in the stairwell (Figure 2.3). Objects collected by Swedish Lieutenant Otto Ljungqvist in Congo during the Belgian occupation or by Swedish explorer Thorild Wulff in China in the late nineteenth century are displayed alongside open-ended questions placed next to the objects: 'Why were these objects taken?' 'Who owns these objects?' The museum does not want to provide answers. Rather, it tries to place conflicts and debates about the colonial legacy of collections in the exhibition path itself.

Conclusion

The concept of 'decolonialising collections' has been around since the end of the 1980s, and essentially designates a process in which a postcolonial discourse serves to progressively singularise the ethnographic object and extract it from

former systems of museum classification that *de facto* maintained the object in its 'colonised' status (Dias 2000, 27). It has generated a critique of the museum that goes beyond the specific colonial context of collecting and display; in 1992, Michael M. Ames wrote: 'Museums are about cannibals and glass boxes, a fate they cannot seem to escape no matter how hard they try' (Ames 1992, 3). To perhaps escape this 'fate', the efforts described above suggest ways in which this 'cannibalistic' appropriation of the materials of other cultures and the exhibitionary process that accompanies it might be exposed.

What does this 'exposure' of colonial roots allow us to say about the relationship between postcoloniality and globalisation? What does this strange juxtaposition of historical and metahistorical commentary on the museum's own past and the new attention to the issues that face contemporary global culture, observed in all of these cases, say about the new role of ethnography museums and former colonial museums? The role is in any case an uneasy and difficult one, as the specialist in African literature Simon Gikandi points out:

> Besides their shared cultural grammar, however, the relationship between globalization and postcoloniality is not clear; neither are their respective meanings or implications. Is postcoloniality a consequence of the globalization of culture? Do the key terms in both categories describe a general state of cultural transformation in a world where the authority of the nation-state has collapsed? (Gikandi 2005, 609)

Certainly the 'glocal' repositioning of these national museums is an attempt to question their historically central position (as opposed to peripheral colonies) in the definition of cultures as a binary process that separates 'us' from the 'others'. The reflexive process of exposing colonial roots is key to overcoming this duality, as it allows the museum to look at itself as the other, as it contemplates its own ancestors behind glass cases, as it asks why these objects belong here, as it becomes an historical object in its own right by becoming strange to itself. It may be hoped that the sense of foreignness, perhaps even unease, that these displays and museum strategies can provoke will only lead to new discoveries.

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Chapter 3
Colonial Spaces, Postcolonial Narratives: The Exhibitionary Landscape of Fort Cochin in India

Neelima Jeychandran

'Welcome to God's own country' and the 'land of memories' are the emblematic words that are inscribed on signposts of the Southern Indian harbour town of Fort Cochin (Figure 3.1).[1] Being the earliest European settlement, Fort Cochin was established to safeguard the European maritime interests and to facilitate the spice trade. As Fort Cochin served as the social and economic hub for the Portuguese, Dutch, and later for the British trading companies, the landscape and cultural geography of the town were continuously reshaped over the years. The built environment is a fine synthesis of Portuguese, Dutch, and British elements, and it is this unique blending of several European architectural styles and indigenous methods of construction that makes Cochin a popular tourist destination. Although Fort Cochin lost its prominence as an international trading port in the postcolonial phase, it soon became an important cultural centre and was declared a heritage zone in 1991 to memorialise the colonial era.

This chapter will inquire into the ways in which the architectural forms in the erstwhile colonial port city are transformed and recast as a cultural heritage and places of memory. I study how the historical landscape of Fort Cochin exists as an alternative archive that narrates colonial history through unique modes of museal display, both within and beyond the walls of the museum spaces. Treating this landscape as *lieux de mémoire* – which, according to memory theorist Pierre Nora, are places where memory crystallises – I will examine the potency of these exhibition spaces as transmitters of memory. Finally, I discuss how the Kochi-Muziris Biennale reengages with Cochin's transnational past by commissioning installations that directly reflect the harbour town's complex and intertwined history.

By investigating the mnemonic and mimetic power of exhibition spaces in postcolonies, I discuss how different institutions, individuals, and communities employ spaces such as museums and heritage sites in postcolonial India to narrate

1 Fort Cochin is also spelt and written as 'Kochi', the way locals pronounce the name. Throughout this chapter, I have used 'Cochin' as several colonial port historians and cultural theorists have used the European name to narrate the history of the place.

Figure 3.1 **A signpost at the public space now called Vasco da Gama Square that refers to Fort Cochin as the 'Land of Memories'. Photograph by Neelima Jeychandran, May 2012**

history, circulate cultural memories, and address modern socio-political tensions through curatorial and artistic interventions. This chapter is also a means to discuss the generation of diverse and contrasting discourses on colonial occupation and to analyse the different ways in which narratives about European cultural connections are presented using the discursive space of museums. I shall unpack the rhetoric of such spaces in Fort Cochin and unravel their present performative roles as relics of colonialism, heritage structures, memorial sites, museums, and exhibition spaces.

History and Contemporary Existence at Fort Cochin

Located on the Malabar Coast in the Indian Ocean, Fort Cochin is a sea port, and one of the three municipalities amalgamated to form the city of Cochin, the second largest city in the state of Kerala. For centuries, it served as an international harbour and a port of call for vessels freighting from Europe and the Mediterranean to India and beyond. As it offered a safe docking for ships, the European trading companies vied to gain control of the harbour and the town. In 1503, the Portuguese became successful and established Fort Immanuel as the first European structure in India, which they later expanded into a big urban township with many civil buildings, warehouses, hospital and churches, including the famous St Francis Church.

Cochin was taken over by the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* – VOC) in 1663, and it became an important political and commercial centre for the Dutch. During the Dutch occupation, it was transformed into a fortified city, where all company employees and their families lived until 1795. Modelled in accordance with the Dutch town planning of the era, the urban layout of Cochin was much smaller in area compared to the urban sprawl during the Portuguese phase. Unlike the Portuguese, the VOC was not interested in building splendid churches: more mundanely, it sought to establish utilitarian structures and spaces (Singh 2010). In 1795, Fort Cochin passed to the British when the Dutch forces surrendered to the British East India Company. After the takeover, the British overhauled many buildings and made several changes to the landscape of Cochin to inscribe their presence and power in Cochin. The British were responsible for tearing down the fort walls and expanding the town to its present proportions. After independence, the town came to be known as Fort Cochin as a reference to the earlier fortified settlement.

After the colonial period, as the local administration and economic activities shifted to mainland Ernakulam, Fort Cochin lost its earlier importance and became a sleepy town. In 1991, gauging the potential of the town as a tourist destination, the Tourism Development Board of Kerala declared Fort Cochin a heritage zone, and extensive restoration projects were developed.[2] Today, on the heritage and tourist map of Fort Cochin some nineteen historical sites like St Francis Church, Santa Cruz Basilica, Dutch East India Company Gate and spaces like Vasco-da-Gama Square, the parade ground and Dutch cemetery are marked as places of historic memory. The restoration projects have revitalised the remnants of the colonial culture and made them visually prominent as in-situ exhibits.

Apart from the heritage buildings and historical monuments, there are two small museums at Fort Cochin: the Indo-Portuguese Museum and the Maritime Museum. The Indo-Portuguese Museum showcases the Christian religious heritage of Cochin. Established with the help of the Portuguese cultural institution the Calouste-Gulbenkian Foundation, the Diocese of Cochin organised the religious artefacts and precious objects in its possession in a newly opened building in February 2000 within the premises of Bishop House. The museum is housed right above the location of the old Portuguese fort so as to commemorate the Portuguese cultural influence at Cochin. On the lower ground floor of the museum is the remnant of the wall of the Portuguese Fort Immanuel that was destroyed by the Dutch. Religious paraphernalia from various churches, including liturgical items,

2 The revitalisation programme was carried out by the Department of Tourism, Kerala State, Fort Cochin Heritage Zone Conservation Society, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, the Revenue Divisional Office of Fort Kochi and the Corporation of Cochin (City Council). Furthermore, the Archaeological Survey of India continues to protect some of the monuments under its jurisdiction. In addition to these organisations, private homeowners, hoteliers and other non-governmental institutions have restored many historic homes and other spaces and put them to various uses.

an altar, insignia and ceremonial items, and other gold and silver sacred objects, are displayed in the five rooms on level one of the museum. Also exhibited in a small room are a few cultural objects from the Portuguese era and a large map of Portuguese Fort Cochin etched on tiles. The Maritime Museum housed within the naval base at Fort Cochin was established in 1989. The museum presents a chronological account of the maritime history of India and the evolution of the Indian Navy. A wide range of displays, including dioramas, models, naval charts, maps, and photographs, presents the maritime heritage of India, including the maritime history of the Malabar Coast and Cochin. Significant historical events pertaining to the history of the Malabar Coast are displayed in a separate room.

Scholars such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) and Bella Dicks (2000) have demonstrated that the transformation of places into heritage sites and exhibition platforms adds value to existing assets that have either ceased to be viable or have become obsolete. This is very true in the case of Fort Cochin. While colonial buildings and precincts were reinvented and regenerated to act as cultural signifiers of the past, they simultaneously produced something new that is of economic importance in the present. With the transformation of habitats and buildings at Cochin, architectural forms and other places started a second life as heritage sites. Invisible and often unnoticed spaces like streets, harbour fronts, cemeteries, and other mundane locations also acquired a new existence as historical venues. The influx of visitors in turn stimulated the establishment of museums and museum-like organisations, thus transforming Fort Cochin into a large exhibition space. Arguably, it is tourism that has caused the transformation of Fort Cochin into a living museum and 'exhibitionary complex'. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) has argued, heritage and tourism are collaborative industries, with heritage converting locations into destinations, and tourism making them economically viable as exhibits of themselves.

Transformation of Fort Cochin into an Open-air Museum

In its current existence as a heritage enclave and open-air museum space, Fort Cochin has come to typify the features of an 'exhibitionary complex' in which places and people are arranged and unfolded in the most dramatic fashion. Here, I borrow the concept proposed by Tony Bennett (2004) in his critical analysis of colonial fairs and exhibitions. Bennett argues that in the colonial fairs of the twentieth century, the world itself was transformed into a display mode as the fairs systematically arranged and presented commodities, cultural aspects, and even people from the colonised world as objects for consumption. Fort Cochin in the postcolonial phase represents the phenomenon of an 'exhibitionary complex' chiefly because of the manner in which architectural structures are displayed by employing various strategies to showcase colonial history and power.

Like Bennett, Timothy Mitchell, who has analysed the ordering strategy of the non-Western world in the imperial exhibitions, posits that the cultures of the Orient

Figure 3.2 The Museum Company, an antique store-cum-curio shop advertising itself as a museum at Fort Cochin. Photograph by Neelima Jeychandran, May 2012

were arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification declaring itself to be a mere 'object', which signified something further (Mitchell 2004). It is worth noting the similarity in the structural ordering of the imperial exhibitions and the heritage complex at Fort Cochin and its signification. Like the great exhibitions, the colonial fortified township of Fort Cochin was a colossal colonial endeavour constructed to assert power and generate commerce. Most importantly, such creations were microcosmic representations of the imperial world. While the great exhibitions showcased the cultures of the colonised world in a miniature format in the imperial capitals, the fort complex at Cochin was a microcosmic representation of the imperial centre and civil society.[3] The built structures in the fortified township of Cochin were a visual representation of wealth and power. While the exhibitions showcased the colonies for the imperial subjects, the fort complex displayed the imperial world to the people in the colony. Today, various organisations and people at Fort Cochin employ the residual structures of colonial spatial ordering as means to display colonial culture.

3 Fashioned like the imperial capitals, the fortified township at Cochin had civil institutions like courts, orphanages, schools, prisons, hospitals, churches, taverns, workshops, and warehouses.

Figure 3.3 **David Hall, the seventeenth-century residence of the Dutch governor, which currently serves as a contemporary art gallery and also one of the venues of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Photograph by Neelima Jeychandran, December 2012**

In the contemporary phase at Fort Cochin, one can see diversified forms of museums and exhibition spaces, which I would say are a unique blend of commercial display and cultural heritage. In addition to the two museums, there are a few curio shops that present themselves as museums to lure tourists to buy artefacts and traditional crafts (Figure 3.2). Local shop owners borrow the display strategy and exhibiting format of the museum as a means to demonstrate the credibility of their enterprise as a more genuine place in a street closely packed with antique stores and curio shops.

Katarzyna Pieprzak, writing about the different types of museums in Morocco, notes that museum-like spaces bourgeoned in Morocco's local marketplaces with the increased tourist influx, as the local vendors, seeing the potential, used the name and the model of museums to attract customers (Pieprzak 2010). Writing about the display culture in modern India, Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge note that there is an intermingling of the colonial model and Indian urban display strategy in the Indian phenomenon of exhibition-cum-sale, where one is invited to view as well as purchase the objects on display. They view this phenomenon as emerging out of a constellation of factors, with the museum-festival-sale promoting a specialised cultural complex where objects and experiences combine visual pleasure, ethnic and national display, and consumer appetite (Appadurai and Breckenridge 2004).

Building on the above arguments, I would say that Fort Cochin is a heritage complex in which culture is showcased according to the dominant Indian ideals of display as seen in the exhibition-cum-sale representational format. In addition to heritage sites, Fort Cochin also has a few good contemporary art galleries such as the Kashi Art Gallery and David Hall (Figure 3.3), which are the venues for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

Because of the presence of a diverse range of exhibition avenues such as museums, art galleries, antique shops fashioned like museums and cultural centres that exists alongside historical spaces and archaeological monuments in a very small radius of two kilometres, I argue that Fort Cochin has the characteristics of an exhibitionary complex. However, there are elements that are antithetical to Bennett's notion. Unlike the colonial exhibitionary complex, where an attempt was made to display the cultures of the world, at Fort Cochin the remnants of the colonial era are curated and showcased to lure both domestic and international visitors. At Fort Cochin, vestiges and fragments from the colonial period are presented chiefly for the visual consumption of domestic tourists. This curiosity and interest in colonial heritage on the part of Indian visitors is a postcolonial way of romanticising the colonial past that is shrouded in some kind of mystery and obscurity in postmodern India. I would say that a reverse orientalism process is at work here as the visitors yearn to unravel colonialism in India.

Postcolonial Memory and Museums

In his penetrating analysis of places as receptacles of memory, Edward Casey shows that places have the power to retain or preserve memory and are potentially very receptive (Casey, 1987). He proposes that place must be regarded as a keeper of memories like the human body or brain, mind or language. Treating the colonial buildings and spaces at Fort Cochin as sites or realms of memory, I argue that the built environments, ruins and museums at Fort Cochin are not 'soul-less' heritage sites, but rather complex and dynamic spaces which house the memories of those who inhabited them once, and also of those who traverse them. According to Pierre Nora, places of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, are sites where cultural memory crystallises and secretes itself (Nora, 1989). Material vestiges of the past such as heritage sites, historical buildings, and museums are visible anchors for memory. In this light, Fort Cochin as an open-air museum space is a *lieu de mémoire* that preserves the memory of colonialism and a site that plays a key role in contemporary production and circulation of selected memories of the colonial past.

Because of their function as places of memory that are intended to preserve narratives of the colonial past, the production of such memories and its discursive trajectory should be critically analysed. In showing why institutions like museums matter in the postcolonial phase, Gyan Prakash argues that museums are critical

sites that need to be revisited to unpack colonial discourses. According to him, far from disappearing, colonialism and its constructions loom as spectres within the discursive space of the museum (Prakash 2004). Being a port city that facilitated cultural connections, the history of Fort Cochin is complex and fraught because it also served as the entry point for the Christian missionaries that altered the religious landscape of the region. However, what is depicted and articulated through the built structures and museums at Fort Cochin is rather a simple narrative about the initial arrival of the Portuguese and the presence of other Europeans along the Malabar Coast who developed the landscape and culture of the local people. The rhetoric of coercion and subjugation is largely absent.

To review the contemporary allure and outlook of citizens towards colonialism, former colonial buildings that are transformed into heritage sites and museums in India should be critically reviewed as spaces that not only resonate with the memories of colonialism, but also generate a new discourse on colonialism. In order to deconstruct the cultural, political, and psychic dimensions of postcolonial memory, K.E. Supriya has studied the museum in Fort St George, Chennai – the erstwhile centre of the British East India Company's political and economic activities. By analysing how Indians interact with colonial exhibits, Supriya (2004) claims that postcolonial Indians craft a complex and textured idea of British rule in India. Observing how museum visitors negotiate with the textured historicity of the museum space and the objects, Supriya states that in postcolonial nations, preservation of built structures and objects stimulates the production of both a public and private form of memory concerning colonialism that is restorative: the disturbing past is not refused or rejected, but rather reworked to achieve equilibrium in the present. Supriya's analysis of the role of the postcolonial spaces and Indian visitors' approach to such spaces is true to an extent. For instance, at Fort Cochin the colonial occupation, trade, and the eventual dominance and rule are not portrayed and read as oppressive histories of colonialism in India. Rather, visitors often view Fort Cochin as a place that benefited and developed due to European interactions and trade exchanges.

While museums and monuments at Fort Cochin, as memory places, ensure the discursive formations of cultural narratives for a community, they also create divergent and contrasting narratives about colonialism and its postcolonial perspectives. Writing about the rhetorical nature of memory places, Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott note that memory sites provide an opportunity for visitors to imagine their links to peoples of the past and realise their connections in the present (Blair et al. 2010, 26). In most cases at Fort Cochin, locals also re-inscribe the histories of the built-in spaces with contemporary forms of narration. For instance, some historical spaces have been restored so that visitors have the opportunity to inhabit them, as they have been transformed into heritage hotels. A case in point is the Vasco Homestay, which according to popular local belief was the residence of Vasco da Gama. Although there is no historical evidence, the locals and the city tourism board consider the place to be the house of the Portuguese

mariner.[4] There are other cases where the colonial history is transformed as a result of popular postcolonial memory and interaction with space. At Fort Cochin, the local residents who run home-stays and curio shops are not only creating a new cultural narrative, but are also functioning as interlocutors of the past and keepers of memories.

A Site for Multiple Cultural Productions

More recently, the landscape of Fort Cochin was revived for a different kind of project. Being the host town for the first edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, several heritage buildings and disused structures of historical importance were chosen as exhibition spaces to display artworks and large-scale installations. The main venues for the Biennale are the Aspin Wall (a British warehouse with a bungalow), Pepper House (a former warehouse used for the spice trade) and David Hall (the former residence of the Dutch governor). The objective of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is to create site-specific works that will articulate as well as respond to the historicity of the place. With the conceptual agenda of performing a critical spatial intervention, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale curatorial team invited Indian and international artists to survey various locations in Fort Cochin and Mattancherry to create works that would resonate with the multi-textured history of Cochin and its contemporary culture. From being a heritage town, Fort Cochin is soon turning into the art capital of India. The Biennale not only brought artists and art enthusiasts from all over the world to the erstwhile colonial port city, but also provided an opportunity for visitors to re-engage with the complex history and culture of the town through artistic productions ranging from paintings, sculptures, installations, video-art, and conceptual art to graffiti and performances.

Renowned Indian artists such as Vivan Sundaram, Subodh Gupta, and K.P. Reji have not only addressed current socio-political and cultural issues, but also opened up dialogues about the sorts of global exchange, oceanic trade, inter-culturalism, and migration that Cochin, as a prominent sea port, has facilitated for centuries. Furthermore, some commissioned works symbolically and metonymically feature specific historical events and characters. For instance, the installation of San Francisco-based Portuguese artist Rigo 23 at the abandoned boat jetty at Calvathy Canal (the waterway that historically separated the colonial town of Fort Cochin from Mattancherry, the traditional trading centre) addresses lesser-known or obfuscated histories. The three installations by Rigo 23, suspended from the girders of the old jetty that slowly sways in the ocean breeze, disseminate marginalised narratives such as Vasco da Gama's unsuccessful endeavours and his brutality, and also the enslavement and murder

4 The current owners of the house advertise the home-stay facility as a place where one can experience and learn about Vasco da Gama's life in Cochin. See 'Vasco House Fort Cochin', http://www.vascohomestay.com (accessed 23 February 2013).

of African slaves in Colonial Fort Cochin, especially during the Portuguese and Dutch eras. By commissioning and displaying contemporary artworks in public spaces, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is creating a new layer of meanings to add to the multi-textured history of the place.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to tease out the different ways in which colonial buildings and spaces are revitalised in postcolonial India, both to conserve the memory of the colonial period and to produce a new attraction for domestic and international visitors alike. Further, I have noted that the contemporary existence and persistence of historical sites in Fort Cochin are more viable as places of memory or exhibition spaces.

In conclusion, in contemporary India, heritage zones like the one at Fort Cochin have come to replace the old exhibitionary complex. Places of historical importance are exhibited and curated owing to the influx of tourists. With heritage sites, museums, and performances functioning as the new cultural capitals of postcolonial nation-states, time and money are invested to design new features that will add to the existing value of these sites. Although the town of Fort Cochin survives as an open-air museum that narrates the story of colonialism, it is not a space that critically questions colonial discourses. Rather, the colonial phase is presented as an era of inter-cultural exchange.

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Chapter 4
Ethnographic Museums: From Colonial Exposition to Intercultural Dialogue

Fabienne Boursiquot

The Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) is scheduled to open in Marseille in June 2013. This new museum brings together collections from the Musée de l'Homme and the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP), two major ethnographic museums that opened in Paris in 1937. Together with other new 'museums of society', MuCEM announces a shift in the treatment of cultural difference: whereas twentieth-century ethnographic museums used to primarily document and exhibit other cultures, museums of society present themselves as places 'where cultures converse' and as intercultural meeting points. This new mission raises certain questions: How exactly will this dialogue take place? Who will be part of it? What place will be made for the past, in particular the colonial past?

In this chapter, I seek to offer a genealogy of these new museums of society by taking into account a paradigm shift that occurred in anthropology itself. Now that some ethnographic museums are reconfigured into art museums (quai Branly, Paris) or 'museums of society' (MuCEM, Marseille), this chapter asks whether these new museums are effective ways to decolonise old ethnographic collections and to foster new relationships between Europe and the former colonies. I suggest that one of the keys necessary to understand this museum reconfiguration in France resides in the relationship between museums and anthropology that was established in the second half of the nineteenth century, and in the paradigm shift that marked the discipline.

The idea – central to the project of the ethnographic museum – that it is possible to reconstitute a society from its objects does not stand up any more. Most of the museums which exhibit objects that once belonged to non-Western societies were established in a context in which Europe dominated foreign continents; they materialise an asymmetrical relation to these societies. What meaning do these museums have now that the colonial era is officially over?

In our postcolonial world, it is not possible to speak on behalf of non-Western societies, nor to represent them or their objects without being preoccupied by what they would say about it. Since the 1980s, there has been a growing feeling that ethnographic museums are going through a crisis. They have been accused of presenting non-Western cultures in a reified and sometimes caricatural manner. In response to this crisis, a majority of ethnographic museums entered into a redefinition

process. Some museums chose to adopt an aesthetical approach; they converted ethnographic objects into works of art. Other ethnographic museums opted for closer collaboration with the communities the displayed objects came from (Ames 1992).

The very category of 'ethnographic museum', as a museum dedicated to the 'Others' – intended here as non-Western civilisations, societies or ethnic groups – needs to be thought through. What is the meaning today of a distinction between 'Us' and the 'Others'? What does it mean when a museum offers the possibility to encounter the 'Others' and to discover their culture when members of these communities are now French citizens (de L'Estoile 2007, 20–21)?

Ethnographic Museums and Museums of the 'Others'

Let us begin by recalling a few historical milestones. Museums of ethnology and anthropology are part of the long history of collectionism and of the exhibition of non-Western societies and their objects.[1] The history of museums goes back as far as Antiquity, where the term *mouseion* (*museum* in Latin) evoked a temple dedicated to the muses. During the Middle Ages, relics, manuscripts and various objects brought back from the Crusades were displayed in churches and monasteries (Alexander and Alexander 2008, 3–5).

The cabinets of curiosities that could be found throughout Europe in the sixteenth century are commonly considered to be the prototypes of modern museums (Impey and MacGregor 1985; Stocking 1985). Like a microcosm, the cabinet brings the whole universe into one room. These collections of miscellaneous objects expressed a desire to understand the world in its universal dimension that translated into an interest in various domains: the natural world (animal, vegetal and mineral), Antiquity (Roman coins, sculptures, Egyptian mummies), exotic objects brought back from Africa, the Orient or the New World, mythical creatures and so on. Europeans' explorations and conquests of other continents supplied royal and private collections. But this was before ethnographic objects were treated as a distinct category (Stocking 1985, 6–7).

If we can see continuity between cabinets of curiosities and the first ethnographic museums, we must admit that their objectives were different.

1 The terms 'anthropology', 'ethnology' and 'ethnography' are used differently to refer to the discipline dedicated to the study of man according to geographical and disciplinary contexts. In North America, the term 'anthropology' is used in a broader sense and encompasses archaeology, linguistics, physical anthropology, and social and cultural anthropology. In Continental Europe, the term 'ethnology' is equivalent to social and cultural anthropology, even though a growing number of practitioners identify themselves as anthropologists, at least in France (de L'Estoile 2007, 15). As for the term 'ethnography', it usually refers to the collection of data. 'Ethnographic museums' remind us that ethnographic expeditions were central to collection-building and the establishment of these museums.

Collectors from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wanted to fathom the secrets of the Creation by collecting its strangest and rarest manifestations. On the other hand, ethnographic museums had a clear scientific aim: to preserve, to classify and to study the products of mankind and nature.

The first public museums emerged at the end of the seventeenth century.[2] However, it was during the nineteenth century that the pairing between museum and anthropology really took shape, at the very moment when the latter emerged as a scientific discipline. The idea of a natural selection, validated by the concept of evolution, justified the classification of ethnographic artefacts with animals and other natural specimens. Ethnographic objects were seen as evidence of the gradual evolution of mankind from the state of savagery to civilisation. Along with the ethnological exhibition of human beings in colonial exhibitions and world fairs, these objects both confirmed anthropology's status as an empirical science and established the distinction between Westerners and the 'Others' (Schildkrout 2012).

The emergence of anthropology as a discipline during the nineteenth century is tied to the museum (Sturtevant 1969; Stocking 1985; Dias 1991). Around the turn of the twentieth century, museums were fundamental in terms of 'the employment of personnel and the support of field research' (Stocking 1985, 8).[3] The curators of the first museums of anthropology, like Frederic W. Putnam at the Peabody Museum in the United States and John William Dawson at the Redpath Museum in Canada, played a major role in the professionalisation of the discipline and the foundation of the first departments of anthropology in universities (Browman 2002; Lawson 1999). Notably, in connection with the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, Edward Tylor, a founding figure of social anthropology, held the first chair in Anthropology in Britain (Stocking 1987, 264–5). Franz Boas, considered by many as the father of American anthropology, received his first position as an anthropologist at the American Museum of Natural History (Browman 2002, 514). Later, the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, in the form of a 'laboratory-museum' as

2 Museums mainly dedicated to anthropology emerged during this period: the Academy of Sciences of Saint Petersburg (1836), the National Museum of Ethnology of Leiden in the Netherlands (1837), the National Museum in Denmark (founded in 1816; an ethnographic collection was established in 1840), the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge (1866), the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris (1878), the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (1884) and the National Museum of Anthropology, History and Ethnology in Mexico (1909) (Alexander and Alexander 2008, 72; Stocking 1985, 7).

3 William C. Sturtevant has defined the 'museum period' in anthropology, running from the 1840s to the 1890s, as the period when almost all research was done by museum anthropologists: 'The gathering of museum collections during fieldwork, and studying them later on in the museum, was an important and respectable part of anthropological research' (Sturtevant 1969, 622). But I agree with Stocking's assertion that 'the great period of museum anthropology only really began in the 1890s' (Stocking 1985, 8).

defined by Paul Rivet, had a durable influence on the field of ethnology in France.[4] The French case contrasts sharply with the situation in the rest of the world, where museum influence in anthropology declined during the inter-war years. In France, in comparison to Britain and the United States, the central role of the museum only began to decrease in favour of universities and research centres three decades later (Dias 2007, 77).

The relationship between museum and anthropology is complex because it is shaped by several factors: the initial identification of anthropology as a natural science and the consequent influence of natural history museums; the use of anthropology as a scientific justification of the European colonial project and the exhibition of 'Savages' during the colonial and universal exhibits through the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century; the idea that indigenous cultures should be recorded in an encyclopaedic fashion before their complete extinction, and the humanist project to prove both the unity and diversity of humankind.[5] Finally, the social and artistic context influenced anthropological museums and their museographic choices, as illustrated by the aesthetic approach adopted by the Musée de l'Homme during the 1960s, right after the opening of the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens.

All in all, one could say that the golden age of the relationship between museums and anthropology came at the moment when the main task of anthropology was defined as the study of the material manifestations of all mankind. Ethnographic museums were in part a response to the scientific necessity to collect and study ethnographic objects. On a theoretical level, these objects are considered to be material expressions of the culture of a given society. Being the depositories of huge collections, ethnographic museums stayed in place throughout the twentieth century, even though anthropologists progressively abandoned the material study of societies and became more and more interested in the study of meaning, social structures, power relationships, social practices, modes of being-in-the-world, and so on, which can only be accessed through fieldwork.

Museological Turn and Paradigm Shift in France

The transfer of the ethnographic collections from the Musée de l'Homme to the quai Branly museum and the future MuCEM, as well as the closure of the MNATP, constitute a major turn in French ethnology and an irreversible transformation of

4 Paul Rivet defined *ethnologie* as 'the science of man in its totality', encompassing physical anthropology, linguistics and ethnography (de L'Estoile 2003, 342).

5 Important anthropological theories, such as evolutionism, diffusionism and structuralism, have also influenced the ways ethnographic objects were classified and presented in museums. Diffusionism was an anthropological theory that was influential during the first half of the twentieth century. It holds that culture traits spread from one society to another (Kuklick 2002).

the relationship between anthropology and museums (Dias 2007). The closing of these two institutions that shaped French ethnology marks the end of a museum paradigm that was more influential in France than elsewhere. This paradigm was not only characterised by an interest in objects; it defined the way the discipline was practised, its aims and methods that revolved around the project of an encyclopaedic inventory of the world achieved through a systematic collection of objects. This model was inherited from the natural sciences and the museum of natural history: to collect, to classify and to establish natural laws. According to this model, the purpose of ethnographic museums is to inventory cultures, peoples or ethnic groups just as the natural history museum makes inventories of plants and insects (de L'Estoile 2008).

The idea that it is possible to establish an inventory of the cultures of the world rests on two assumptions: (a) cultures are seen as closed and clearly delimited units, and (b) cultures exist in a limited number. However, these presuppositions were increasingly challenged during the twentieth century. Ethnography shifted from a 'collection model' to an interlocution or a 'translation model', and from a naturalist paradigm, whose aim was the objective depiction of different ways of life, to a translation paradigm (de L'Estoile 2008, 666). In a translation paradigm, the goal of anthropologists is to translate for the members of their own society the ways of life they learned while inserting themselves into another world. From this point of view, anthropology is not the science of otherness, but a kind of knowledge that relies on the relationship between different worlds. In other words, one can say that ethnographic knowledge is characterised by the fact that it is gained through interpersonal relations (de L'Estoile 2003). In a postcolonial world, ethnographic museums must acknowledge this paradigm shift. The challenge for ethnographic museums and anthropologists today is to find new ways to translate the results of their researches into exhibits. As de L'Estoile (2007) puts it: in a postcolonial word, ethnographic museums tend to become museums of the *relationship* between 'Us' and the 'Others' more than museums of the 'Others'. The transformation of the French museum landscape during the last decade reveals a relocation of such a boundary.

Before the relocation of their ethnographic collections to the Musée du quai Branly and the MuCEM, the Musée de l'Homme and the MNATP offered a dual definition of 'Us': at the level of all humankind, and at a national level. The redistribution of ethnographic collections into new museums traces new identity boundaries. The future MuCEM illustrates the desire to foster a European and Mediterranean sense of belonging, whereas the absence of European collections at the Musée du quai Branly establishes a new distinction between 'Us' and the non-European 'Others' (de L'Estoile 2007).

What place is given to the French colonial heritage in this identity reconfiguration? One important aspect of this reconfiguration is the absence of a museum dedicated to colonisation. In fact, it seems that the French colonial past has become a blind spot for the national museums. The colonial heritage is either relegated to the collections of quai Branly, or integrated into the larger theme of

immigration at the Cité de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, on the site of the former Palais Permanent des Colonies (de L'Estoile 2007).

Museums of Society and Intercultural Dialogue

In France, new museums like the quai Branly and the future MuCEM adopt a posture of openness to cultural diversity. Thus, the motto of the Musée du quai Branly is *là où dialoguent les cultures* ('where cultures converse'), and the MuCEM is presented as a meeting place for twentieth-century civilisations. But as James Clifford brilliantly puts it: 'cultures don't converse: people do' (Clifford 2007, 16). Reflecting on the quai Branly's opening ceremonies, Clifford argues that even though the new museum identifies itself with indigenous recognition movements, this attitude towards cultural recognition and dialogue has little impact on contemporary inequalities: 'How, in practice, the Musée du quai Branly might position itself to foster a "dialogue of cultures" in contemporary Paris and its embattled immigrant suburbs was a question that haunted the opening events' (Clifford 2007, 18). In this respect, I agree with Mary Douglas when she says that this dialogue must take place with the people who made the objects displayed in museums and their descendants:

> What an ethnographic museum should be able to do, in one way or another, is to engage a conversation with the descendants of the peoples that are at the source of this art, that created the marvelous treasures that the museum protects and transmits to future generations. And who are they? They are the immigrants, the refugees and the poor in our community that are not part of our Western traditions. (Mary Douglas, translated and quoted in Price 2009, 5)

As Price (2007) points out, preconceptions influenced by movies, television, books and so on are not absent from the contemplation of non-Western works of art. The pure aesthetical contemplation of objects cannot lead by itself to an intercultural dialogue. On the contrary, it can nurture a reified imaginary of non-Western societies as being exotic, mysterious, stuck in time, and far different from us. The question that remains to be asked is how the museum and its exhibitions can foster a constructive dialogue between different groups of people that are now part of the French society. One modest hypothesis is that temporary exhibits and cultural activities, being more flexible than permanent exhibitions, and guided tours might offer fertile occasions for learning, encounter and reflection about our relation to the 'Others'.

Ethnographic objects are enmeshed in multiple histories (colonial, familial, local, mythical). What is an adequate way to display them today in museums? As works of art? As a testimony of the culture that produced them? Or as remnants of a pre-colonial era? These different approaches often coexist in museums that display non-Western cultures. But globally, there has been, since the 1920s, a growing influence of the formalist approach over museums of ethnography (de L'Estoile 2007, 332). From this perspective, the introduction of 'first' or 'tribal' art to the

Louvre of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is representative of a transformation in the way non-Western objects are defined: from ethnographic objects, they become works of art and enter the universal history of art. This transformation is seen as a recognition of non-Western cultures and their art. But the formalist approach has also been the target of numerous criticisms: because it neglects the history of cultures, of the objects themselves and of local and transnational meanings (Clifford 2007), because it says little about the social and artistic processes of creation (Bensa 2006), and because giving an exclusively aesthetical meaning to objects that were once collected to inform Europe about the life of foreign peoples is in itself a semantic deviation (Dubé 2004).

L'Estoile (2007) suggests that these objects should be presented on the basis of the complex relations that were established around them. Ethnographic objects are not only non-Western objects in our museums; they are enmeshed in relations between 'Us' and the 'Others' – relations that are in constant redefinition. The postcolonial museum, as de L'Estoile suggests, is a museum that reflects on these relations and places history and reflexivity at its core. The postcolonial museum questions the very possibility of exhibiting cultural diversity as if it were a reality. It encourages the public to reflect on the fact that other cultures do not exist outside of the relation that determines difference. It asks how ethnographic objects were collected and why, how tourism transformed cultural practices, what is the 'museum effect' on the way we see non-Western societies (Alpers 1991). It is only through a reflexive effort of this kind that the possibility of intercultural dialogue can emerge.

For French philosopher and museologist Bernard Deloche (2010), this reflexive component is a central characteristic of *musées de société* ('museums of society'). These museums – the Musée de la Civilisation in Quebec City, the Ethnographic Museum in Neuchâtel, the future MuCEM in Marseille or the Musée des Confluences in Lyon – transform at the same time what they show and the relationship with the public. They define themselves primarily through their public, and not on the basis of their collections, and adopt a thematic approach to reflect on questions of society.[6] Museums of society want to escape ideology, they do not wish to transmit absolute values, nor an eternal dogma; they transmit questions rather than answers. In this perspective, the museum becomes an interactive 'observatory' of social life where the public are invited to question their own culture and identity (Deloche 2007, 204–5).

Conclusion

The end of the Musée de l'Homme and the opening of the Musée du quai Branly in France mark a dual breakdown: in the encyclopaedic model with its universalistic ambition on the one hand, and in the disciplinary paradigm on the other (Dias

6 In this regard, the Musée de la Civilisation de Québec, founded in 1988, acts as a trailblazer (Bergeron 2002, 63).

2007, 76). In their new forms, museums dedicated to the 'Others' seem to adopt one of the two following models: the art museum (as with the quai Branly) or the museum of society (as with the MuCEM). Dealing with questions of society and putting the public instead of its collections at its centre, the museum of society opens the door to a new role for the museum: reflexivity and critique. It is a role full of promises, as it meets with the critical posture of a certain kind of anthropology.

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PART II
Artistic Incursions in Space and Time

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Chapter 5
‘There is Not Yet a World’[1]

Ebadur Rahman

Prologue

The Minister of Propaganda of Gulmoher Republic, a fluid network hub of Bengali artists, vehemently denied any constitutional doxa. He invoked a Deleuzian trope, ‘faciality’, and likened any formal rigidity, notion of hexes or ideological allegiance to a facialised re-enactment, inscribed on a colonial grid. The dominant subject, the colonisers and the slave owners, formulates the Other as a coherent identity-formation, based on a hierarchy of incongruity from the white man’s face, and redeems this idea of the identity of the oppressed in objects: art, literature, iconography.

To quote Gilles Deleuze: ‘This machine is called the faciality machine because it is the social production of face, because it performs the facialisation of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus’ (Deleuze 1996, 181). According to the Minister of Propaganda of Gulmoher Republic, if faciality is a counter-dialectical machine to maintain the marriage of the coloniser’s apparatus of domination with his face, then Gulmoher Republic is an erotic state, Gulmoher Republic is a perennial erection looking for the face to penetrate and pulverise its doxic closure.

The Dominant Subject, the locus of material and spiritual signification, represents the colonial subject as object, in order to gain control over the world; the coloniser – here, perhaps, it is helpful to include in our discussion what Samir Amin calls ‘internal colonising’ – inscribing names and the category of things, reinstates the Other as an object of his knowledge (Amin 1976).

According to its Communique #8, Gulmoher Republic is a networked viral expansion loop to disrupt ‘knowledges’ and ‘histories’ by inaugurating haptic resonances in aesthetic experience. Gulmoher Republic brings the foci of the a-subjective realm of ‘becoming’ and its primal absence of order into the field of culture production. Gulmoher Republic has attempted to illuminate a particular moment, when both Kapitalist-corporate time and occidental ‘History’-making (‘History’-keeping and art-making related to these ‘Histories’, body and gesture) have become particularly problematic in the Subcontinent.

Given the dominant academic grids, regardless of places as different as Dhaka, Delhi or Darfur, the reception of ‘History’ invariably alludes to the dominant ways of knowing and thinking about the history of practices – an affirmation of the idealised, settled, schematic and totalised transcendental signifieds generated

1 Artaud (1995).

by the power elites. Time and again, in its critical literature, Gulmoher Republic reiterates these questions: Can an 'underdeveloped', 'Third World' woman be the ethical subject of History? Can the 'Other' from the position of a meta-historical outreach write history? Can the Woman/Other create art within History, or does she have to initiate her own brand of 'Art History'? What is art which has to operate outside history or has to resist art-as-an-aesthetic-project in order to, as Heidegger puts it, be-in-the-world?

The Citizens of the Womb

In a recent pop-up exhibition held in Mahasthangarh amid medieval ruins which are the mythical site of the marriage of Behula, 11 kilometres north of the largest colonial mint town famous for manufacturing the best silver coins during the Raj, Gulmoher Republic started the festivity with a mixed-double Badminton tournament for madrasa students, with Wagner playing in the background. In between games, there were short talks and poetry readings in memory of the brilliant hacker, Internet activist and one of the founders of Creative Commons, Aaron Swartz, who had committed suicide a couple of days before. The show consisted of 23 newspaper tents, an attempted replica of the nomadic Palestinian village Bab al-Shams which had been demolished by the Israeli army even before Gulmoher Republic's exhibition dismounted.[2]

The poster for the show quoted Irene Nasser, a village co-ordinator of Bab al-Shams: 'Our goal is to create facts on the ground, just as the military are always creating their own facts on the ground with settlements and outposts' (Nasser 2013). The exhibition featured photographs of leftist activists – including Mofakkar Chowdhury, the Secretary General of the Sarbahara Party of East Bengal – who were kidnapped by the paramilitary force Rapid Action Battalion in 2004 and killed in alleged crossfire. 'We are forced to borrow and utilise a lexicon of tools taken from the so called contemporary or post modernist corpus to understand and absorb, and of course, to resist, contemporary art's historical and discursive aggression,' proclaims the Republic's Minister of Propaganda.[3]

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2 Adam Shatz, in his post 'Opening the Gate of the Sun', wrote: 'At 2.30 on Sunday morning, the Israeli army removed 250 Palestinians from Bab al-Shams, a village in the so-called E1 corridor: 13 square kilometres of undeveloped Palestinian land between East Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim, an Israeli settlement in the West Bank with a population of 40,000. … Bab al-Shams took its name from Elias Khoury's epic novel, published in 1998. In the book, *Bab al-Shams* – "the gate of the sun" – is a secret cave where a Palestinian fighter, Yunis, and his wife, Nahilah, meet to make love. Khoury is accustomed to this sort of confusion. He did much of his research for Gate of the Sun in Lebanon's refugee camps, where he collected oral testimony about the Nakba. By Sunday morning they were all gone, and Bab al-Shams had returned to the land of dreams' (Shatz 2013).

3 Author's interview with Gulmoher Republic's Minister of Propaganda.

Evidently all the borrowed instruments were not equally efficacious and the difficulty of absorbing post-modernist/Historical tools could only be treated strategically, through various ingenious culture-specific procedures; Action Féminine was required to take into account the accumulation of the body of effects and implicit references already instituted by other artists. Here we can recall Baruch Spinoza or Emmanuel Lévinas, who had come upon similar difficulties; they were often forced to use Greek signifiers – logos – in order to gain entry into ideas of the Other who, essentially, is not Greek. Lévinas, in particular, initiated a practice of constantly transforming strategic negotiation: a strategy that is essentially plural, differentiated, self-conscious about and resistant to the network in which it finds itself caught.

We clearly locate the utopian traces of the work of visionaries like Isidore Isou, Yeves Cline, Robert Filliou, Joseph Beuys, Eikoh Hosoe, Yayoi Kusama, Tatsumi Hijikata, Safdar Hashmi, Chitralekha, Vivan Shundaram, Rummana Hussain and others in Gulmoher Republic's staging of oppositional communication *contra* the statist power by questioning the paradigm of disciplinary societies and the *techné* of control of the individual body and the bodies of information. By cross-connecting the power-configuration of the systems – imposed by the state and the corporations – between the gaze of surveillance and the surveilled, the visible and invisible, vigilance and violation, the inner and outer coherence of the temporal fabric and the changing relationship with surveilled reality, Gulmoher Republic promoted a confrontation of the relationship between subject and object.

Without listing all 30 artists represented in the exhibition, a few examples will suffice to signal the premise and the scope of Gulmoher Republic's radical opening up of a vision – contradicting the logic that continues with the anti-realist trends of Continental philosophy obsessed with discourse, text, culture, consciousness, power or ideas as to what constitutes reality and remains unable to forward a more sophisticated critique of humanity's place in the world and of the self-enclosed Cartesian subject *vis-à-vis* the total collapse of civil society, the convergence of technological and political fascism and ecological catastrophe – towards an 'object-oriented metaphysics', to use a portmanteau trope made popular by Graham Harman (2011).

The outstanding video installation *The Citizens of the Womb* by 2 Anonymous Artists is a direct intervention in the public discourse of biopower and media: TV news, reality show, citizens' journalism, surveillance, rights, constitution and legality. Documented through a series of fractured moving images, *The Citizens of the Womb* inserts a different kind of presence, a presence not of the banality of evil, but of a lacuna. *The Citizens of the Womb* turns an unblinking gaze on the brutal killing of Bisyajit Das, a Hindu man living in old Dhaka, by a group of student cadres of the ruling party, in front of the police and the media; as soon as the onslaught of the images breaks through our ocular inhibitions, real-life footage of another brutal murder, of Rohinga refugees, is mobilised.

Roland Barthes noted that rather than meaning coming from the objects photographed, these induce associations of ideas and inaugurate a process of

signification, controlled by politics, stable to a degree which allows them to be constituted into a ready-made semiology. Power relations and the meaning generated are a transcendental horizon which makes our reality meaningful, and when we are deprived of this transcendental network – that is, of the fantastic coordinates of meaning – we are no longer engaged participants in the world, we find ourselves confronted with things in their nominal dimension. For a moment, we see them the way they are, in themselves, independently of us – or, as Marcel Proust put it in a wonderful formula, as the spectators of our own absence.

The photographic tableaux of 2 Anonymous Artists' video installation short-circuited the Bengali nationalist notions of secularism and justice. 'Bishwajit was bleeding profusely. And when some people tried to stop the attackers, the student said, Bishwajit was an Islamist. Bishwajit told them, "Brother, I am not an Islamist. I am Hindu, I am Hindu." But his voice was feeble, and the students continued hitting and hacking at him,' said Anisul, a roadside vendor. Even though no state can truly negotiate the institution of state and the myths and fantasies organised around the idea of state, the killing of Bisyajit Das upbraids the foundational myth of Bangladesh: a Hindu killed by Muslims in a secular state; a 24-year-old minority tailor killed by the cadres of the ruling government party goons on 10 December, on Human Rights Day, five days before Bangladesh's national victory day.

Through the lens of the unconscious libidinal economy, the blood-stained shirt on Bisyajit immediately brings to mind the shirts of the martyrs of the liberation war of 1971, dark-red heart-blood, stories of ethnic cleansing by the Pakistani army, in Bangladesh; footage of death camps. Except that here the dynamics are reversed: the party which led the Bengali nationalist war in 1971 has unleashed its armed cadres on the minority citizens and common people. Such a reading is not a simple de-sublimation, a reduction and unpacking of an ideological formation to its lower economic or libidinal cause; the aim of such an approach is, rather, the inherent decentring of the status of a certain reality, which brings to light its disavowed presuppositions and consequences. It offers a praxis of change and redemption by revising power's grand narrative and proposing at least two things: (1) that historical moments should be pluralistic micro narratives plotted as confrontations rather than as transition, and (2) that such confrontations with power are signalled by a functional change in the sign-system.

2 Anonymous Artists' bold installation performed a shift in perspective and located the agency of change in the insurgent desire that morphs into political signifiers in the social text of contemporary Bangladesh. Of course, photograph and film are privileged instruments of such an approach. Their purpose is not to illuminate a standard text or ideological formation, but to foment a force of crisis. This is the case with the second part of the video, that consists solely in the doubly inscribed signifying material, which confronts hidden presuppositions about the Rohinga refugees and their criminality – Rohinga being a group of people living in the northwest Burmese-Arakan region who happen to be ethnically Bengali and Muslim, and who in the last couple of decades have crossed the border to enter Bangladesh to escape the atrocities of the Burmese army but, due to Bangladesh

government's policy of 'pushback', their legal position is tenuous in this country – and what Durkheimian sociology calls a 'collective representation'.

Slavoj Žižek noted that the detective in a classical genre novel or a film processes the scene of murder as a bricolage of heteronomous elements; the connection between the murderer's *mise-en-scène* and the real events corresponds exactly to the manifest dream content and the latent frame, or the immediate figuration of the 'rebus' and its solution (Žižek 1992). 2 Anonymous Artists' performance subtracts the fantasy object from reality; it is not the observed reality that changes, but the observing subject himself: Bisyajit Das is reduced to a gaze observing how things look in his own absence. *The Citizens of the Womb* attempts to be the site of absence, a place of the displacement of function between sign-systems and, in no small way, their ruptures in the Subcontinental context and in the transaction between past and future. It is amazing that in their statements and interviews, the curators of Gulmoher Republic concealed the fact that the main item of their investigation is what Nietzsche would have called a *fortgesetzte Zeichenkette*: a continuous sign-chain. Gulmoher Republic sets up a dynamic with *The Citizens of the Womb*, in the context of the show, to break up and re-link the chain to perhaps create a possibility for a new meaning.

This is a fairly typical mode of interpreting *The Citizens of the Womb*. A typical post-structural unpacking seeks to reveal a further encrypted diminution that is attached to the chosen signifier: the pathological might be recognisable in the visual, but only once a latent menace has been interpreted can this other sense of the signification be exposed. Reiterating the point of the 'speculative turn' of Gulmoher Republic's recycled innovation, let us revisit a series of photos – the photocopied faces of murdered armed revolutionaries or common people killed by the state: mere collateral damage – with a massively ironical title, 'Underground chic', that is carefully and strategically plastered on the newspaper tents. This offers viewers a glimpse of a very unfashionable, anti-representational politics by placing some of the photos' subjects – for example, Felani, a young Bangladeshi girl killed by the Indian border guards who hung her body from a barbed-wire-post in the no man's land of the India–Bangladesh border – in a minefield of muted power relations. To invoke Michel Foucault, that would be in a 'lacunary and shredded enunciative field', where fragments of the stated and the largely silenced cut across structures and constructions of knowing (Foucault 1984).

Appropriating the theoretical apparatus and contemporary hagiography of 'Underground chic' risks misreading and obliterating the radical alterity and different political space that is magnetised, circularised and polarised by the photographers and curators of Gulmoher Republic. It was particularly interesting to read how the referents of 'Underground chic' intermingle their discourses in a circular, musical compulsion. 'Underground chic' inaugurated a contrast between 'structuring absence' and pure absence which allows the cartographic signals of revolutionary subjectivity to emerge: not unlike Indian classical music, Raga, revolutionary subjectivity hinges on an absent tonal structure or notes. The revolutionary subject emerges when its objectal counterpart (in this case, Felani or

other murder victims) disappears or is forcefully erased, while remaining effective/active in its absence. The revolutionary subject is correlative to a disappeared object whose existence is purely spiritual or ideal.

A common thread among most of the photographers of 'Underground chic' was Nan Goldin's brand of snapshot aesthetic, but unlike Nan – a 'monster' in the sense Georges Bataille (1992) utilised the word – these photographers have not produced an *oeuvre* or relentlessly personal body of images that awaken deep empathy. 'Underground chic' was more coldly strategic in quietly placing itself in a lineage of 'invisible' artists. This leads to a comparison with Valentine de Saint-Point, lover and model of Rodin and Alphonse Mucha, a photographer and a futurist theoretician who composed the notorious *Futurist Manifesto of Lust* (1913) and the *Manifesto of Futurist Women* (1912). She really begged to be enfranchised, resisting the aggressive apparatuses of pouvoir/savoir by softly staging a promiscuous intertextuality and interdependency between systems of representation at the opposite ends of the hierarchy of Western aesthetics and cultural values.

Put simply, 'Underground chic' and Gulmoher Republic's polluted portrayal of the 'not yet' people (and places) – to cite John Stuart Mill (2002), who denounced Africans and Indians as 'not yet' real people ready for autonomy – is that of a 'rude' nation, from the disorganised anterior of a Euro-eccentric culture, sophisticatedly decoding and critiquing the hegemonic model and the aesthetic ideal(s) of the Occident that presents itself as the definitive civilisational focus.

Favouring what Deleuze (1996) calls 'messy vitality' over 'obvious unity of aesthetic reflex', the impact of 'Underground chic' rests on its incommensurability with a teleological History. Gulmoher Republic's curatorial logic emphasises discontinuity, the interstitial. It serves to destabilise the 'identity politics' rampant in the Indian Subcontinent since the European and North American economic crisis and the emergence of Asia as a new economical power established a new brand of jingoism in the region.

Recent exhibitions and the photographic Chobimela Biennial, held in Bangladesh, showcased numerous interesting works including contributions from master photographers like Raghu Rai, Salgado, Shahidul Alam, Anwar Hossain and others who are highly regarded by local viewers and artists. Gulmoher Republic's curatorial practice purposefully subverts these photographers and, in general, mainstream documentary photography's complicity with the representation of the systemic violence of poverty. The disaster-visibility dramatisation of social injustice and the NGO/Agency-formulated 'positive message' constructions, what Gulmoher Republic refers to as a 'poornographic' practice, only serve to perpetuate social injustice for the fun and profit of the Empire and its local agents. These theoretical issues are hardly defined, demarcated or dealt with in Bangladeshi contemporary arts with any kind of seriousness or rigour.

The Minister of Propaganda of Gulmoher Republic stressed that arts anchored in the unabashed depiction of Third World miserabilia or images of violence and

frisson are not at issue here. A post-conceptual perspective on violence could be invoked to examine how public narratives that circulate in our society are constructed, presented and represented in the media and eventually deployed in the general development of a macro-narrative. The minister is specifically interested in the relationship between the private experience of an event and the 'official' public story about it. This is to look into the entire cycle of any act or event, envisaged in a system where the critique of the linear continuity and dialectical polarity offers a revealing insight into the systematics, the registers and the vicious curvature of our political space. In particular, this regards the relationship between conceptual and visual aspects, the meaning of theoretical discourse, and the role of institutions and mediators.

2 Anonymous Artists' *The Citizens of the Womb* engages with and explores the valence of 'agency' by imposing a palimpsestic inscription on the 'truth' of the official version of the event of the Bisyajit killing, denouncing what Pierre Bourdieu (2012) refers to as a 'relation of force', and decolonising the deterministic and moralistic position of the journalists and the media commentators. By purging the moralistic order, the genuine symbolic violence of the social order can be staged beyond relations of force, themselves only elements of a shifting configuration in moral and political consciousnesses.

Rafiqul Shuvo, a young but very influential artist associated with Gulmoher Republic, views the process of 'our' art-making as something that is always morphing and stretching towards possibilities impossible to understand within the framework of Occidental art history and theory. Shuvo agrees with Gulmoher Republic's dictum that life/art can hardly be separated with a slash or a hyphen; for him, art is a live organism, symbiotically plugged into reality to rework its contour and content. Shuvo insists that recruiting the Russian art group Voina as the symbolic curators of the Berlin Biennial, the emergence of Julien Coupat or the 'Invisible committee' in France, hacker-artist group UX, fictional Elvis's language-speaking artists from the German and Swedish Pirate Parties, and so on, signals the shift in the roles of both artist and curators along the borders of art and so-called activism, and is of practical importance in saving Western art from the irrelevance of a market-driven doom.

Contra Post-structuralist Material

Only God Can Judge Me (2012), a recent exhibition orchestrated in an abandoned soap factory in the industrial district of Dhaka that Rafiqul Shuvo curated and participated in, mapped out a psycho-topology that differed from demarcating 'truth' as representative of an already existing reality. It heralded an oblique route to an emerging paradigm – still fluid and in-process, contingent on different socio-political variants – enabling the spectator to take in not only the exotic fauna, but also some of the topical/typical tensions and seismic turbulence of the new magmatic ground that is constantly shifting underfoot.

The curatorial logic of *Only God Can Judge Me* sought to grasp a corpus of work (a *tour d'horizon* predicated on 30 slivers of narratives) which does not fit too readily into the standard headings and ready-made ideological template/*artemes*. It drew on Shuvo's technical brilliance as a manipulator of what Duchamp referred to as the 'infra-mince' and a curious rigorousness for the continual elaboration of the contest between Shuvo's vision and the languages of arts determined by circumstance and factors that conceptual artists in the years 1965–75 were the first to announce: the cultural dominance of information, the professionalisations of artistic practices, and the application of the criteria of good design.

The inclusion of photographers, pranksters, a poet, a rapper, the International Cricket Council's number one cricketing all-rounder in the world, an advertising guru from an international agency as well as a host of iconoclastic artists put into practice a body of beliefs concerning the art-making capabilities of persons as distant as can be imagined from the professional art world. This immediately initiates a tension between the context/form and the content as a semi-lattice of interconnections and overlaps of soon-to-vanish (his)stories and multiplicities of situations.

Shuvo's 'category-confusion' between art, craft, activism, power relations, hoax, culture hacking, culture production and journalism, and his elaborate layering of different temporal and syntactical planes, theatricality and obsessive level of technical control carry within them the seed of their own *delirium*. It immediately leads to upbraiding *orientalist* hermeneutics that confuse fascination with critique, voyeurism with empathy and profit with the exposing-of-social-wrongs. Invoking Susan Sontag (2003) – who traced the 'pulse of Christian iconography' in contemporary wartime photographs (she discussed Goya's aimed assaults on the sensibilities of the viewers in his *The Disasters of War* (1810–20) series, leading to a new standard in the responsiveness to suffering in the realm of art) – on how to respond to the pain of the *Other*, Shuvo's art-encounter takes on the form of a series of assaults.

Without irony, *Only God Can Judge Us* parenthesises contemporary viewers' jadedness, scepticism, numbness and morbid fascination with the contemporary arts, and reveals, from within, the space of proper circumstances in which to experience and process extreme material: form and context over content, since anything from child pornography to a Hijra (transvestite) saga could be potentially subversive or heroic, or more accurately, a transcendental signifier.

In the same register, Shuvo's delirious central pieces – *Golden Head*, an awe-inspiring installation by Shakhawat Hossain Razib; Marzia Farhana's installation *Iron Rain* and Mustafa Zaman's installation immediately come to mind – featuring insurgent subjects and freighted with surface tension that to a greater or a lesser degree foment reinterpretation in terms of the breakdown of control and classification, signal a possible aesthetic shift that challenges the current market demand for the exotic and the spectacularisation of trauma/catastrophe. A connection to a reality that demands subjective engagement and deep organic

language(s) that permit(s) a different kind of 'truth' in a delirious vein is here established.

Ronni Ahmmed is another artist closely associated with the cabinet of Gulmoher Republic. His recent installation, *Terrorism in Other Planets* (2012), part of an exhibition called *7 Senses* at the Dhaka Art Center, enunciated ideological imperatives of conscientious political imperatives in an anti-imperial project. It overrode the inner-colonialism in the head-space of 'native' artists while forwarding the hypothesis that art cannot be activated within a political vacuum; the *form* and the *language – the mode of production* – of image-making is deeply embedded and engaged with politics and particular strands of histories.

There is a massive impetus in South Asian art-making to, by and large, mine the form, ideological credentials and language of a neo-*orientalist* tradition. Once this *language* has been set in place and understood as the *only* protocol and methodology to invoke/depict Asian reality, it hardly matters to expose the abusive, *Corporate-Kapitalistic* subtext of arts or to celebrate one or two dissenters' work. The criteria and the guidelines by which to judge this mode of art production and control its critical consumption automatically stages the canonically relevant pictorial regime of *Empire*.

Unlike the majority of South Asian artists, Ronni Ahmmed creatively rethinks the coordinates of common reality and the politics which illuminates and connects these, while maintaining the tension of his vision and constantly deconstructing his practice within a broader tendency of re-narrating the present. In a letter reiterating his position on *Terrorism in Other Planets*, Ahmmed writes in his typical telegraphic fashion:

> We are living in a political world where terrorism doesn't have a face. Terrorism HAS BECOME A COMMODITY … It's an essential friend to the last phase of capitalism. WithOUT terrifying common people it's impossible to do good business. THE BUSINESS OF FEAR. There's a very thin line to separate state and the multinational conglomerates.
>
> THEIR works process is similar. They are chickenhawk of war, hunger and poverty; they make profit out of war, hunger and poverty at every stage. THEY BELIEVE in DEVELOPMENT only because THEY SALE DEVELOPMENT. They kill people to show they can kill anyone anytime. THEY BELIEVE IN NATIONALISM only because THEY CAN SALE NATIONALISM. They believe in internationalism because they cannot rule the world individually. THEY BELIEVE IN TERRORISM because THEY need the war on terror to make business. Occident BELIEVEs IN TERRORISM BUT THEY ARE NOT TERRORISTs. MUSLIMS DON'T BELIEVE IN TERRORISM BUT THEY've BECOME TERRORIST. Now capitalism needs its market to spread, to avoid decay. In few years there will be no market left for capitalism in this planet. It needs to colonise new planet for the speed of new capitalism. Occident

> needs launch new capitalism in other planets like JUPITER … URANUS … PLUTO … SATAN or MARS … IT NEEDS TO HAVE NEW KIND OF TERRORISM AND FEAR TO CONTROL THE CITIZENS OF THESE NEW PLANETS. IN my work *Terrorism in other planets*, I wish to arrange a pre-launch meeting for the interplanetary new capitalism which is a direct byproduct of terrorism, fear and greed … *Terrorism in other planets* is an attempt to understand the POST POST MODERN CANNIBALISM of the POST POST MODERN COLONIALISM. *Terrorism in other planets* is ALSO a seminar of real personalities FOR THE SAKE OF interplanetary peace. The seminar would be presided over by George BUSH, Steven Hawkings, Gandhi, Bin Laden, MURGI MILON (an infamous terrorist of Bangladesh), Harry Potter, James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Rabindranath Tagore, Alexander the Great, Monica Bellucci, Alice, Gautam Buddha.[4]

Speculative Objects

In 1925, Walter Benjamin, in his first appraisal of surrealism, 'Dream Kitsch', analysed the accumulation of objects in his parents' overstuffed apartment in Berlin. He correctly proclaimed that surrealists do not perform the dream-dissection and anal-analysis of souls, but of the objects. The most analysable feature of contesting layers of contemporary time, he contended, is a mass-produced, commonplace, kitsch-object. The kitsch-object is: 'the last mark of banal, the one with which we clothe ourselves in dreams and in conversations, in order to take up into ourselves the power of the extinct object-world' (Benjamin 2001, 4).

The object-world is dead because its forms are fixed and frozen, although it is coded, freighted and invested with desire, power and, sometimes, rapidly and exceedingly mutable social meaning. In 'Dream Kitsch', Benjamin noted that what formerly was claimed as art 'begins at a distance of two meters from the body' (Benjamin 2001, 5), through mass-produced objects and an object-world shifted towards the individual subject, peeling away emotions, foregrounding fantasies, acting like mass-produced images or the montaged fragments, in that it met the viewer halfway. Mass-produced objects, kitsch and clutter demand their right to exist and to be decoded, for they have overridden the traditional relationship with objects, including art-objects. For the consumer, the mass-produced object 'offers itself to his groping touch and finally builds its figures inside him to form a being, who could be called der moblierte Mensch (an ornamented person or a tenant)' (Benjamin 2001, 4).

Objects inhabit us as we inhabit them. The object-world, the frozen world of things, besets us in a series of networks: the complex web of relationships, desires, past experiences, affections and so on which impact on raw perceptions and construct our reality. Our reality becomes a purely relational grid: one can

4 Private email conversation between Ahmmed and the author.

only think of reality as a network, a net cast over the entirety of objects, over the totality of the real. The consensual reality inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane which we call the plane of the symbolic.

Post-Structuralist linguistic theory is regularly deployed in order to assert that elements in consensual reality may be broken down and interpreted through a conceptual framework where the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary and controlled by politics. In Ronni's artwork, the pre-launch meeting for Capitalism on other planets, the speakers George Bush or Gandhi or Monica Bellucci are replaced by objects: a chair, name tag and a vegetable. The relationship of the person of George Bush, and the word conveying George Bushness, to a receiver is absolutely arbitrary: it is controlled by the hegemonic politics of the Kapital.

Objects are not subjects, but subjects can be objectified, can be transformed into words, into signifiers. Signifiers stand forever, and mysteriously, beyond the subject or the metaphysics of the essence of the subjects and objects. In seeking to explain the relationship between objects and words, we are constantly brought up against the limits of our knowledge of reality.

Terrorism in Other Planets

The term 'concept art' was arguably first used by Henry Flint, a writer and musician loosely associated with the Fluxus movement. In 1961 he postulated a kind of art which consists of a 'concept'. In 1968, Sol LeWitt famously stated: 'the idea is the machine that makes the art'. The conceptual artist mimics an absurd producer who, in the heyday of the late 1960s and early 1970s, interrogated new capitalist relationships, the fetish of information, communication technology and the desubjectification of production. Of course, the ground-breaking exhibitions like *Op Losse Schroeven* and *When Attitudes Become Forms* led to widespread protest, the cancellation of a planned Joseph Beuys exhibition and Harald Szeemann's resignation from the directorship of the Kunsthalle. It not only culminated in the larger contours of the Arte Povera, Anti-Form, Conceptual and Land Art of the moment, but inaugurated an innovative approach of de-emphasising the material presentation, challenging existing and future categories and introducing new curatorial strategies.

While *Terrorism in Other Planets* is, theoretically, a paradoxical project which attempts to capitalise on conceptual art's formative tenets, the artist Ronni Ahmmed profits from his own geographic and cultural specificities. This requires him to concentrate his inquiries on a particular terrain: the psychogeographic, spiritual and political Bangladesh *vis-à-vis* the war on terror. A pattern of hegemonic imperialist cultural reality and a historical experience of resistance against Empire inform *Terrorism in Other Planets*. In this manner, it is not just derivative or a residual Fluxus art, but an attempt to subvert the causal fetters of consensual reality, as proactive and insurgent subjects of history in a perpetual state of siege.

While the setting of the seminar room and the designation of the speakers and their place in the global capitalist hierarchy provide an underlying premise, pivoted on the continual interplay of a split between reason and its Other, the immanent terrain of Ahmmed's sculptures made with kitchen utensils, brooms, silverware and chess pieces glued on a chequered soccer ball, inaugurate processes of signification that can be constituted into a ready-made semiology. These sculptures solicit their objects in double-bind discursive regularities: in experience by finding the form which orders experience and by raising the lived horizon of our knowledge to the level of our discourse.

There is something that has not yet been made explicit in the above discussion of Gulmoher Republic and its sovereign citizenry network's creative construction/documentation of the upheaval in the perception of social space – their defiant charting of the disappearance of the city as a critique of the spectacle and economics of late capitalism.

In his critique of late capitalism, a revolutionary French icon of 1968, Guy Debord, declared that the spectacle, being the reigning social organisation of a paralysed history, is in effect a false consciousness of time. Meanwhile, Fredric Jameson pronounced that modernism is dominated by the categories of space rather than time. A new technological space-time, operating within a constructed social fabric, composed/decomposed by the transfer, transit, transmission systems and transport of transmigration networks, displaces the city in historical time and signals the unprecedented violence of a permanent wartime economism. The human body residing in the modern city produces value, consumes spectacle, and is conditioned by laws that are not ethical, but economical.

The Critical Art Ensemble describes the modern city as one of 'liquescence', where the location of power – and the sites of resistance – rests in ambiguous zones without borders that are dissolved in the name of multinational greed. In its later exhibitions, Gulmoher Republic captures the vector of the citizen of these interrupted and nomadic cities and their hellish intestine of historical and post-historical architectures in various forms of (de)composition, evolution and (dis)use. It links the perimeter of a 'biographical universe' to an aesthetic vocabulary that attempts to revise the historically specific nature of the cinematic reportage of place/space within the social field.

Gulmoher Republic's use of Naeem Mohaiemen's *Live Through Life or Die Trying* – the photo-text combination that stages the intersection and interstices of a radical Islamist and a leftist rally taking place on the same day – could be received as a photo-alchemical practice in which the artist's conscience is mortgaged to form and demands abstraction to perform an emotional need to understand and resist a dromologically mutated space-time. This initiates an arbitrary arena of symbolic form which embodies a magical logic defying the violent regimes of disciplines and economic imperatives of various stages of capitalism – directed at the body from without – encoded and perpetuated through architecture and forms. Space is being scrutinised and qualified by the Other's gaze, which, surprisingly, is not 'historical' or 'politicised'.

Epilogue

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin proclaims:

> Anecdote brings things closer to us in space, and allows them to enter into our lives. Anecdote represents the extreme opposite of history – which demands an 'empathy' that renders everything abstract. Empathy amounts to the same thing as reading newspapers. The true method of making things present is: to imagine them in our space (and not to imagine ourselves in their space). (Benjamin 1999, 1,014)

Gulmoher Republic discontinues the telos determined in advance by the macro-narrative of history to attempt to juxtapose an anecdotal and dialogical scenario, collapsing the alignment and separation between three contested, but nevertheless entwined, palimpsest-sites of 'arthistorylife'.

Through various performative projects, publications and constant questioning and debates, Gulmoher Republic seeks to launch, in Žižek's parlance, an effective critical procedure to trip the wires of the contesting strata of realities, stories, fragments that do not usually touch – in other words, to interrogate dominant power relations through the critical lens of artists who are constantly and ineluctably marginalised and disavowed. Gulmoher Republic brings together the insights of a revisionist history concerning the constructedness and discursivity of a Bengali identity with the argument that this identity's organisation is implicit in the negotiation of the violence of Western development and modernism.

Contra 'history' and by opposing history's cumulative and progressive mega-narrative, the networked, radically open-sourced and connected Gulmoher Republic proposes to let the Other inhabit our space and open the narrative up to a heterogeneous reconstruction. This is not a monolithic power-endorsed past, but a fluid and polyphonic present: the fabulous and hysterical history of now!

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Chapter 6
The Artist as Interlocutor and the Labour of Memory

Mihaela Brebenel, Christopher Collier and Joanna Figiel

In conceiving this chapter, we come from a particular position, not only as researchers, but as cultural practitioners and activists involved in a number of collectives struggling in relation to precarity, education and communicative and cognitive forms of labour. We originally considered discussing a number of specific examples from our collective practices. However, the ethics codes of these various groups specifically guard against the representation, or interlocution, of collective activities by individual members in such contexts, in an attempt to prevent an enclosure and valorisation of collective endeavour for individual gain. We therefore set out to tentatively explore this seeming paradox – how the conveyance of our testimony and memories as variously recombinant cultural, educational and migrant workers might contradict the conditions of collectivity to which we seek to give voice. It was important to us that these considerations should themselves be conducted collectively, although we represent only ourselves.

Articulating Collective Memories

We develop our considerations from the founding assumption that the artistic articulation of collective memory necessarily entails the construction of subjectivities on a variety of scales. That is to say, for memory to be understood as collective, for its expressions or annunciations to be comprehensible as such, it to some degree necessitates a shared space of subjectivity – something this memory also produces in the act of its articulation. By considering the artist as an interlocutor of collective memory, we therefore understand this interlocution to mean both the articulation and production of collective subjectivity, and through this, potentially also political struggle.

The practical deconstruction of traditional conceptions of sovereignty by social movements across the globe suggests that subjection/subjectivation itself presents a key point of political purchase in negotiating a radical politics of cultural resistance. As Edward Said has noted: ‘stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonised people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history’ (Said 1994, xiii).

Yet the decline in notions of the self-contained, self-transparent liberal subject in so-called 'advanced' capitalist economies parallels the inauguration of a mode of production founded in a necessarily *continual* process of subjectivation – understood by Foucault through the notion of 'human capital' and articulated in much post-workerist theory.[1] Certainly in the post-Fordist context in which we speak, the artistic interlocution of collective memory involving a certain storytelling also mirrors one of the primary orientations of production – precisely in this production of subjectivities.

Although all forms of production doubtless produce configurations of subjectivity, we refer to what has been characterised as the ongoing, fluid nature of this production within post-Fordism, occurring through what Franco 'Bifo' Berardi defines as the precarious and continually recombinant fragmentations, or fractalisations of a worker's life (Berardi 2012, 91). In this production of subjectivities via the assemblage of fragments, is this interlocution – between part and whole, individual and collective – functioning as a form of recombination? Can it thus be considered a subsumption and valorisation of memory?

To address this question, we consider the conception of the artist suggested in the work of György Lukács via our definition of interlocutor, comparing it to an understanding of interlocutor to be gleaned within a different context, that of *testimonio* literature. We aim to explore how this conception might begin to be transposed onto a mode of production founded in continuing subject construction.

We go on to consider how Guy Debord's development of Lukács's relation of subjective and objective relates to an understanding of collective memory. We further develop this through the technological ontology of Bernard Stiegler, speculatively exploring how Stiegler's thoughts on mnemotechnics might parallel Karl Marx's notion of the 'general intellect' and how the post-workerist rethinking of this concept brings labour back into focus for us, allowing potentially a deeper understanding of the artist's place as interlocutor, along with her function within contemporary capitalism's processes of valorisation.

The Authors of History

Addressing the idea of artist as interlocutor demands an attention to relations between an articulation of subjectivity and the subjectivation produced. In light of our central question around valorisation, we begin from a tradition in Marxist aesthetics, based on Lukács's defence of novelistic 'realism', suggesting that artists function as the articulators of collective subjectivity. Often taken polemically, as a position against which post-modernist proponents of multiplicity might set their face, Lukács is held to interpret the realist novelist

1 We are referring here mainly, but not only, to authors such as; Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri.

as articulating the objective conditions of a people, class or historical moment, 'bring[ing] to life those objective poetic principles which really underlie the poetry of popular life and history' (Lukács 1983, 56). In this position, the artist transparently reflects the social conditions of their emergence. Successful art has a social function, if not agency: to transcend fragmentation, reflecting the 'self-consciousness' of a given historical moment, and to endure as collective memory (Maslow 1967, 547).

Turning to a practice that might appear in some ways congruent with Lukács's principles, yet with a varying approach to subject construction, we jump forward to a form of praxis emergent from Latin America in the 1960s: the genre of *testimonio* writing. Containing elements of autobiography, confession, memoir and oral history, *testimonio* usually entails a first-person protagonist, recalling life-historical events in a way that often appears in conflict with the representational hegemony of a European and North American bourgeois literature that persists as a legacy of colonialism, and continues under the conditions of capitalist globalisation (Beverley 1989, 11–28).

Fredric Jameson sees *testimonio* in contrast to an overt subjectivism, and individualising subjectivation, found in the European novel, downplaying the individual subject in favour of their speaking for a wider collective (Jameson 1993). This collective, denied the opportunity to speak by the hegemony of 'Western' articulations, is given voice by producers of *testimonio*, whose own subjectivities, in our terms, become interlocutors for collective experience, enacting a *collective* subjectivation. When read alongside Jameson's wider commentary on what he calls 'third-world literature', especially in relation to what he somewhat sweepingly identifies as the erasure in such works of a 'radical split between public and private … poetic and political' (Jameson 1986, 69), his observations are somewhat complicated. He makes the over-general claim that 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society' (Jameson 1986, 69).

Although he certainly over-generalises and flattens what he labels 'third-world culture', we might perhaps approach such apparently crude observations in light of his wider corpus relating to strategies of abstraction and totality in understanding postmodern, global capitalism. However, his identification of *testimonio* as offering an example of the 'artistic' interlocution of memory, one with specific dimensions of collective subjectivation, certainly appears relevant to our concerns here.

In terms of a subjective interlocutor articulating the collective memory of a situation, we might be tempted to see *testimonio* as somewhat congruent with the articulation of Lukács's 'objective poetic principles'.[2] Likewise, we could be lured

2 The term 'interlocutor' is somewhat complicated with relation to *testimonio*, given that it is usually used differently in this context. For example, celebrated *testimonio* producer Rigoberta Menchú had Elizabeth Burgos, a Venezuelan anthropologist, act as interlocutor for her testimony. However, we use the word in line with our already established criteria, therefore in this instance we would identify Menchú as the interlocutor for her community.

into seeing a unity of subjective and objective here that could loosely be equated with a notion akin to class consciousness. However, to do so would be to gloss over the important dilemma of dialectical criticism evident in Lukács, central to the interlocutionary relation between the aesthetic and social conditions, attached, as Jameson observes, to a crisis of historicity and its place within 'two mutually exclusive registers: the absolute … and the relative' (Jameson 2007, 198).

The particularity of *testimonio*'s narrative appears to avoid the drive for absolute truth, suggesting an openness in its practical subject construction. Not contained in the monolithic figure of the proletariat, its collectivities pertain to multiple recomposition and interpenetrating of social, religious, territorial and kinship groupings. *Testimonio* then offers an individual experience of collective struggle embodied in the figure of the testifier as a figure of solidarity. It is the work of a more active collective subject construction, rather than attempting to transparently represent objective conditions subjectively and vice versa. George Yúdice suggests such a perspective rejects the postmodern injunction on the possibility of representing alterity, the speakability of 'otherness' in hegemonic discourse, simultaneously presenting a mode of representation divorced from totalising truth claims and what, in reference to Lukács, he labels the 'aesthetic reflective mimesis of nineteenth-century European fiction' (Yúdice 1991, 27). Yet in remaining in the register of the relative and particular, could this model ever represent a politically effective collective subjectivation?

In Jameson's reading, Lukács's totalising 'realism' is a hermeneutic necessity, standing in dialectical relation to the 'free-play' of signifiers offered in later modernist and post-modernist literature. For Jameson: 'when modernism and its accompanying techniques of 'estrangement' have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be 'estranged' and corrected by a more totalizing way of viewing phenomena' (Jameson 2007, 211).

Recognising that Lukács was quite wrong in the 1930s, Jameson holds that a Lukács-informed 'realism' holds promise for a perspective on postmodern or 'cultural' capitalism. Arguably for him, its totality can operate as a negative concept, revealing the fragmentation of collective experience by capitalism. Therefore it might be positioned to 'resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent the category of totality' (Jameson 2007, 211).

How then might we understand the artist-interlocutor's role in articulating collective memory – and thus constructing collective subjectivity – in such a way that it combats the fragmenting relativity and alienating operations of contemporary capitalism whilst also learning from *testimonio* in avoiding the problematically idealistic totalising arising in the transparent identity of subjective and objective in Lukács's conception? If this is possible, are these efforts necessarily recuperated into the valorising circuits of capital, ultimately working against their intentions?

Objects and Fragments

To reclaim this function of collective subjectivation against fragmentation, we must contend with the problem of whether the notion of collective memory itself, and its artistic articulation, is in some way fundamentally tied to a problematic, transparent unity of subjective and objective. The artist-interlocutor as derived from Lukács may depend on a subject transparently able to identify with their 'objective' situation. This is approached by Debord, whose thinking serves to illuminate Lukács's most 'crude error'.[3] Debord shows us how Lukács's conception of the artistic interlocution between aesthetic and social, part and whole, is arguably founded on a problematic reading of Hegel and thus the union of subject and object.

For Debord, following Marx, objectification is not identical with the estrangement and alienation of capitalism: the subject must *necessarily* and repeatedly lose itself in the object in order to reform anew, to subjectivate. Lukács, however, in confusing the relation between alienation and objectification, upheld the overcoming of capitalist alienation as identical with an end of objectification. The Hegelian unity of subject and object, universal and particular, became itself a static, universal goal. For Debord's open-ended dialectics, objectification is rather the necessary basis of subjectification:

> As Hegel showed, time is the necessary alienation, the terrain where the subject realizes himself by losing himself. In total contrast, the current form of alienation is … spatial alienation, the society that radically separates the subject from the activity it steals from him is in reality separating him from his own time. (Debord 2009, 110)

Essentially, Debord is distinguishing the qualitative, temporal objectification of useful labour from the quantitative, separated and fragmented (spatial) objectification of abstract labour, constituted by the act of exchange. This is something specific to capitalist production, accelerated by its increasingly 'spectacular' nature, in which '*Separation* is the alpha and omega' (Debord 2009, 30). Where the general equivalent, money, had constituted one level of abstraction, the image is an abstraction that further occludes the qualitative – guaranteeing equivalence, precisely through fragmentation.

Debord's distinction between spatial and temporal objectification illustrates that qualitative objectification is a temporal phenomenon, involving subjectification over time. The spectacle therefore effaces temporality, and with it collective memory, by rendering it into equivalent fragments through the image-commodity form. As art becomes just one more specialism within the fragmentation engendered by the spectacle, this would make the artistic interlocution of collective memory impossible as a form of collective subjectivation. Instead the artist as specialist labourer would in

3 As he himself would later concede.

this instance only serve to further fragment subjectivation, enclosing and valorising memory, rendering it in separate, imagistic and equivalent forms.

Does this enable us to think through the earlier suggestion that the subjectivation enacted by artistic remembering might serve as an important form of valorisation within a post-Fordist capitalist context? Debord's theory certainly tallies with the observation that museums, as repositories of collective memory, have changed from elitist and diachronic historicism towards a spectacular, synchronic space. Andreas Huyssen ventures that in recent decades, museums (and we might include art galleries) have increasingly shifted their emphasis from high cultural conservation towards mass entertainment and blockbusting shows (Huyssen 1995, 13–36). If we concur with this assessment, it might be explicable as a shift in function from historical consciousness of the ruling classes towards an equally ideological control function, mirroring the apparent flatness and timelessness of the image-commodity back at captive audiences in a spectacular fashion.

Rather than lament this 'culture of amnesia', we can view it as symptomatic of a changing mode of production. The seeming paradox of ever-increasing number of museum visitors and diminishing historical consciousness begins to make sense when seen alongside concomitant developments in capitalist technology and mass culture. Understanding the reorganisation of post-Fordist capitalist society through the increasing subsumption of communicative relations – whether formal (operating as control) or real (accelerated as an engine for the production and reproduction of value in itself) – may be key to understanding the valorisation of memory within contemporary artistic practice. Must we then understand the artistic interlocutor of memory as necessarily fragmenting memory (formerly a collective resource) and enclosing it within capitalist relations?

Perhaps Debord remains unable to conceive fully the co-constitution of, and slippage between, 'subjective' and 'objective', along with the more fundamental fragmented form this takes. Arguably, Debord misunderstands this alleged erasure of collective memory in fragmentation by reversing Lukács's error one stage on. In equating fragmentation with capitalist alienation, rather than with objectification as such, he actually arrives at an undifferentiated understanding of fragmentation, through the abstract and totalising notion of spectacle. A more nuanced interpretation is perhaps to be found in Bernard Stiegler's technological ontology.[4]

Mnemotechnics

Stiegler argues that temporal experience is founded on originary technicity. Put simply, there would be no possibility of a collective memory, or indeed temporal experience, without this founding co-constitution of the human and the technical.

4 Though we note Stiegler is himself involved in various practical initiatives in rethinking the way museums and artists might serve as interlocutors for collective memory, we limit our considerations here to his theoretical re-understanding of memory.

Extending Edmund Husserl's schema of primary and secondary retention, Stiegler holds that a technical prosthesis, what he terms 'tertiary' memory, whilst it might confront us as externalised in the technical object, is not only the basis of culture, but of the experience of temporality itself (Stiegler 1998, 246). It also therefore opens up the possibility of not only subjectivation, but collective subjectivation through time.

Tertiary memory, in the form of 'mnemotechnics', is transindividual and exceeds the subject, and therefore both a Lukácsian and Debordian fragmentation, in the sense of separation of subjects from each other and the objective conditions of their existence. However, this is based on another more fundamental fragmentation. Memories are exteriorised, objectified, in mnemotechnics through 'grammatisation'. This process involves the discretising of qualitative gestures, through repetitive and abstracted traces, such as writing (or indeed speech) and audio-visual recordings; even the repetitive gestures that make up labour – communicative or manual – are variously grammatised. Therefore, through grammatisation, fragmentation is the very condition of culture, memory and the subject.

Different modes of technology grammatise in different ways, whilst the given form of a technical milieu produces a certain temporality. Stiegler concurs with Bertrand Gille's proposition that Western industrial society has functioned through permanent and acceleratory innovation (Stiegler 1998, 15), something Marx would place within capitalism's inherent logic of space-time compression (Marx 1973, 539). This leads to a disjuncture between technics and culture.

This division might be compared to Theodor W. Adorno's identification of the critical potential of an 'autonomous' art, in that arguably, such art achieves its apparent autonomy, a loss of use-value, by being out of synch with current technical production, reflecting instead anachronistic modes. Conversely, however, the avant-garde also functioned as a condition and contestation of this supposed separation of art and life, and hence from labour as properly constituted.

Against Stiegler's identification of this separation, perhaps we can propose, appropriating Peter Bürger, that when the avant-garde failed to destroy the instrumentalised (capitalist) culture it had attacked, capitalism's own advancing mode of production sought to recuperate its former critical power (Bürger 1984). Art's formal subsumption became real subsumption with its dissolution into mass culture at the end of modernism proper, the avant-garde disappeared and art became understood as 'contemporary' – part of the communication economy. Therefore, realigning with the current mode of production would actually realign art *more strongly* with technics, opening up its potential as what Stiegler (after Derrida) labels *pharmakon* – both poison and remedy.

For Stiegler, technics is *pharmakon* – both a threat to, and the condition of, individuation. Its realignment with what might formerly have been viewed as 'autonomous' art can therefore be seen, not as a simple subsumption of art, but as opening up new possibilities. In becoming integrated with the mnemotechnical apparatus and appearing more plainly as a commodity, art attains a new concreteness, making its labour appear more clearly *as* labour and throwing new light on the peculiar temporality of production itself.

The General Intellect

This relation between culture and technics is located, for Marx, in the relation between the superstructural and the means of production (what for Stiegler would encompass the mnemotechnical horizon). For Marx, the praxis of life – the production of the world – simultaneously produces the producer; this praxis can be understood as labour, or objectification, and the technical milieu seen as the condition of its possibility. This allows us to place Stiegler within a certain unorthodox anti-humanist reading of Marx, whereby subjectivity is externalised within a techno-historical social milieu, this subjectivity reflecting and creating the form of production. This milieu is something he arguably identifies with the 'general intellect'– an objectified store of knowledge, but also previous labour held within the fixed capital constituting the means of production themselves.

Engagements with Marx's notion of general intellect have proliferated in post-workerist discussions around the informational and communicative character of post-Fordist capitalism. It is argued that contemporary capitalism subsumes social life, enlarging the sphere we might equate with the 'productive power of society's intelligence' (Marx 1973, 156–7) by inaugurating a system of communication technologies in which the generation of value rests in communicative activity both within and outside the traditional workplace.[5] Whilst such theories of immaterial labour are perhaps inadequate to deal with the complexities of global production as a whole, they are certainly useful in representing the particular field of cultural production in the context we are addressing.

Though capital subsumes the non-work sphere of the 'social factory', it simultaneously extends possibilities for communication against and beyond capitalism, the mnemotechnical milieu containing the pharmacological potential for alternative possibilities. If the communicative, social nature of the individual founds valorising activity, this social communicative dimension also equips workers with opportunities for autonomously deploying such resources (Negri 1989).

For Marx, fixed capital bound up in the means of production, as a store of past labour, is reawakened through productive activity. The value created by the past labour is therefore realised/preserved and transferred into the product of current labour: 'by virtue of the particular useful character of that labour … it raises the means of production from the dead' (Marx 1990, 308). What is notable in the temporality of capitalist production is that labour extinguishes and realises the use-value of previous labour precisely in the *useful* character of that labour.

Therefore, if we speculatively extend the parallel between fixed capital and Stiegler's mnemotechnical milieu, we can propose that it is in this way that capital succeeds in valorising memory, the act of 'remembering' fulfilling the role of useful living labour in awakening the slumbering value of the mnemotechnical

5 This formulation is apparent in, for example, the works of Paulo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, Antonio Negri and others.

apparatus. The labour of remembering valorises the memory of labour. In addition, given the realignment of art's mode of production with capitalist technics that occurred with modernism's subsumption, as suggested above, contemporary art can no longer claim the critical autonomy of an absence of use-value. In becoming useful labour, its function can be understood as valorising in these terms. Furthermore, for Negri, the opposition between living and dead labour can be recast in terms of communication and information (Negri 1989, 119). Thus we can also propose that it is precisely the artist's status as communicator, as interlocutor, that both valorises, but also potentially exceeds, fixed capital. This allows us in turn to conceive the act of remembering, and particularly its artistic articulation, as living labour, something which begins to point towards a politics of memory.

A Precarious Class Consciousness?

Understanding artistic remembering as labour enables us to see that not only does this entail the valorisation of collective memory, but that it also, somewhat pharmacologically, offers a locus of political struggle. What would it mean to attempt to withdraw, or reappropriate this labour? If the immaterial or cognitive labour of remembering is what valorises mnemotechnologies, it does so, as Bifo suggests, through the recombination of fragmented, precarious subjectivities. Its inverse is recomposition, orientating the construction of subjectivities through more socialised forms of subjectivation.

Even if, contrary to Negri's propositions, this socialised, communicative worker cannot really be generalised, it might be held to describe the position of the artist, and also be useful in understanding a growing class of so-called 'precarious' workers for whom the artist's often indistinct choice between an entrepreneurship of the self and auto-valorisation appears paradigmatic. This is not to argue an artistic exceptionalism, but rather to say that social conditions brought about by post-Fordist production now place the artist in the position of interlocutor for a wider social situation.

In speaking and remembering for themselves, artists, as labourers, enact a recomposition, a qualitative subjectification: by giving testament to their own labour, they can perhaps simultaneously articulate a 'historical consciousness' for the situation in which their 'artistic' form of labour is increasingly forced upon a wider class (Virno 2004). Collective memory might be given testimony, not quite through a Lukácsian realism, but in a way that both accounts, and accepts responsibility, for its role, as labour, in subject construction.

If, as for Yúdice, *testimonio* relates community experience through a given interlocutor – not as a representative as such, but as an embodiment of a collective remembering, involving an act of both individual and collective identity construction and subjectivation (Yúdice 1991, 15–31) – perhaps we might appropriate something similar into our own context. In uniting the individual and collective, the precarious interlocutor can purport, if not to reveal the objective

conditions of a given historical situation, then to recompose precarious subjectivity, and collective subjectivity in a given group, in more socialised orientations.

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Chapter 7
Performance in the Museum Space (for a Wandering Society)

Margherita Parati

Museums in Transformation and the Emergence of a 'Performing Model'

Museums are undergoing a profound institutional and cultural transformation in the contemporary 'age of migrations' (Basso Peressut and Pozzi 2012, 31–7). In the 'geography of supermodernity' (Augé 2009) in which we live, comprising a network of flows of information, people, objects and ideas, museums play a connecting role in social, cultural and economic dynamics, on both the local and global scale. The idea of the museum as the symbol of a dominant identity, which originates from the certainties of the modern era, is questioned in the postcolonial viewpoint (Ferrara 2012). A new perspective is emerging, which involves a necessary critical review of the cultural role played by the museum, targeted at a society that has deeply changed and is now global, multicultural and multiethnic. In view of its 'new publics', the museum has to adjust its communicative strategies. Cultural institutions, and museums in particular, are required to ensure accessibility of message, learning motivation and the visitor's direct participation, among other new competences. In this context, the museum is seen as a medium of communication where the dynamics of object–subject–space can be investigated.

Starting from these premises, this chapter focuses on a specific phenomenon: the use and re-evaluation of performing language, based on direct actions and physical experience, in museum narrations and spaces. The phenomenon will be framed from a theoretical point of view, singling out the potentialities and criticalities of this language, leading to a reflection on the mechanisms of narrative construction and memory stimulation. The specific case of art museums and their spaces will be taken into consideration, where art itself experiences the potentialities of such a language.

The American scholar Valery Casey focuses on the relationship between object and subject. In her paper 'The Museum Effect: Gazing from Object to Performance in the Contemporary Cultural-history Museum' (2003), she highlights the power that museums have in communicating a message to their public. Casey acknowledges the priority of the visual component in the impact of the exhibit: sight is the most stimulated sense in the media reality we live in, and the scholar takes it as the parameter to analyse the relationship between object and subject and the 'screen' that is the 'filter' represented by the exhibition space.

Casey defines three possible relational dynamics that occur between the visitor and the exhibit, showing how they correspond to three 'models' in the evolution of museum typology: from the 'legislating museum', as seen in *Wunderkammern* and *cabinets de curiosités* in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, to the 'interpreting museum', typical of the public museum in the nineteenth century, which had a precise didactic purpose, to the contemporary 'performing museum', where the explanatory caption of the object is replaced by *performance*. In describing the latter model, the author refers to Living History – that is, those forms of musealisation which occur through theme re-enactments, where the non-authentic object is concretely 're-used' and made known to the visitors by means of theatre acts in which they are invited to take part. Leaving aside the heated debates that are triggered by these re-enactment practices, it is worth noting the importance attributed by Casey to the acknowledgement of the performance as an alternative and contemporary narrative 'strategy'. The performance replaces the object, and the visitor is actively involved on stage.

Such reasoning leads to interpreting the performance as a 'relational strategy' and identifying the *performing museum* as a contemporary model to reflect upon. It is possible to talk about an outright change of paradigm, where instead of mere display, the visitors' direct experience becomes central (Bagnall 2003). The performing paradigm calls into question the relationships among object–subject–space and the sensory modalities through which we experience contents. In this context, Pedro Gadanho, curator of the MoMA Architecture section in New York, talks about 'Performative Turn' and 'return to the user', referring to the contemporary social role of architecture and its design process (Gadanho 2012).

'Performing Strategy': Potentialities and Criticalities

Performing language is seen as a *strategy* that is now part of the mechanisms of narrative construction within the museum. There are various ways for putting such strategy into practice: from authentic theatrical representations (the Museum Theatre phenomenon) to storytelling, to interpretations in the first person, to artists' performances, to *hands-on* strategies encouraging visitors to touch objects (Jackson and Kidd 2011). There are many examples, from the debated Colonial Williamsburg Museum, the largest museum in the world built on the model of Living History, to the recent 'hands-on stands', as in London's British Museum, where visitors can touch some historical objects and ask museum staff for information and explanations.

Recognising the increasing interest in the cultural implications of performance, seen as essentially contested concept, Casey (2005) highlights the potentialities and criticalities of its dynamics in the museum space. As happens with all languages, performance is instrumental with respect to the action and content conveyed. There are plenty of examples in history where such language

was used for its potential of creating emotional involvement: from Classical Tragedy to popular traditions and rites, to its manipulation for propaganda purposes, as in the Nazi era.

On one hand, performance can be seen as a powerful form of control on narration in the hands of a single 'director', running the risk of becoming pure entertainment or manipulation. On the other, it can create a *displacement effect* with respect to the observed reality, turning such language into an opportunity to stimulate a critical awareness by working on 'other' communicative channels capable of encouraging participation. By focusing on *action*, the performing strategy breaks the hierarchical frontality of the relationship between visitor and exhibit, using a kind of language which is universal by its very nature, namely the language expressed by gestures and the body, which does not require any translation. The real potential of triggering forms of constructive participation and learning, which are unique owing to the space and time in which they take place, lies in this subversion of the elements.[1] Visitors become a key element in the development of the narration. Their physical engagements awake 'other' forms of memory – more intuitive and sensorial – as opposed to the merely visual mode of exploring spaces and contents.

The performing strategy is seen to have great potential in the search for a more inclusive and less authoritative idea of narration within museums, which are revisited in a multicultural perspective as 'contact zones' for confrontation (Clifford 1997). In these spaces for encounter, body and movement are seen as instruments to convey ideas of cultural identity (Goldberg [1979] 2011). Moreover, the relation to the physicality of spaces and objects imposes itself as the counterpart to totalising digitalisation: rather than denying or aiming to replace it, it can potentially integrate with it. This language makes it possible to figure out forms of re-activation and re-reading of the collections from different points of view and with different voices, forms of stratification of the narration levels, introducing a transitional temporality into the museum.

Stimuli from the Art World and Experimentations on Museum Architecture

Many artists are re-discovering techniques and languages typical of the artistic practices that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and are generically referred to as 'performance art' (Goldberg, [1979] 2011). Such practices, along with experimentation of sensorial languages involving the body, gestures and the new media, have asserted the social and political value of making art which is

1 See the meaningful passage that took place in the 1970s, from behavioural educational theories (behaviourist psychology) to cognitive ones (cognitive psychology). The pioneers of such educational theories are Bruner and Piaget, who in the 1970s started experimenting new modes of learning based on the subject's involvement (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Miles and Zavala 1993).

strictly linked to contemporary cultural transformations, calling into question the museum space and its very role. Blurring the boundaries between the conventional spaces for art and urban dimension, contemporary artistic practices such as 'relational art' (Bourriaud 1998) and 'new genre public art' (Lacy 1995) find in 'performance' a powerful media through which to activate processes of social engagement and participation. Thanks to the adoption of such language, questions of gender, race and migration – which have long been excluded from institutional circuits – are allowed to enter the museum spaces.

This is the case, for example, with the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, who, since her very first works, has turned her artistic practice into political action. Her long-term travelling project *Immigrant Movement International*, developed in collaboration with the Queens Museum of Art in New York, aims to raise issues and a debate about what happens outside the museum space, specifically discussing the implications of having a migrating identity.[2]

The rediscovery of the provocative potential of performing language in the arts is confirmed by many exhibitions and events that have taken place during 2012. In the United States, the latest biennial exhibition of the Whitney Museum in New York has devoted a lot of space to performers; the Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries in Beacon (New York) have inaugurated a programme of performances by contemporary American choreographers, including Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer; in winter 2012, PS1, the MoMA extension located in the Queens borough in New York, opened a 'Performance Dome' in the courtyard in front of the building.

In Europe, too many museums are currently enlarging their premises to make room for such artistic practices. This is the case, for example, at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Tate Modern in London, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the new Centre for Contemporary Creation, due to open in Córdoba in early 2013. So we can ask: What spaces do these renewed artistic performing practices require in the museum? How do they challenge not only the museum's programmes, but also its spatial configuration? How is museum architecture influenced by these fluid dynamics that cross its urban fabric?

The Tanks at Tate Modern

In July 2012, London's Tate Modern inaugurated The Tanks, the first space to be exclusively dedicated to performing arts in a museum at the international level. The conversion of The Tanks, former underground containers used to store oil for the Bankside Power Station turbines, is part of the wider museum enlargement project being developed by the studio Herzog & de Meuron. The Tanks are three circular spaces 30 metres in diameter and 7 metres in height,

2 See http://www.taniabruguera.com/cms/486-0-Immigrant+Movement+International.htm (accessed 6 November 2013).

directly accessible from the Turbine Hall. Two of the three are adjacent to the Collection Room, where works in the museum collection are exhibited: the Commission space, which houses *site-specific* installations, and the Live space, which houses alternating events, installations and performances.

The Live space, in particular, was at the heart of the *Art in Action* festival, curated by Catherine Wood, Kathy Noble and Stuart Comer, which inaugurated The Tanks last July. The festival offered an experimental programme of events, with the precise aim of providing visitors with a space for dialogue and discussion, questioning the role of the museum today. Before being an architectonic space, The Tanks aim at being a social space. In the *Open Manifesto* published in the festival programme, Tate Modern's Director, Chris Dercon, states:

> [The Tanks] provide an entirely new space for Tate Modern, and for museums internationally. … They challenge many aspects of what has been important to museums – their collection and modes of display and archive – and ask vital new questions of what is to be a museum in the twenty-first century. … We can think of the museum in the twenty-first century as a new kind of mass medium. Many of the works presented in the Tanks address their audience directly, emphasising the visitor's own physical presence, whether that be by being part of a crowd surrounding a performer, becoming part of a conversation, or walking through and around an immersive installation. (Grant and Danby 2012, 2)

For fifteen weeks the Live Tank functioned as a genuine experimental laboratory, investigating the relationship between performance art, the museum and contemporary society. It hosted events enabling artists and visitors to physically move between the internal spaces of the museum and the external spaces of the borough. This was the case for the exposition *Inside/Outside: Materialising the Social*, and the day dedicated to the project *Across the Board: Politics of Representation*, when two African artists, Otobong Nkanga and Nástio Mosquito, performed in the first of four planned stages of the project (London–Accra–Douala–Lagos), due to last two years. The London event addressed reflections on cultural identity to explore the politics of representation and their strategies in contemporary African art. Nkanga activated the space of the Tank with a performance as part of her project *Contained Measures*, focusing on the shifting state of intangible things such as memory and identity. Visitors were invited to sit in front of her and discuss their impressions of photos she had previously selected, representing, for example, African landscapes, parts of her own work or works of art from the Tate Collection. In the evening, the Tank hosted the performance *Flourishing Seeds* by Mosquito, structured as an alternation of video projections, 'a cappella' songs and the spoken word, questioning our way of understanding notions of art, Africa and the West.

In just one day, very different performances alternated in the Tank, requiring a different layout and outfitting of the space (Figure 7.1). Whereas Nkanga was sitting at a table with visitors moving around her, Mosquito was singing and

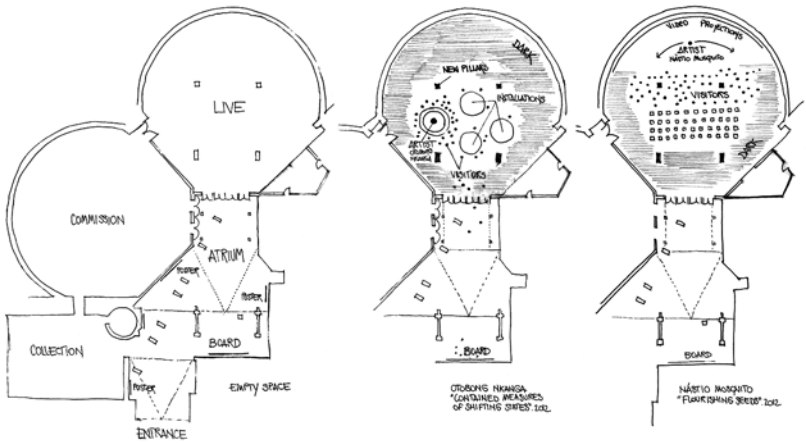

Figure 7.1 Different layouts in the Live Tank for the project *Across the Board*. Sketches by Margherita Parati, 2012

moving in a more dynamic way in front of the circular walls with videos projected on them, while the public could watch sitting on the floor or on chairs placed in the central part of the space.

In the evocative architecture of The Tanks, where the traces of history are visible on the ageing walls and apparent in the intense smell of oil, these artists' performing languages found a powerful ally in triggering visitors' intellectual and emotional involvement. The architects' interventions on the space have emphasised its theatrical character, simply replacing the old floor with a smooth concrete base, highlighting the centre of the space with new pillars, and introducing the necessary equipment to ensure its potential and fast transformation. The titles of works can be projected onto the walls, while captions explaining the projects are simply written on paper attached to the rough walls, as if they were advertising billboards. One of the walls in the entrance hall is used as a big blackboard, where visitors are invited to write comments on their experience in the space, answering some questions projected on the wall. The Tanks are new spaces that have been 'discovered', where Tate Modern is experimenting with new strategies of visitor participation, exploiting the stimuli from art in order to investigate the relationship between performance and museum architecture.

Figure 7.2 **Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, 'Cavernous Agora of the Palais de Tokyo', 2012. Exhibition view from La Triennale 2012, *Intense Proximité*, http://www.flickr.com/photos/dalbera/7759895088/in/photostream/ (accessed 6 November 2013). Photograph reproduced courtesy of Jean-Pierre Dalbéra**

Palais de Tokyo in Paris

The Palais de Tokyo in Paris also sets out to be a space of confrontation and dialogue. The building was erected in 1937 for the Paris Art and Technology World Expo; it was later used as the Centre National de la Photographie and the Palais du Cinema, and today it has been turned into a 'district for contemporary creation'. When the Palais was opened in 2002, it already presented itself as an anti-museum, a *laboratory of experiences*, where the public's participation and involvement were the basis for 'relational art' exhibitions organised by the young curators Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans (Bourriaud 1998; Nicolin 2006, 7–48). In April 2012, the Palais de Tokyo opened another area covering 14,000 square metres to the public, as planned in the second phase of the project by the studio of architects Lacaton & Vassal.

In a labyrinth of fluid spaces, where small and cosy rooms alternate with large ones, the prevailing aesthetic is 'the un-finished' (Figure 7.2). The designers have

intervened in the space by subtraction, leaving traces of its various uses over time visible and removing only what impeded its public use. This way, a dimensional alternation of the spaces has been enhanced, where the *empty* space, the space where the actions take place, is an integral part of the logic that is implied in the project. Light partitions in metal or polycarbonate grids and movable furniture allow the exposition layout to be easily reconfigured as a Piranesian labyrinth with a strong urban character.

The third edition of La Triennale, entitled *Intense Proximité*, which inaugurated the extension of the Palais in April 2012, also gave ample space to the performing arts, with a view to creating a wide array of events which are continuously changing on the four floors of the building. The aim of the festival, whose special Artistic Director was Okwui Enwezor, was to highlight the role of art as a means of confrontation between cultures, as we read in the programme: 'At its core, *Intense Proximity* is based on a series of programmatic directions on the ways of sharing space, social experience, and aesthetic antagonism without resorting to the strident pieties of identity politics, nativist self-regard, ethnocentrism, and myths of national cultural cohesion' (Enwezor 2012).

According to the curators, the fragmented and episodic character of the space made it possible to have heterogeneous works and events alternating during the festival, housing a multiplicity of voices and languages, turning the Palais into an active relational space.

Conclusions

The cases analysed in this chapter testify to a correlation between curatorial and architectural strategies while investigating the consequences of the *occupation* of the museum space on the part of performing artistic practices. As Michaela Quadraro has recently argued, with reference to the feminist theorist Elisabeth Grosz on one hand and the curatorial practice of Thelma Golden on the other, contemporary art practices challenge the institutional framework of the museum, which is thus revisited as a 'site of intervention' (Quadraro 2012, 128). Once it has been affected by these stimuli, the museum turns into an experimentation laboratory, in the perspective that Iain Chambers discusses as a possible 'Museum of Migrating Modernities', 'a location that sustains the potential, often against the institutional intentions, for a democratic laboratory of an emerging citizenship' (Chambers 2012, 24).

What role can architecture play in activating these dynamics? We find some common architectonic themes in the two cases described, as they reveal the hybridisation of design processes in art and architecture. In both cases, a clear need for flexible spaces emerges, in order to guarantee quick and continuous transformation. This leads to the integration of technological equipment in the ceilings or walls. In these new spaces, which are deliberately left rough and unfinished, the *void* plays a crucial role. These new areas are activated through

actions, and then left void again. With its ephemeral nature, performance introduces a rhythm into both museum space and museum time.

The architectonic language emphasises the primary elements of the space: floors, walls and ceilings. In designing additions, the architects focused on the surface geometry and their treatment, leaving the traces of previous uses of the space visible. Over these permanent and pre-existing layers, the exhibition design comprises flexible and removable furniture that, like a scenography, supports the gestures of both the artist and the visitor.

The Tanks and the Palais are examples of projects of the reuse of existing architectures. The same strategies, once again stimulated by the need to give room to artistic performing practices, also lie at the basis of the brand-new project by architects Nieto and Sobejano for the Centro de Creación Contemporánea, due to open in Cordoba in 2013. Here again the design of the space has to support the simultaneity of the production and exploitation of the works of art. The building plan comprises hexagonal rooms which can be connected to create different paths. These rooms are covered by concrete panels and lit from above. The idea underlying the project is the 'urban bazaar' as a place of encounter and exchange.

Is it possible to take stimuli from such recent experimentations in art museums, their programmes and their new spatial character, and apply them to other typologies of museums, to set up a different confrontation with visitors? These new interiors are open to urban practices of socialisation. In this sense, they are *performative spaces*, where architecture plays an active role in stimulating dialogue and participation. They suggest a new possible field of investigation, based on the relationship between performance and cultural spaces.

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PART III
Disorienting the Museum

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Chapter 8
Museo Diffuso: Performing Memory in Public Spaces

Viviana Gravano

This chapter investigates the relationship between some practices of contemporary art and what has been called 'difficult heritage'. It is divided into two parts: in the first, I define what I mean by *difficult heritage*; in the second, I cite some significant examples of memorials, museums, and artistic practices.

The term 'difficult heritage' comes from an important essay by Sharon Macdonald. With this expression she identifies places that conserve the memory of a traumatic event whose transformation into spaces of collective memory is particularly arduous. In her own words:

> 'difficult heritage' – that is, a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity. 'Difficult heritage' may also be troublesome because it threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures. (Macdonald 2008, 1)

Three fundamental terms emerge from this text: memory, the present and identity. Macdonald speaks of places that lead to possible conflicts within the community that inhabits them. The memory these places carry with them has a powerful relationship with the re-reading that they can operate in the present. The first question is: How do certain places become bearers of images of the past that 'concerns' us today in the sense of the term used by Georges Didi-Huberman: 'what we see has a value and a life inasmuch as it is connected to us. The division between what we see and what concerns us is therefore ineluctable' (Didi-Huberman 1992, 9; my translation).

When memory appears in the form of a place or an image, it can have a value not just as a simple 'object' to be observed, but also as a subject that looks back at us. In the latter case, it consigns us to an ethical position and makes us feel part of a place, an inhabitant rather than a passer-by, an actor and not just a spectator. The sites of difficult heritage imply a negotiated relation with those who watch, involving us even when we negate them or wish to forget them. They resemble the *damnatio memoriae* the Romans inflicted upon those who, having betrayed Rome, were forced into oblivion. The physical erasure of the figure of the traitor from

public representation in sculpture and painting produced an absence that actually maintained the eternal memorial of that betrayal. The 'apparent' erasure generates the constant confirmation of that which was, and even more so, of that which is. I propose to associate this quality of erased places with the Benjaminian concept of *das Jetzt* ('the now'). This has nothing to do with the temporality of the image, but with its pertinence to all the possible todays.

Macdonald draws our attention to how the recognition of certain places of memory evokes the re-reading of national narratives, and impacts on the construction, or deconstruction, of the foundational myths of that narration. The presence of a concrete visualisation of a traumatic past through images, places and practices aids recognition of the possible re-emergence of this past in contemporary tales of identity. In the spoken language, certain expressions, deriving from definitions formulated in the past, come to be actualised in the present. In this sense, certain forms of current representations are the offspring of the erasure and repression of images of the past. The constant concealment of the place and symbols of power, of sites of oppression and violence, produces a void of visual images that, following the principal of *damnatio memoriae*, generates a mythologised and highly imaginative permanence. The *rescissio actorum*, or the actual destruction of the work, produces a punishment that guarantees eternal presence for a total absence. The erasure of difficult memories implies the impossibility of a collective re-elaboration. It creates a myth of absence, leaving space for the transformation of the figure of the 'erased' into a victim of history.

Processes of Collective Removal in Italy

I would like to cite a recent and significant example of this process in Italy. Bolzano, a city in Alto Adige with a very strong separatist tradition, is composed of two linguistic communities, one German and one Italian. There are also other minorities such as Ladino, and this leads to constant conflicts. The city was mostly constructed in the fascist period, and many of its public buildings date from that period. In piazza Tribunale, a fascist building features an enormous bas-relief with Benito Mussolini on a horse. The sculpture was realised in 1939 by the sculptor Hans Piffrader, but only placed on the building in 1956, many years after the fall of the regime. In 2011, an international call was announced for a work of art that would 'disempower' the fascist sculpture. The desire for such an intervention began with a strong local debate regarding the necessity of activating a process of 'disempowerment' of the urbanised, architectural and artistic inheritance of fascism in Bolzano.

The term 'disempowerment' seems very problematic, because it presupposes that the images in themselves are bearers of an evocative force, of a signifying power: the memory not of an abuse, but of power and potency. Over five hundred applicants responded to the call. The five winners received prize money, but the local institutions, in accordance with the Berlusconi government in power at

that time, did not give the go-ahead for any of the selected works. After bitter debates, it was decided to cover the bas-relief with a large frosted pane of grey glass. A perfect monument 'in hiding' in reality exalted the force of that hidden and therefore 'unimaginable' image. Erasure exalts the absence, transforms the executioner into victim of the *damnatio memoriae*, and intentionally excludes the possibility of a public, shared re-elaboration. In Bolzano, the projects proposed by artists and architects would have initiated a process of negotiation with an image that confronts the past of the city and Italy and poses questions linked to the new images of the neo-fascist right, constructed thanks to the repression of the memory of the Mussolini era.

The Power of a Difficult Heritage

Now I would like to raise a second question regarding the political value of the definition of *difficult heritage*. According to what criteria can a given place can be ascribed to the difficult heritage, and who has the authority for deciding? Does a difference exist between those places recognised unanimously as difficult heritage, thanks to the worldwide 'notoriety' of the trauma they have given rise to, and those places that have profoundly determined the narratives of identity at the local level, but have not gained an international standing? Can the location of a conflict, of a dictatorship, or of a traumatic event be considered as difficult heritage even if it has not received unanimous worldwide condemnation or not been an object of study?

I believe that this is a fundamental question in understanding whether the definition of difficult heritage can be seen as a form of discrimination in mainstream academic research. Macdonald discusses the difficulty of considering the places of slavery in the United States, in common with many places marked by European colonialism, as difficult heritage on the part of those countries that welcome research on the subject. Research, and consequent actions, linked to the memory of Nazism or the regimes in the ex-Eastern European bloc, receive an immediate position in this context, with a uniformity of readings determined by those who wield academic power: universities in Europe and the United States. With this, I do not wish to negate the extreme importance of the contributions on memory concerning the Nazi period and the dictatorships of Eastern Europe. The question is: does the selection of places, and the subsequent choice of actions to be promoted there, denote a form of political power used to decide *a priori* those sites that necessitate 'recollection'?

We also need to pose a question regarding the resources and channels of research that are fundamentally concentrated in Europe and the United States, or in the countries that are politically closely associated with them. I can give an example in this respect. Brazil, under the presidencies of both Lula de Silva and Dilma Roussef, and Argentina, with Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner as president, both appointed State Commissions to prosecute crimes committed during the

brutal military dictatorships. This initiated a process of recognition and critical reactivation of the places of detention and torture and the palaces of dictatorial power. Immediately after the fall of the dictatorships, the governments, under the influence of the United States, rapidly erased or re-converted these places so as to suppress all memories of their past. It is surely problematic that while research centres on the United States – the country that financed the advent of these dictatorships and has taken a very clear and forthright approach to the heritage of Nazism – it has been much more ambiguous about the difficult heritage in countries of Central and South America.

This example poses an essential question: in indicating an area of difficult heritage, one is also implicitly indicating a question of identity linked to whoever belongs to that area, but how can this link between personal identity and local history be made explicit? The position of the researcher, artist or activist who has taken on the operation of recollection is essential to the narration of identity. By saying this, I do not mean that only those who live in a given place can tackle the complex questions linked to difficult heritage. I believe that the variables in the negotiations between territory, memory and community require consideration of the identity of the personal and academic narrative of the researcher**.**

I say this because in elaborating this chapter, I know that I am not only a scholar of new genre public art based in Italy. I know that I am a woman from Southern Europe, born in 1961, with a history of political militancy in the Italian Communist Party, linked to the story of my uncle, a socialist who was deported to Auschwitz, and have witnessed as a young intellectual the horrible war in Yugoslavia, the invasions of Iran and Iraq, and many other catastrophes. Thus my definition of difficult heritage begins in Nazi Germany, and passes boldly through fascist Italy, colonial Europe and imperialist America. Like any scholar who deals with these themes, I must begin from a critical and vigilant analysis of the origins of my research.

I would like here to recall Walter Benjamin, who in 1939, speaking of epic theatre, cited Brecht with regard to the role of the actor: 'The actor must show the event, and he must show himself: naturally he shows the event by showing himself and he shows himself by showing the event' (Benjamin 2003, 11). The calling into question and constant deconstruction of academic power remains essential in not superimposing our research requirements to the demands of the community with and for which we work.

Now I would like to address the question of places as living testimonies of the topographies of memory. I would like to begin from the concept of *museo diffuso*, rendered variously in English as 'open-air museum' or 'diffused museum', or again 'dispersed museum', or finally 'disseminated museum'. The expression actually emerged in Italian museum literature, and in origin did not refer to difficult heritage. The dispersed museum designates the myriad of common goods diffused throughout the territory that a policy of recuperation and valorisation tends to treat as a unit. The dispersed museum is intended to transform a territory of everyday transit into an open-air museum itinerary.

The initial definition of the *museo diffuso* was by the architect Fredi Drugman in a seminar given at Milan Polytechnic in 1980, published in the Italian magazine *Hinterland* (Drugman 1982, 21). Since then, the scholar has often returned to the need to see the museum as a place of society: the dispersed museum implies a close link between alterity and familiarity, the usual and the extraordinary, the everyday and the unique. Thus the dispersed museum comes to be seen as an open form which proposes a deep relation between territory, community of inhabitants and visitor.

The two binomials proposed by Drugman – treated dialectically, not as dichotomies – seem appropriate when speaking of difficult heritage. There exists a sense of familiarity towards certain places, but also a strong sense of estrangement with respect to its previous use. Quite often these sites are on the daily routes of inhabitants of the community or standard tourist routes, but the emergence of a repressed memory can reveal what is exceptional. The everyday nature of the place becomes a unique experience because it challenges all our identity narrations. The place as interruption of flux of habit, as interval in the usual perception, evokes Paul Klee's vision of the angel of history described by Walter Benjamin: 'His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread …. His face is turned toward the past' (Benjamin 2006, 392). The unexpected 'survival' of the past manifests itself in the guise of shock (Benjamin 2006, 320), of interruption, of 'interval' in the sense Benjamin attributes to Baudelaire in the modern metropolis. The anti-monumental artistic practices must search for a modality that impedes the re-absorption of that place in the past and renews the shock in an epic way. Still speaking of the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin writes:

> Like the pictures in a film, epic theatre moves in spurts. Its basic form is that of the shock with which the single, well-defined situations of the play collide. The songs, the captions, the lifeless conventions set off one situation from another. This brings about intervals which, if anything, impair the illusion of the audience and paralyze its readiness for empathy. These intervals are reserved for the spectator's critical reaction – to the actions of the players and to the way in which they are represented. (Benjamin 1969, 153)

In my view, the role of the sites of difficult heritage involves the perception of these places as territories of shock that interrupt a pacific, conflict-free vision of the space in which we live. But it can also offer each one of us the opportunity to articulate a critical vision with respect to their representation. In Benjamin, the concept of the *cutting* pushes the audience towards a vision that asks for its continuous, personal and cultural reassembly of historical 'facts'. The testimony of places does not appear like a sacralised conservation that easily leads to a dangerous fetishisation, but presents itself as an 'interval'. Each break in the urban fabric of today can become an interval, forcing critical replacement between actions produced accidentally and those that can be hosted voluntarily. Twentieth-century European culture tends to use the monument and the memorial as commemorative

places, producing not a shock, but a mimesis of the landscape, becoming not a space, but a place. As the sociologist Michel de Certeau writes:

> At the outset, I shall make a distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) that delimits a field. A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location …. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. A *place* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersection of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflicting programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction of the place, it has thus none of the univocity of a 'proper'. (de Certeau 1984, 117)

The monument as a 'place' conserves an integrity that identifies it with a past event that it has hosted and condemns as impossible the action in the present. The space exists only as it is practised in action. The monumentalisation, the practices of textual reconstitution of the sites of the great tragedies, make them invisible since their mere nomination transforms them into places. The celebration of memory that must be kept alive actually crystallises the event recalled in one fixed image, localised and therefore unimaginable in the present.

In the book *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, featuring photographs taken by a *Sonderkommand* inside the extermination camp at Auschwitz, Georges Didi-Huberman proposes the question of the possibility and impossibility of representing the horror of the camps:

> In order to know, we must imagine for ourselves. We must attempt to imagine the hell that Auschwitz was in the summer of 1944. Let us not invoke the unimaginable. Let us not shelter ourselves by saying that we cannot, that we could not by any means, imagine it to the very end. We are obliged to that oppressive imaginable. It is a response that we must offer, as a debt to the words and images that certain prisoners snatched, for us, from the harrowing Real of their experience. So let us not invoke the unimaginable. How much harder was it for the prisoners to rip from the camps those few shreds of which now we are trustees, charged with sustaining them simply by looking at them. Those shreds are at the same time more precious and less comforting than all possible works

> of art, snatched as they were from a world bent on their impossibility. Thus, images in spite of all: in spite of the hell of Auschwitz, in spite of the risks taken. In return, we must contemplate them, take them on, and try to comprehend them. Images in spite of all: in spite of our own inability to look at them as they deserve; in spite of our own world, full, almost choked, with imaginary commodities. (Didi-Huberman 2012, 3)

A little further on, the author says: 'to remember one must imagine' (Didi-Huberman 2012, 30). I would prefer to see the phrase translated from the French with the verb 'recollect' instead of 'remember' in order to better emphasise the difference between memory and remembrance, where one word refers to the preservation of memory and the other implies an active re-emergence of this memory.

I always found the French scholar's appeal to abandon ethical terms such as 'unimaginable' or 'unspeakable' when referring to the tragedy of the Nazi death camps illuminating. The impossible representation does not just pass through the destruction or concealment of difficult heritage, but paradoxically, often passes through the monuments to its memory, understood as the petrifaction of memory, like a dead language rather than a spoken language. This brings to mind some photos taken by American photographer Margaret Bourke White on entering the Buchenwald concentration camp, immediately after the arrival of the Allies. Some pictures from the series 'German civilians are forced by American troops to bear witness to Nazi atrocities at Buchenwald concentration camp, mere miles from their own homes, April 1945', which she produced for the magazine *Life*, were never published. In these photographs, the true subject was not the mountain of corpses or the people reduced to skin and bones, but the eyes of the German citizens that were 'forced' to see what meaning the camps had. Those images carry a level of obscenity, so much so that *Life* published the shocking images of mountains of corpses piled up like 'objects', but not those in which the protagonist is the gaze of someone who does not want to look. The omission from *Life* established a criterion of unwatchability. The horror of the published images constructs such an impact that we are all from that moment not allowed to look because what you see is literally 'unbearable'.

The erasure of the images of those who are 'forced' to look would have set a dangerous precedent, a kind of invitation to watch, a real possibility, a tangible watching/seeing that those images would no longer have relegated to the sphere of the 'unwatchable'. In a series of unpublished photographs, Bourke White omits even the object of the gaze and shows only the contrite and even 'disgusted' faces, looking at something horrible elsewhere. That group of viewers, of bystanders, is the potential European audience, who could identify with them, who could be 'forced' to watch. They are the live witnesses, but they are not survivors. The inability to identify with the survivor authorises the ability to say, 'Only those who have lived it could never understand,' and so this absolves everyone else from having to understand. The German citizens standing in front of the horror perpetrated right on their front doorstep could

be us, we might have been the same witnesses. To erase that kind of witness is equivalent to still being able to say that everything that has happened will always be 'unimaginable'.

Returning, then, to the question of the testimonial value of 'places', I would like to conclude by saying that in Italy, the celebrative monumentalisation of many places of difficult heritage, and contrary to the literal erasure of the true space of the criminal action of fascism and Nazi fascism, has produced a sort of imagination gap. Today, much of right-wing culture, and not only that of the far right and pro-Nazis, re-proposes an iconography linked to the fascist period that is gaining ground in de-figuring the period. The lack of a real geographical and topographical reworking of fascism in Italy has turned that time into a sort of ghost without place, which is countered by a celebratory rhetoric that relegates many events to the designation of 'civil war'. Suffice it to say that of the three detention and torture centres of the Nazi fascist period in Rome, the Pensione Jaccarino, the Pensione Oceano Pacifico and the Pensione on Via Tasso, only the latter has a Museum of Liberation. The Pensione Jaccarino has returned to its normal activities as a hotel, and the Pensione Oceano Pacifico is home to the headquarters of Radio Radicale. Both are commemorated only with a marble plaque that dryly records that on this spot the infamous group of Nazi fascist torturers called the Banda Koch once operated.

The Italian colonial past has had a similar fate, represented as a sort of comic defeat, a failed attempt from the start. This stereotyped representation of the picaresque Italian who approaches the colonial enterprise in an almost burlesque manner, has in Italy prevented the circulation of the numerous archival images showing the violence and killings perpetrated in the colonies from the Unification of Italy to the fascist period. The result is the current strongly racist iconography that permeates popular communication, from advertising to the cinema, denoting a total lack of reworking of colonial iconography. Such repression produces the belief that the colonial era does not 'concern' the Italian culture of today.

Berlin: Difficult Heritage Tourism

I would now like to mention some examples of best practices through interventions closer to the spirit of the new-genre public art working within a vision that have produced approaches that are site-specific-oriented and, in my view, very interesting.

Berlin is home to a *dispersed museum* in the city concerning the memory of the Nazi period and the wall. After German reunification in 1990, Germany had to deal with the thorny issue of the memory connected to the Nazis, but also the resulting division after the Second World War into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Crossing Berlin, the capital of the reunified nation, we find many places of German difficult heritage that are turning into spaces of remembrance. I will not dwell here on all the initiatives, many are already well

known, but I will focus on three examples that suggest three approaches that I consider interesting.

A red brick line on the ground marks the old path of the Berlin Wall that was built in August 1961 and demolished in November 1989. Walking in the city now, it is easy to step on and cross over this stretch without noticing. In two places in the city, the presence of the wall returns in an obvious way: Bernauer Strasse, where the Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer has been built (the Berlin Wall Memorial), and Checkpoint Charlie, with its museum, where the apparatus of the border of the period of the wall was left. I would like to start by distinguishing these two initiatives, proposing how museum practices can produce two very different approaches with respect to the same difficult heritage. Discussion has already begun around *difficult heritage tourism*, the current tendency to make some areas that are difficult for the memory of the local community into places organised for a kind of tourism that tends to become mass tourism.

In his book *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting a German History in the Urban Landscape* (1997), Brian Ladd clearly reconstructs the market that was built around pieces of the Berlin Wall after its fall, fundamentally related to non-German collecting. The wall, after its almost complete material destruction, fell into the fetishisation trap of which I spoke earlier. In Berlin, the Berlin Wall Memorial and Checkpoint Charlie Museum have seen two very different reactions to this urgent matter. The Berlin Wall Memorial is defined on the official website as *Gedenkstätte*, the exact German equivalent of the English term 'memorial'. The term derives from the Latin term for memorial, *memorialis*, essentially indicating a book, and therefore a written statement that will leave a trace – but it also means a historian. The word alludes to the need to conserve memory, but fundamentally, the ability to transmit it.

The diffused construction of the Berlin Wall Memorial works with the possibility of recollecting the wall, in a site-specific way, leading the visitor along a physical path that consolidates the relationship between space, memory and viewer. The audio, video and textual columns along the path of the wall at Bernauer Strasse seem to be a contemporary version of the techniques of recollection from Giulio Camillo Delminio's ancient *Theatre of Memory* in the sixteenth century: a series of aedicules that housed the *tableau vivant* of each record to be transmitted and preserved. Each information point of the Berlin Wall Memorial materialises an aspect of past life with the wall standing, in a sequence of daily life that is topographical rather than chronological.

The memorial avoids monumentalisation and fetishisation. All elements of the display used were fragments of the hidden structure that nurtured it and kept it alive, and are shown still buried, surrounded by a fence and explained in detailed plaques. This form of archaeological excavation permits a locating of these 'objects' in the past, but at the same time makes them present as traces. The exposing of what did not appear as evident invites a desacralisation of the paradoxical tendency to turn the wall into 'urban furnishing' in order to preserve a fragment as cult object. At the memorial on Bernuer Strasse, the path of the

Figure 8.1 **'A bike attached to one of the poles of the Berlin Wall Memorial', Bernauer Strassse, Berlin 2012'. Photograph by Viviana Gravano, 2012**

wall is marked by a long sequence of rust-coloured pipes driven into the ground, which do not block the sight of the wall and clearly outline the path of that part of the wall.

On my last visit to Berlin, I took a picture of a bike attached to one of these poles (Figure 8.1), and I think this parked bike is more eloquent than any words I might offer. The memorial, on the one hand, activates reflection, forcing a critical intervention, and on the other, recreates a familiarity with the place, reconstructs a presence that is not monumental and therefore unapproachable and untouchable.

The intervention at Checkpoint Charlie seems to be something entirely different. In front of the museum of the same name, the first in Berlin to document the history of the wall, on the old border crossing point between East and West Berlin, a sentry surveillance point with sandbags was erected. A young actor, dressed as a member of the American or Russian military, allows tourists to take his picture. A little farther on, across the street, the remnants of the wall, graffitied by famous street artists, make it easy to overlook the political significance of the remaining wall as it is transformed into a fetishised and commercial object. Checkpoint Charlie is, in my view, the perfect representation of erasure by evidence. Beyond the removal implemented through the concealment of traces,

there is another form of removal that is just as dangerous: that which happens through a pop sacralisation of difficult heritage places, under the false pretence of popular dissemination. It diffuses any conflict of identity in the narratives of the present, and promotes the aesthetic mythologising of the past in a nostalgic key. The trace does not appear as a theatre of memory, but only as a performance of a pacified present that formalises places to make them workable on the surface. It is no coincidence that Checkpoint Charlie has failed to foster any relationship with the inhabitants of that portion of the city: it has become a sort of Berlin Wall theme park in the middle of the city, for the benefit of tourists.

I would like to cite another example, present in Berlin but also spread throughout Europe: the *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones or blocks) of the German artist Gunter Demnig. These stones, now deposited in their thousands in all of the countries that had citizens deported to the Nazi death camps, are small brass blocks of 10 × 10 cm, with a simple engraving of the name, date of birth, date of deportation, and when known, the date of death for each victim of Nazi-fascism. Each stone is set in the pavement in front of what was once their residence at the time of their deportation. Each stone costs 120 euros and can be funded by private or public institutions, but also by an individual citizen.

The stones cause the mild perceptual shock I mentioned above. They are brief, sharp breaks in our flow, they are simple interventions, small but heavy in the course of our daily journey. They are objects that show an unexpected corporeality in their present rendering of who disappeared.

In the recent press conference held for the installation of new stones in Rome at the Casa della Memoria ('Memory House'), Mr Veneziani, in telling the story of the people to whom the stones he financed were being dedicated, told us that in the branch of his family which was deported, all his relatives were killed, from the youngest grandchild to the grandparents, and left no trace behind at all in life. He explained how his cousin was sold to Nazi fascist Italians by his neighbour for 5,000 lira, and hence deported. The stones become an uncomfortable presence, similar to the looks omitted from the photographs of Margaret Bourke White – because they are on the sidewalk in front of our houses, because they are inserted into a road we walk down every day, because they are the trace not only of extermination, but of indifference.

Their widespread diffusion not only functions as a collective recollection, but invites an assumption of responsibility for the individual. The laying of stones triggers a strong debate, which in some countries has led to their disfigurement and attempts to remove them. At the time of installation, the community that receives them performs a ceremony, to which all those who knew the remembered people are invited. Public institutions and individuals are invited to participate economically and organisationally in the installation of the stones. It is not by chance that in the extermination camps the bodies were burned in ovens, that the militaries of Central and South America threw bodies into the sea, that there are *desaparecidos*, the victims of dictatorships, but also the name for many prisoners in US prisons. The erasure of the body prevents the incorporation of the victim

within those who remain. How can you identify with those who no longer exist, not because they died, but because they are missing? The stumbling stones restore a physical, tangible experience to those who never returned from the death camps by giving them a body that hurts us, touches us every time we place a foot near one of those stones.

Conclusion

I would like to close my remarks by citing two works by contemporary artists who, in two different contexts of difficult heritage, have raised critical issues of great urgency. The first work is the *Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History* by Ian Alan Paul, an artist and theorist based in the California Bay area.[1] The museum is actually a website that shows an imaginary museum installed at the well-known US prison at Guantanamo Bay, the setting of episodes of torture and violations of human rights, after its hypothetical closure by order of President Barack Obama. On the homepage of the museum website you can read the welcome message from the Director: 'The Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History, located at the former site of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp in Cuba, is an institution dedicated to remembering the U.S. prison which was active between 2002 and 2012 before it was permanently decommissioned and closed.'

The museum houses an Exhibition Hall and a Research Centre dedicated to all the victims of the detention centre: the *Tipton Three Exhibition Centre*, dedicated to the collective name of the British citizens from Tipton, England who were held in the extrajudicial detention in Guantanamo, and *Jumah al-Dossari Centre for Critical Studies*, dedicated to the citizen of Bahrain tortured in Guantanamo. On entering the website, visitors find instructions to arrange their visit, to become supporters of the museum, and even to apply to be artists-in-residence.

The work of Ian Alan Paul suggests a theme that I raised at the beginning of this chapter: Who decides what constitutes *difficult heritage*, and according to what criteria? When Guantanamo is truly abandoned, if ever, will it be a place that will become a field of research for difficult heritage, since it is a place where all human rights were suspended? We ask ourselves the question: Shy was such a prison installed at Guantanamo, in that paradoxical bay on the island of Cuba still owned by the United States? We might respond by saying that precisely a place that imposes a traumatic presence, a continual interruption of the democratic flow of the United States, was placed outside the framework of possible random passers-by or US citizens. The location's problems of trace and memory are bound to affect everyone, even in those countries that have drawn the boundaries and criteria of difficult heritage. I would ask again whether a place like Guantanamo can be transformed virtually, even before its 'end', into a *difficult heritage*?

1 See the museum's website: www.guantanamobaymuseum.org (accessed 6 November 2013).

At the beginning, I said that difficult heritage deals with those places that produce conflicts in the construction of identity narratives of today, and Guantanamo is one of these. Deterritorialising Guantanamo by turning it into a virtual site which recollects what still takes place within its walls can be a new frontier of artistic intervention in difficult heritage, can become a master key, a battering ram even, to open those doors not into the past, but into our own present.

One of the works in the *Guantanamo Bay Museum* is by an Italian-American artist based in San Francisco, Fiamma Montezemolo. Her work reproduces the now famous orange jumpsuits of the Guantanamo prisoners along with part of the book *If This is a Man* by the Jewish-Italian writer and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi. Through headphones, you can hear the sounds of the revolving door along one of the passages of the US–Mexico border. The artist explains her work on her website:

> In this piece, an imaginary prisoner/migrant – with an unidentified nationality – leaves only a trace of the intolerable of his experience. The trace is made of a note/poem and a sound. The poem is by Primo Levi, written after surviving the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. The sound has been collected in the border between Mexico and the USA where there are metallic doors that abruptly divide the Americas in two. The image of the poem, written on the now infamous orange prisoner uniform, along with the sound, establishes an analogy between the attempt to forcedly create boundaries, categories and aliens on the basis of violence.[2]

The proximity between the memory of the Nazi death camps, perceived through the words of Primo Levi, the prisoners subjected to torture at Guantanamo, through the use of jumpsuits, and the thousands of migrant victims, dead or disappeared at the US–Mexico border through the use of sound, combines, in a dazzling 'today', the traces of a possible definition of *difficult heritage* that, extending beyond academic boundaries, arrives at being true fieldwork.

I believe that this work by Fiamma Montezemolo is the perfect closure to my paper, as it sought to problematise the concept of difficult heritage by inviting a consideration of the possibilities emerging from *site-specific-oriented* research, and the role of the players as necessary components in true remembrance.

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Chapter 9
Mining the Museum in an Age of Migration

Anne Ring Petersen

Since the 1970s, the meta-discursive activities commonly described as 'institutional critique' have established a strong artistic tradition for detailed analysis of networks of power and systems of representation. Institutional critique often uses museological practices to question the ways in which museums rewrite history through the politics of collecting and displaying (Corrin 1994, 4–7). It has proved capable of revealing the cultural mechanisms at play in museums and other institutions that market or display art and cultural artefacts (González 2008, 67). There is now ample evidence that one of the most efficient means of deconstructing Western museums as cultural spaces is to invite a critical artist to stage an intervention, thereby temporarily transforming the relatively static display of a permanent collection into a living archive and an innovative exhibition context. As Lisa Corrin remarks, these types of projects and installations have formed a veritable movement that could be described as 'Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves' (Corrin 1994, 1). The question is: can they also help us envision what a 'postcolonial museum' could be, and what it could do?

A well-known example is the American artist Fred Wilson's groundbreaking installation *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992. It was based on a collaboration which allowed the artist to interview the staff and to have open access to the collection, including the objects and histories that had been buried in the museum's basement. *Mining the Museum* brought to light previously untold histories of African-Americans and Native Americans in Maryland. It thus supported the Historical Society's efforts to make its collections more relevant to greater Baltimore's mainly African-American population (González 2008, 83). Another remarkable characteristic of *Mining the Museum* was that it did not involve artworks by the artist, but a curatorial selection and reinstallation of items from the collection in a way that invited visitors to reconsider the items on display, as well as the ideological function of the exhibition itself as a knowledge technology that taught particular interpretations of history, thereby also invariably suppressing others. In this case, the suppressed histories were the histories of slavery and racism in America. Wilson's critical, revisionist intent was succinctly summed up in a vitrine labelled 'Metalwork 1793–1880' that displayed a slave's iron shackles alongside the vitrine's usual display of ornate silver goblets and elegant decanters (Figure 9.1). Similarly, the room entitled 'Modes of Transport, 1770–1910' revealed a Ku Klux Klan hood resting in the sheltered space of a pram,

Figure 9.1 **Fred Wilson, 'Metalwork 1793–1880', from *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–93. Silver vessels in Baltimore Repoussé style, 1830–80; slave shackles, *c.* 1793–1872, made in Baltimore. Makers unknown. Photograph © Fred Wilson, reproduced courtesy of the artist and the Pace Gallery**

contextualised by an early twentieth-century photograph of African-American nannies with white children in prams (González 2008, 88).

The British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare's installation *Garden of Love* at the quai Branly Museum in Paris in 2007 was not an artistic intervention in a collection like Wilson's. Yet it had a similar disruptive effect on the institution's display policies because it exposed how colonial history permeates European ethnographical museums. The quai Branly Museum features indigenous art, cultures and civilisations from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Seventy per cent of its objects were 'acquired' between 1880 and 1939, at the height of European Imperialism (Müller 2007b, 26). It is telling of the interplay between Shonibare's installation, the permanent collection and the museum environment that one art critic thought that Shonibare was 'doing a Fred Wilson' (Jones 2007).

Shonibare was prompted to use the French 'picturesque garden' to launch an institutional critique from the museum garden, which is made up of plants not indigenous to Europe. He linked the site-specific garden motif to his own fascination with the lavish lifestyle of the aristocracy in eighteenth-century Europe, when

Figure 9.2. Yinka Shonibare, 'The Confession', installation from *Garden of Love*, Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2007. Two mannequins, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, shoes, coir mattins, plinth, artificial silk flowers, 158 × 178 × 170 cm. Photograph by Patrick Gries. Image courtesy of the artist, James Cohan Gallery, New York and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

members of the ruling class lived in unimaginable luxury while revolution was brewing around them. The three tableaux entitled 'The Confession' (Figure 9.2), 'The Crowning' and 'The Pursuit', which constituted the core elements of *Garden of Love*, staged this pre-revolutionary moment by paraphrasing paintings of loving couples from the series *The Progress of Love*, painted by the quintessential Rococo painter Jean Honoré Fragonard in 1771–73.

Contrary to Fragonard's silk-clad, rosy-cheeked aristocrats, Shonibare's figures wore Rococo costumes made of African-print fabrics. Originally produced by Dutch colonisers for an Indonesian market, these fabrics found costumers in West African colonies, and later became an emblem of African identity and pan-African nationalism. As a result, they are impregnated with colonial and postcolonial connotations, which Shonibare exploits in his efforts to make viewers understand that coloniality is a constituent of modern Western societies, and not something external to them. Moreover, the figures' heads were removed, as a warning that a bloody revolution may also be imminent in our contemporary world, with

its increasingly uneven distribution of wealth (Müller 2007a, 14). To link his exhibition with the museum garden, Shonibare placed his tableaux in a faux garden labyrinth, its artificiality enhancing the 'artful naturalness' of the exotic garden outside (Gilvin 2009, 168). The labyrinth mimicked the experience of wandering in quai Branly's garden and collections. It also offered multiple perspectives on the same tableau via carefully placed windows from the passageways into the spaces with the figures. Sometimes visitors could even see, but not enter, other exhibition spaces (Gilvin 2009, 169–70). In this way, the ethnographical museum was put into critical perspective as a system that assigns fixed places to objects-as-signs.

In my mind, there is no doubt that artistic interventions such as those of Wilson and Shonibare are capable of disrupting the traditional order of objects in Western museums and of questioning naturalised understandings of history. Again, can they also help us to envision a 'postcolonial museum'? In recent years, an agonistic discourse on 'decolonial thinking' and 'decolonial aesthetics' has emerged from the broader field of postcolonial studies and theory. In 'Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity', the protagonist of decoloniality Walter Mignolo has made a case for a clear-cut distinction between 'postcoloniality' and 'decoloniality', and claimed Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* for decoloniality. According to Mignolo, Wilson's intervention was a decolonial and hence political reminder of the 'underlying syntax' of coloniality and 'the hegemonic relations of power' that shape museums culturally, socially and economically (Mignolo 2011, 83).

In what follows, I will use Mignolo's assertive interpretation as a bridgehead for a reconsideration of two issues central to the idea of the postcolonial museum: first, whether or not it is possible to differentiate sharply between postcolonial and decolonial thinking, and second, the extent to which Mignolo's simple equation of an art project with the politics of decoloniality captures the transformative potential of artists' interventions in museums in an age of migration, when the much-desired diversity of audiences should also be mirrored in the chosen exhibits and modes of display, which means in the histories that are told and the way in which they are told.

Postcoloniality and Decoloniality

In Walter Mignolo's understanding, postcolonial and decolonial thinking are two different spheres. He defines postcoloniality as an offspring of Western postmodernism. It is a critique of European colonialism that emerged in Western Europe and the USA, and which brought French post-structuralism into dialogue with orientalism and subaltern studies in India. Decoloniality, on the other hand, emerged from the critical traditions of Latin America and found a continuous source of inspiration in the countless social movements and uprisings of indigenous activist groups in Latin America and elsewhere (Mignolo 2007, 163–4; Mignolo 2011, 79). In the 'Decolonial Aesthetics (I)' manifesto (written by Mignolo in joint authorship with a group of decolonial thinkers, artists and activists), decoloniality

emerges as a political and ideological project in which artistic practices and activism play a leading role (Mignolo et al. 2011). In addition, the manifesto revives the Modernist belief in the emancipatory power of the avant-garde and sees decolonial aesthetics as a representative of community-based interculturalism 'from-below', as opposed to multiculturalism, which the authors claim to be state-enforced 'from-above':

> Decoloniality endorses interculturality (which has been conceptualized by organised communities) and delinks from multiculturalism (which has been conceptualized and implemented by the State). Decolonial transmodern aesthetics is intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual but always from perspectives of the global south and the former-Eastern Europe. (Mignolo et al. 2011)

Postcolonial and decolonial thinking obviously have different intellectual pedigrees. As opposed to the deconstructive approach and dialectic perspective that characterise postcolonial theories concerning hybridity and cultural translation, decoloniality has a polarising political agenda. It is founded on a dualistic view of a world divided into a hemisphere of Evil and a hemisphere of Good: an imperialist North dedicated to imposing on all others 'the Western imperial reason' (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012, 7) and a liberating South (including the former Eastern Europe). Whereas the first is demonised as purely racist, colonialist, capitalist and universalist, the latter is defined as the home of convivial 'pluriversalism' and decolonial emancipation (Mignolo et al. 2011). Despite these differences, the two positions seem to share some basic assumptions and aims.

Mignolo claims that the basic premise in decolonial thinking is that 'coloniality is constitutive of modernity and there is no modernity without coloniality' (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012, 8; Mignolo 2007, 162). However, this assumption and line of inquiry is fundamental to postcolonial thinking, too. Moreover, when reading Janet Wilson, Christina Şandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh's recent stocktaking of the aims and institutional position of postcolonial studies, one gathers that there are more similarities than differences between the postcolonial and decolonial 'projects'. Both take as their object of study underprivileged subjectivities, marginalised political entities, and the violence of colonial and imperial agendas; and both primarily articulate their critique from institutional positions in major universities, frequently in the West (Wilson et al. 2010, 8).

To conclude, Mignolo's sharp distinction between postcoloniality and decoloniality seems to be more rhetorical than actual, although Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova claim that decolonial epistemologies 'will be constructed with their "back" toward the West', thereby also 'delinking' from Westernised postcolonial studies (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012, 12). Rather than seeing postcolonial studies and decolonial thinking as discrete fields of knowledge, I argue that decolonial thinking could be seen as a faction of the broad field of postcolonial studies; a certain mode of practising a critique which favours

an interventionist mode of 'doing' or performing art and culture, with the aim of 'mining', and thereby undermining, colonial perceptions of the world. If decoloniality is understood as a critical, interventionist strategy, it is of particular relevance to the revision of European museums.

I will now return to Wilson and Shonibare to substantiate my proposition that decolonial interventions can be a means of turning museums into sites of contamination that are capable of including formerly repressed histories and migrating memories. As a first step, I will scrutinise Mignolo's reading of Wilson's installation. Mignolo opens with the question of how museums with historical roots in the logic of coloniality can contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge and become places to learn how to unlearn, in order to relearn (Mignolo 2011, 73). He builds his argument on Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, which he considers to be 'an exemplary case of a decolonizing perspective' and 'an exemplar of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience' (Mignolo 2011, 72). Mignolo is primarily concerned with explaining the basic tenets of decolonial thinking and how coloniality continues to be 'an underlying syntax' that affects 'the entire socio-economic system and subject formation' (Mignolo 2011, 84). He only briefly introduces three well-known displays of *Mining the Museum* before jumping to his conclusion that its most powerful element was 'a decolonial statement in the heart of the museum which is an imperial/colonial (and of course national) institution' (Mignolo 2011, 76).

To Mignolo, Wilson's art is nothing but a political statement that constitutes a decolonising reminder of the museum's underlying colonial syntax, and it is the political content that makes *Mining the Museum* 'one of the enormous contributions … to the decolonization of being and knowledge' (Mignolo 2011, 80). The aesthetic aspects of Wilson's installation are no more part of Mignolo's understanding of Wilson's work than the history of slavery was a visible part of the collection of the Maryland Historical Society before Wilson so effectively mined it. Since Mignolo does not explore Wilson's artistic method, he fails to answer the critical question of what it is about his installation – its strategy of display and the modes of attention it invited – that constitutes its decolonising perspective. Surely, it is not the slave shackles and the Ku Klux Klan mask in themselves. Rather than simply ignoring the connections between the postcolonial *and* the aesthetic, like Mignolo does, I argue that in a museum context, where visual display is a primary medium of communication, it is crucial to consider the aesthetic aspects in order to grasp art's decolonising potential. If institutional interventions by artists are instances of 'politics', as Mignolo suggests, they are instances of politics performed *by means of* aesthetics.

The Postcolonial and the Aesthetic

The little-examined notions of 'a postcolonial aesthetic' and 'decolonial aesthetics' will serve as starting points. I have adopted the notion of a postcolonial aesthetic

from the literary scholar Elleke Boehmer, and the notion of decolonial aesthetics from the 'Decolonial Aesthetics (I)' manifesto. I use these terms for want of better words. As Boehmer points out, postcolonial critics are generally hostile to matters 'solely aesthetic', considering this to be a Western, middle-class indulgence. They tend to avoid the word 'aesthetic' and to read artworks – in the widest sense – as testimonies, political critiques or ideological manifestos. As a result, they often come to rely on a reductive and generally unacknowledged notion of aesthetics and aesthetic modes of attention (Boehmer 2010, 170–71). Judging from the manifesto and Mignolo's reading of Wilson's exhibition, this critique applies to decolonial thinkers, too. According to Boehmer, the unreflected implicit notion of aesthetics in postcolonial scholarship typically invokes polyglot layering and cross-cultural mixings – like the manifesto's declaration of decolonial aesthetics as being 'inter-aesthetical' and aimed at 'pluriversalism'. Such invocations rest fundamentally on what Boehmer calls a *mimetic aesthetic*, because the work is presumed to merely reflect postcolonial cultural politics or conditions (Boehmer 2010, 171). It is indeed a mimetic aesthetic that underlies Mignolo's understanding of Wilson's work as a political critique of colonialism.

Although I wish to highlight the issue of aesthetics in postcolonial discourses, I hesitate to speak of postcolonial or decolonial aesthetics. Artists working with a postcolonial or decolonial perspective are often deeply entangled in the institutional and economic structures of the Western art world and draw on movements in Western mainstream art such as conceptual art, institutional critique and installation art. One must therefore be careful not to validate neo-essentialist notions of a particular postcolonial or decolonial aesthetics, and to promote the illusion of the singularity of postcolonial or decolonial art. For example, Wilson's work is based on the strategies of conceptual art and institutional critique (González 2008, 66–7), whereas Shonibare's work draws heavily on Western art history and installation art. However, this complicity with Western economic, social and art institutional systems does not stifle their critique; on the contrary, complicity is the very precondition for their decolonising infiltration of Western institutions, in order to launch their critique *from within* the institutions.

Despite these reservations, I use the terms in question as my starting points to emphasise the centrality of 'aesthetics' to any exploration of how postcoloniality or decoloniality is articulated in art and culture. In my view, we cannot grasp how artists such as Wilson and Shonibare articulate a postcolonial critique without analysing their respective artistic methods. Without attention to artistic forms and languages, we cannot comprehend what it is within art or particular works of art that performs postcolonial or decolonial work. Only through aesthetic analysis can we discover *how* interventionist strategies can bring repressed histories and the museum's inherent power-knowledge system to light.

As Boehmer points out: 'the postcolonial entails a definition drawn not from the *work* but from the *world*' (Boehmer 2010, 176). It primarily denotes history, not aesthetic form. Throughout, I will therefore use Boehmer's definition of the term 'aesthetic' as referring to a concern with form as a critical part of a work's

content. It follows that it is *not* defined as something autonomous, but as an element that actively shapes the work's content and is complicit with the work's content and contexts. Consequently, the term implies attention to the work's generic and formal aspects and its connotative language, but also a concern not to relate that work solely to historical, social and political frames of reference. Although the topic of the work emanates from outside the work, from the world and its injustice, the artist has felt that this topic could only find adequate expression in a particular kind of artwork. The work must thus be read on its own artistic terms, insisting on its own particular modes of attention (Boehmer 2010, 171 and 179).

Mieke Bal's distinction between 'an art of politics' and 'an art of the political' supports this definition of the 'aesthetic'. The former is an art of didactic political statements; the latter uses aesthetics as a weapon that moves people, so that their perspectives may change.[1] My point is that the decolonising effect of *Mining the Museum* is not explained solely by its rather obvious anti-racist and anti-colonial contents – its function as 'an art of politics'. Its deconstructive disclosure of the museum's politics of exhibiting and ideological role as a social institution relies on Wilson's subtle use of artistic and curatorial means to move his audiences in *affective* ways. The sensory impact of his works stirs bodily, emotional and reflective responses, which are not so easily controlled and politically uniform as Mignolo's reading of Wilson's installation suggests. As Wilson himself has observed, his juxtaposition of objects traditionally kept apart functions as 'one way of unlocking [history] without a didactic tone – allowing the objects to speak to each other' (quoted in González 2008, 87). The museum's Director of Education, Judy Van Dyke, also stressed the variety of reactions, especially to the Klan hood:

> One black man said to me that it was almost humorous. I was blown away …. And another black man said, 'Well, I don't see anything funny about it. To me it's not funny at all. I've had personal experience with the Klan in Louisiana and I can hardly look at this. I am sweating right now, just looking at it.' (Van Dyke, quoted in González 2008, 88)

Wilson's emphatically corporeal juxtaposition of pram and adult-size hood (Figure 9.3) functions as a visual metaphor for how African-American slaves and citizens were forced to nurture the baby masters whose cruelty and violence would later make them sweat from fear.

Reading Mignolo against the grain, the most interesting points become the tiny affective cracks in his otherwise seamless political argument. Contrary to the sweating visitor, Mignolo 'shivered' when confronted with the juxtaposition of pram and Klan hood. In addition, the unusual experience of seeing a bust of Napoleon placed on a pedestal so low that visitors would look down on him left Mignolo bewildered, because the unfamiliar debasement produced 'some strange

1 Mieke Bal, in discussion at the conference *India! Art on the Move: Migration and Contemporary Art*, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, Denmark, 26 October 2012.

Figure 9.3 **Fred Wilson, 'Modes of Transport 1770–1910', from *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–93. Baby carriage *c.* 1908, hood twentieth century. Makers unknown. Photograph © Fred Wilson, reproduced courtesy of the artist and the Pace Gallery**

sensation in your body and in your brain' (Mignolo 2011, 76). One may infer that Wilson's juxtapositions caused an aesthetic shock that stirred ambiguous sensations not easily verbalised, but capable of disrupting naturalised modes of perception and of producing fresh political insight. Mignolo's article is in itself an eloquent testimony to this effect.

Just like Wilson's mining, Shonibare's use of aesthetic seduction highlights the complexity and reciprocity of interracial and colonial relations (Figure 9.4). I wish to propose that not only did *Garden of Love* manage to smuggle artworks loaded with references to canonical masterpieces of Western art history into an ethnographical museum otherwise reserved for non-Western 'indigenous' art, but by adding his artworks to a museum of the 'Other', Shonibare also succeeded in provincialising or *indigenising* Europe.

The quai Branly Museum was intended as a gesture of respect for the arts and cultures of the small tribal peoples of the Americas, Africa, the Pacific and the Arctic. However, a reasoned critique of neoprimitivism was expressed when it opened in 2006 (Clifford 2007, 5–6). It can therefore be said that one outcome of Shonibare's installation was to filter European culture through the neoprimitivist aestheticisation of the quai Branly Museum. He took the European colonisers as

Figure 9.4 **Yinka Shonibare, 'The Crowning' from *Garden of Love*, Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2007. Two mannequins, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, shoes, coir mattins, artificial silk flowers, 160 × 280 × 210 cm. Photograph by Patrick Gries. Image reproduced courtesy of the artist, James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London**

objects of curiosity in the manner of European ethnographers, thereby reversing the gaze: 'These members of the aristocracy, as a modern African, I find in a way that they are objects of curiosity, in a kind of reverse way. So the fetish for me, as an African, is the eighteenth-century European culture, whilst their fetish is the African mask!' (Müller 2007a, 21).

At quai Branly, 'illusion' and 'the work of art' coexist uneasily with the realism of ethnography and history. As a result, the balance between ethnography and aesthetics has been the focus of the debate, with the neoprimitivism and aestheticism of the permanent display area as the main point of criticism. As James Clifford has noted, the neo-*Naturvölker* concept of Jean Nouvel's spectacular architecture becomes oppressive here, overpowering the curatorial attempts to claim conceptual space for the displayed objects (Clifford 2007, 10). The presence of an exhibition by a big name in the global art world like Shonibare made the distinction between fine art and ethnographic artefacts even more uncertain, and enhanced the aestheticisation already present in the display of the ethnographical collection.

But what about politics? Here it is useful to recall Bal's distinction. While an art of politics risks falling into propaganda, Bal argues that an art of the political 'demonstrates that the political impact is not dependent on political statements'. On the contrary, '[the] political of art must stay aloof of politics in order to be effective'.[2] With its combination of unequivocal political messages and affective impact, Wilson's installation functioned as both. Shonibare's garden was an art of the political, moving audiences politically by aesthetic means: luscious colours, eroticism, decapitation and the ethnographical re-contextualisation of European culture. One therefore wonders whether the affective impact of art may move spectators more deeply than the immediate political statements that count for everything with Mignolo.

As Mignolo points out, there is no right or natural way to define what museums should do, but museums should span different and agonistic kinds of interpretative practice (Mignolo 2011, 84). To invite artists to make critical interventions into museum collections and practices can help unravel the colonial syntax and logic still deeply ingrained in many Western museums. However, the decolonising potential of artists' institutional interventions may well be greater than that.

Artists have practised institutional interventions for several decades now. Having a legacy does not mean that the *détournement* provided by artists has lost its poignancy. Quite the opposite, since it means that artists can now draw on a range of interventionist strategies knowing which of them achieved decolonisation work and which ended up serving the institutions they were intended to criticise. Just as postcolonial studies have been able to renew themselves, so too are artists able to produce new types of critical intervention that contribute to the decolonisation of museum practices. Artistic interventions such as those of Wilson and Shonibare can provide the necessary conditions for an act of dis-identification that enables museum professionals and audiences to imagine what a 'postcolonial museum' that also produces views from the 'other' side could be like.

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Chapter 10
Blurring History: The Central European Museum and the Schizophrenia of Capital

Ivan Jurica

To envision a postcolonial museum within the Central European space means first to think of this space as a site of ideological clashes and divisions, both in the present and in the past. Despite all the current proclamations of a united Europe as a 'space without borders', we still experience a division between Western Europe with its uninterrupted culture and ideology, and Eastern Europe with its socialist past and turbo-capitalist present. The museum, as a state institution, subjected to the dominant ideology, dictates the official form of art and culture. We have to bear this aspect in mind when we analyse the postcolonial Central European museum that operates from a position in between different histories and conditions. Visiting different places in Central Europe, one will experience exhibitions that serve different functions within the political and social structures: so, different museums will be encountered in Austria and Germany, in Prague, Bratislava and Bucharest. Moreover, one may experience the use of an identical 'universalist' form – yet what is the past and present meaning of this form when adopted in different histories?

Another urgent question is raised by the role of postcolonial theory within this space. Why do we actually talk about postcolonial theory in Central Europe, which does not seem to be affected by classical colonial history as imposed by the Western colonial powers? Postcolonial theory not only deals with colonial history, but also with coloniality and the history of capitalism and Christianity. If the local official historical narrative excludes any notion of racism and colonial exploitation, this still does not mean that coloniality, as an ideology and mentality, did not and does not exist within these spaces. Further, it is precisely postcolonial theory that enables a different understanding of current processes within the transitional societies in the 'East', as well as in the West. Last but not least, in this sense it is postcolonial theory that provides a radicalised approach to the profound implications of the fascist history and post-fascist present in this space. For postcolonial theory analyses fascism, its historical and current forms, not as a historical error, but as generated by capitalist ideology and practice. So, how can we perceive a Central European postcolonial museum?

The Central European Postcolonial Museum: The 'Grand Narrative' and the West

The 'journey' commences in the centre of a new constellation of Central Europe that is actually not new at all in Vienna. Even though from the geopolitical point of view Vienna and Austria tended, especially before 1989, to be considered (ridiculously) as belonging to Eastern Europe due to their international isolation and provinciality, they are definitely spaces of Western culture and ideology within the Central European space. This fact is crucial in understanding the new, post-1989 role of Vienna and Austria. Their intensive economic growth is based on their renewed positioning between the East and the West, combined with their historical affiliation to the West. This position secured access to the capital necessary for privatising the collapsed Eastern European structures. This might be regarded as the resurrection of a 'grand narrative' (a history that lay unforgotten) that, in combination with capital, constitutes the foundation of its reactivation. The privatisation of post-socialist cultures and the resurrection of the new-old centre have gone hand in hand with an emphasis on 'our' common history, traditions and hierarchies. Thus was the post-1989 imperial capital reconstructed (Freudmann et al. 2009).

In 1989, we saw not only the collapse of socialist economies and their ideology, but also the beginning of globalisation processes. Multinational capital changed the character of borders, while the movement of the people within the so-called 'borderless' space remained strictly regulated. The collapse of the Eastern European economies and the war in former Yugoslavia generated, among other aspects, poverty and a multitude of 'naked lives'. The consequence was a massive migration into spaces which seemed promising in terms of a regular job and a safe existence.

The Central European postcolonial museum as an official cultural institution was affected in a twofold manner: the Eastern European situation and the war in former Yugoslavia provided a postcolonial repertoire for the Western museums and their exhibiting policy, and Eastern Europeans themselves became potential visitors – either as tourists or as students and migrants. At the same time, the neo-liberal economic agenda entered the cultural landscape, or to put it differently, the museum was thrown into neo-liberal market structures. Suddenly, the relevance of the museum became economical instead of educational or historical. Or to put it more precisely, the educational and historical relevance was subordinated to economic issues. This does not mean that the historical narrative was not conditioned by economic reasons in the past. None the less, as Walter Mignolo (2011) has put it, in the twenty-first century, society constitutes a part of the economy, while in the past the opposite was the case: the economy was part of society.

The classical historical museum in Central Europe has yet to confront postcolonial theory. There are several reasons for this. First, they have not undertaken the attempt to re-write universal history, but rather the opposite. There are few museums operating within this territory with postcolonial theory

and knowledge at their disposal. In terms of museum organisation, differences are minor but crucial as far as theoretical conceptualisation is concerned – the classical historical museum operates in the temporality of the present, but it does not work with it. The present, meaning the way history is constructed from the current point of view, remains invisible within the 'grand narrative'. In view of historical racisms and processes of exclusion, currently being repeated, this connectivity to the past and the present could be decisive for re-thinking the capitalist order and its ideology in a divided Europe that prosecutes migration.

One of the popular museums that combines the consumerist expectation of a visitor with the attempt to re-formulate the dominant perception of history is the Vienna Museum. Recently, one of its curators proposed the historical figure of Angelo Soliman with the intention of revealing the long history of Austrian racism. Who was Angelo Soliman? The exhibition booklet *Angelo Soliman – An African in Vienna* introduces him to the contemporary visitor as follows: 'Born around 1721 in sub-Saharan Africa, enslaved as a child … a man who had enjoyed a distinguished career in the enlightened circles of the capital and was posthumously displayed in a museum as a half-naked "savage", adorned with ostrich feathers and shells' (Wien Museum 2011).

The exhibition space was divided into three parts: first, the life and death of Angelo Soliman were presented, then examples were shown of how art and culture appropriated this historical figure, while the last section displayed current structural racisms of the state, supported and reinforced by powerful mass-media representation, including such cases such as the killing of Marcus Omofuma.[1] So the narration and dramaturgy did not only include Angelo Soliman, but struggled, via the extension into the present, with an attempt to grasp racism in general. Yet how was this actually achieved?

Popular museums obviously cannot avoid presenting their subjects in a popular way. Soliman and Omofuma, both historical figures, were, among others, displayed in the same way as the defeat of Ottoman troops near Vienna in 1683 or the construction of St Stephen's Cathedral or the Viennese underground. I cannot say whether the aim of curators was to intervene in the current and historical racism by way of art. But if this was not their intention, what were they seeking? What they did manage to do was to exhibit the person Soliman (or Omofuma). The attempt to critically discuss white European racisms, via the posthumous display of a non-white European man, occurred through the gaze turned on the 'Other' as object. The desired intervention in dominant ideological structures actually had the effect of conserving and reproducing them. Postcolonial theory here entered a popular institution of the historical narrative, accompanied by questions of historical and current racisms, but the institution itself was not disrupted. Rather, the popular museum was renovated through the life and destiny of Angelo Soliman, and postcolonial theory was institutionalised. But does critical theory really aim to change official institutions?

1 See http://no-racism.net/rubrik/97/ (accessed 10 March 2013).

In terms of exposing the postcolonial museum as operating within the schizophrenia of capital, a museum of modern and contemporary arts seems to be an even more suitable example. Why? Because, as distinct from a popular historical museum – which is conceptualised rather as a site of aesthetic consumerism and tourism – modern Western museums present themselves as sites of confrontation, where critical knowledge is produced. While this might be true, the crucial point in this context remains what sort of knowledge and what sort of confrontation is implied? Here, with regard to a postcolonial museum, I will examine in more detail the role of art education in modern art museums. It is important to bear in mind that art education in a museum is not just any department, or a simple extension of the museum services. Rather, within Austria's cultural and educational landscape, it has become a top item on the agenda in recent years. So a museum in Austria no longer simply focuses on collection and conservation, but nowadays also on education.

An institution of modern and contemporary art envisages itself as progressive, open to new theories, models, innovative forms and so on. It increasingly asserts its political statements through art. In this sense, the modern museum evokes notions of democracy and democratisation, communicated through the intensification of educational and transmission processes. Yet 'opening up' the museum to the 'outside' is not a sign of change in the bourgeois mentality, but rather of the modified conditions of the modern museum within the neo-liberal market democracies. These processes were intended to reinforce the social and political relevance of the state institution to the market. What does 'democratisation' of the institution and of art mean? If in the past the museum was described by its critics as a space of dead art, now the dead – actually meaning de-politicised – universalistic form has been extended through a diversified museum discourse involving a cacophony of meanings and voices. Everybody can enter the museum, everybody can express him- or herself; the education department is available when needed and will explain all. But the most important aspect in terms of 'understanding' art within the museum – that is, how the museum as an institution functions and how a certain form or practice becomes art – remains invisible. The institution operates in the same way as ideology – it is possible to talk about everything, but not about the museum/ideology itself. If ideology operates as naturalised and omnipresent, so does the museum institution as one of its agents – the meaning and role of the historical narrative shifts out of focus and is blurred.

Here I approach the primary schizophrenia of the postcolonial museum as a capitalist institution. The principal relevance of modern and contemporary art production is interpreted and theorised as a tradition of resistance against the capitalist market, executed by means of formal innovation. So if a critical political agenda was, and still is, a subject of modern and post-modern art production in any form, what relevance does this have in a society that operates under a 'market consumer dictate'? What relevance does an image or the evocation of resistance against the market have if the market and mechanisms of profit dominate and legitimise all fields of contemporary globalised societies, including the education and art system? What is the meaning of a resistance against the market and

capitalism if these are privatised by capital and ideology? Or, to put it another way, what form does, or should, the resistance against exploitative capitalism take? Last, but not least, it is also important that forms of resistance are not free from universal validity.

This situation turns out to be even more absurd when dealing with migrants or their children of the second or third generation. The constant confrontation with racist state power in terms of control and disciplining is here focused on their integration into the official system and structures. One of the most frequent demands is inclusion in the job market as a guarantee of possible and successful integration. As integration in the job market apparently results in cultural integration, this leads to participation in the state culture that is the basis of a non-reflexive dominant racist cultural history. In a similar fashion, museums of modern and contemporary art deal with activities and resistant cultural and societal forms, while migrants experience the exact opposite within these cultures as they are increasingly reduced to passive objects.

Against this background, it is possible to argue that art education within the modern museum institution, presented in terms of democratisation, operates as a mythology. The talk about art, its form and content, the attempt to transmit this knowledge to students and pupils, end up, once again, as an overarching seductive narrative. The audience is capable of following what the educator is talking about, it is even very interesting, but that is all. So the topic of resistance in a modern museum is maybe relevant to resistance-as-a-game within the virtual space – for the participant should stimulate a resistance, he or she should make it possible. In the end, however, it actually reinforces the exterior system that is repeated and relayed inside the museum.

The museum is not only about artworks, it also involves employees and their working conditions, with precise hierarchies and huge income differences. The postcolonial status of the institution might well be represented by the following, actually stereotypical, scenario: an exhibition space full of modernist paintings or images representing modernist utopias, post-modernist criticisms of the system, even postcolonial positions, all for the sake of evoking a progressing institution and society. And a team of cleaners, consisting of poorly paid migrants, is at work between the objects. These exploited 'cultural workers' are like shadows – they work very early in the morning, as during opening time their presence would disturb the visitors, the staff, and above all the artworks. Alternatively, this scenario could itself be a work of art.

The Central European Postcolonial Museum/the Colonial Difference and the East

As the topics of migration and colonial history became urgent in the field of contemporary art production, postcolonial theory also became relevant to the Central European space. While postcolonial theory turned the gaze back on to

white racist Western societies and their ideology within the framework of the history of classical colonial powers, in the Central European space these issues still concern the other(s). It was a theory by the 'Other' about the others, about the white bourgeois mentality of producing and exploiting colonial difference. This happened *there, somewhere else, far away from here*. In terms of the structure and the form of a museum, and in terms of the structure and nature of a historical narrative that appears to be segregated from the present, postcolonial theory was again turned by institutionalised processes into a curiosity. It signalled the progress of the institution. In the end, it re-produced colonial thought and the 'Other'.

In this respect, the post-1989 privatisation of the Eastern European space and structures via Western, as well as local, capital was represented in the colonial rhetoric of modernisation, renovation and progress of the post-socialist cultures. If, in the 1990s, the notion of 'self-colonisation' became popular for indicating the processes of transformation from socialism to turbo-capitalism, one important factor was missing from this formulation: an alternative to a straightforward subjugation to the West. Populist promises of a better future based on a desire for unlimited consumption and nationalist pride provided a basis for the future order of this space. The collective disillusionment with the dream of capitalist democracy as the guarantee for equality and justice within the post-socialist societies quickly followed. Forty years of a patriarchal totalitarian socialism has had a bitter consequence. Given that socialist and communist ideology generated a radical criticism of capitalism, currently any kind of criticism against turbo-capitalism is immediately viewed as socialism, with its associated totalitarian structures and communist ideology. Of course, the issue of appropriating postcolonial theory in Central Europe or post-socialist societies is awkward. In the context of nostalgia for the totalitarian past within the totalitarian present, postcolonial theory not only focuses on the history of colonialism, but also on the history of capitalism, Euro-centrism, Christianity, and on the dominant historical narrative as well. If, for example, socialism constituted and legitimised itself via anti-fascist resistance during the Second World War, the turbo-capitalist present constitutes and legitimises itself by means of its anti-communist ideology. While currently the socialist past is presented as the darkest era of Central European modernity, the fascist past as generated by capitalism is increasingly rehabilitated and legitimised.

In the last twenty years, the post-socialist state museum, as an agent of official ideology, has been intensively concerned with its universal re-positioning in terms of its inclusion in the Western art system and market – thus it has focused on its own re-historicisation. The postcolonial Eastern European museum is struggling, as Jürgen Habermas put it at the beginning of the 1990s, with the institutionalised 'catching up of the West' (Habermas 1990). In the post-socialist context, this implies a re-construction of modernity and of the universalistic modernist form. In terms of Slovakia or the Czech Republic, it is a mutation of the former avant-garde into official art history and power. Both the museum and art production serve as evidence of the 'correct' universal history of civilised societies that is

worth integrating into Western structures: they provide evidence of how to fill the gaps of the post-socialist colonial difference. The history of socialist realism has to be deleted, while at the same time this history is used to evoke capitalism as independent and free. In this context, the art of socialist realism is subject to deletion, or else is exposed in amusement parks or museums of terror.[2] The twentieth-century socialist past is currently conceived and presented as a historical error that could be defeated.

But how does this re-historicisation in the context of a universal history affect the comprehension of the universal art form? This might also answer the question of why the booming Western interest in Eastern European art production faded away so quickly in the first half of the 1990s. In this context, the Slovakian art historian and curator Petra Hanáková (2010) refers to a paradox: the politically rather left-wing universalistic Western art form represents exactly the opposite within the Eastern European context. The form taken from the West was previously adopted and developed as representing the unofficial art scene, as a counter-position to socialist realism and culture. Hanáková describes the subsequent situation in the 1990s as a mutual disappointment: the heroes of the internationally canonised art history from the West were now regarded by their Eastern European colleagues as being communists, and vice versa.

Collecting Art – Relocating the Profit of Relocated Production

Another example of a postcolonial museum in Central Europe – viewed in the context of the capitalist establishment of an art collection – is the Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg, near Vienna.[3] The Essl Museum is part of the estate of the Essl family, who founded and owned the Austrian Baumaxx company that has been widely active throughout Central Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Essls are known as rather untypical art collectors – they truly love art; without any art education, they simply like what they like. Money is never an issue when it comes to art, and their shopping trips in the art scenes worldwide, including various more or less 'exotic' territories and cultures, are legendary. In this context, it is also interesting to note their engagement with the nascent Eastern European art scene in the form of the popular Essl Award. This competition assembles young talent as well as well-known theoreticians of the local art scenes. The Austrian political economist Hannes Hofbauer writes in this context about obligatory models of enterprise for Austrian and German companies. Since the 1990s, when the first Western companies relocated their production to post-socialist countries, this relocation of production from Germany or Austria to a post-socialist country indicated serious and competent economic management – leaving the production in Germany or Austria was considered economically irresponsible towards the

2 See, for example, the film *Red Tours* by Joanne Richardson and David Rych (2010).

3 See http://www.essl.museum/english/index.html (accessed 10 March 2013).

company (Hofbauer 2010). The establishment of foundations and art collections might be considered part of such obligatory enterprise models. On the topic of the repetition of colonial processes, Hofbauer remains careful, but beside the exploitation of cheap labour, he considers the obverse relocation of immense profits to the head offices in the West as a possible moment of colonial repetition. The Essl Collection might be understood in these terms: their museum and the collection are products of relocated capital and the relocation of profit.

And Lastly …

A good example of an activist art project, deploying postcolonial theory with the intention of cracking the bourgeois hegemonic image and representation in the Central European space, might be the *Hidden Histories – Remapping Mozart* project, realised in 2006 in Vienna on behalf of the 'Mozart Jahr', celebrating the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth.[4] The project featured four exhibitions in four locations in Vienna involving a network of scientists, artists, theoreticians and activists. The project actively and critically examined historical and contemporary problems in art, in politics and society. It shifted established perceptions and created new meanings. The exhibitions, called 'configurations', used quotes from the libretti of Mozart operas and gave the four configurations a frame, focusing on and intervening in themes such as orientalism, exoticism, racism (anti-Roma), the appropriation of Mozart by the Nazis and the Second Austrian Republic, and the criminalisation of desire, with the corresponding counter-strategies. Against this background, the activities of the anti-racist collective Pamoja – Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence also deserve mention. This collective, as the name implies, intensively researches Austrian history in terms of coloniality, colonialism and racism. Another important initiative is Maiz, an independent organisation founded and operated by and for migrant women, based in Linz, Austria.[5] Both of these organisations act at the core of anti-racist self-determination and represent a counter-strategy to, among other things, the divided postcolonial present and colonial past in the context of a society of 'equal rights'.

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Chapter 11
The Limits to Institutional Change: Organisational Roles and Roots

Peggy Levitt

'The first thing you see when you walk into the new Art of the Americas Wing', Elliot Bostwick Davis, Chair of the Art of the Americas Department at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), told me, 'are five spectacular K'iché burial urns, produced by the Maya in the southern highlands of Guatemala in about 750 AD. These were produced by a highly sophisticated culture, with its own court rituals, portraiture [and so on]. We wanted people to see ancient American art and Native American art on their own terms.' The museum's curators also wanted people to realise that American art never developed in a vacuum. Even early on, links with neighbouring societies influenced these Ancient American artisans. The roots of American art grew out of conversations with other cultures.

Erica Hirshler, the Senior Curator of American Paintings, who has worked at the museum for nearly thirty years, said:

> What is interesting to me is to see what kinds of real estate are being given to different kinds of art. When I first came here in the 1980s, when we talked about colonial art, we were talking about New England and Anglo culture. We were talking about Copley and his relationship with England …. In the new wing, for the first time, we have a Spanish colonial gallery, and that is a huge change for us. It sounds like it shouldn't be, but it is for Boston, a kind of bastion of Anglo culture, to acknowledge that there was a huge colonial presence somewhere else.

The story of American art's porous boundaries runs through all four floors of the museum's new wing. When visitors see Paul Revere's iconic Sons of Liberty Bowl, commemorating the Boston Tea Party's organisers, they are supposed to recognise that it has a lot in common with the Chinese punch bowls made during the same period. 'Almost any piece of silver in the last half of the eighteenth century', said Dennis Carr, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, 'would have been Chinese-inspired.' Similarly, portraits by John Singer Sargent, whom most people consider a quintessential American painter, greet visitors on the third floor. But Sargent, born to American expatriates in Florence in 1856, spent his childhood travelling around Europe, and did not even set foot on US soil until he was twenty. Clearly he was not just an *American* painter, but also a citizen of the world.

Bostwick Davis says:

> One of the messages of the new wing is that American art is intimately connected to its neighbors to the north and south. The wing is very different from every other wing of American art in the country because it includes the ancient cultures as far as we can go back, plus what we have from where we happened to land on this planet. So we are going north, central, and south to work with that as a continuum. We walk people through so they get a sense of this layering and richness, and I hope for each individual there is an opening of the mind [regarding] what is American.

The MFA first started collecting pre-Columbian art in the late 1800s. Still, admits Dorie Reents-Budet, curator of the MFA's Art of the Ancient Americas, the collection is weak compared to the museum's other holdings. Until the new wing became a reality, there was no permanent curator because the prevailing attitude held that:

> it's little brown people stuff, you know, it's not art …. There are still many museums in the United States that have the pre-Colombian collections in the 'Hall of Man' [representing] the nineteenth century attitude about non-Western cultures as being objects of study, of scientific inquiry into the science of human development rather than art.

So why did Museum of Fine Arts curators decide to feature this collection so prominently now? How does its retelling of the American art story succeed, and where does it come up short? What can this tell us about possible constraints on changing museum practice? The findings presented here are part of a larger study of how museums around the world are responding to immigration and globalisation. Cultural institutions have always played starring roles in the drama of nation-building. But in today's global world, what kinds of citizens are museums creating? What combinations of identities, from the global to the very local, do they reflect, and who is embracing them? Why do some cities create outward-looking institutions while others create institutions that look barely beyond their doors? What can we learn about nationalism by looking at a country's cultural institutions? To answer these questions, I interviewed museum directors, curators and policymakers, reviewed accounts of exhibits, observed gallery talks and public programming, and collected stories of eccentric benefactors and iconic objects from six sites around the world.

I treat museums as embedded in urban organisational fields where they may or may not make decisions in relation to each other. While not generalisable to the larger museum universe, my research illuminates how staff members at particular times and in particular places see themselves as creating citizens, what kinds and in what combinations, and what their rights and responsibilities might be. Their answers reflect how these professionals make sense of the relationship between

globalism and localism (and all other identities in between) and what they think the role of museums should be in working it out.

Staff at the MFA see themselves as radically retelling the story of American art. In many ways, for this institution, they are. The new wing features Ancient American and Native American materials more prominently, includes a Spanish colonial gallery, and showcases more works by Black, women and Latino artists. But you have to look for them. The retelling is subtle, and often overshadowed by the sheer volume of material from Colonial New England. The MFA exemplifies how locality constrains just how postcolonial museums can become. The cultural structures laid down by the city's founding fathers, and what I call 'the urban cultural armature' (a city's social and cultural policies, institutions, demography, and endowments), still strongly influence how museums represent the nation in the world. The organisational distribution of labour for representing history, within the city and within the nation, also constrains what stories museums can tell.

Why Here, Why Now?

The idea of placing Ancient American art at the root of the American art story grew out of a happy convergence of factors. When MFA Director Malcolm Rogers arrived in the early 1990s, he reorganised departments to promote communication across mediums and among the people in charge of them. He combined American Paintings and Decorative Arts, folding in some of the Latin American materials that had been included previously in Europe. Also placed under the 'American' umbrella was the pre-Columbian collection, which had never before had a home of its own.

Demography also came into play. The US is well on its way to becoming a majority-minority country. In 2008, the American Association of Museums launched its Center for the Future of Museums (CFM). Its first report, *Museums and Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures* (CFM 2008), illustrated the widening gap between American and museum visitor demographics. Before 1970, minorities made up 10–13 per cent of the US population, but by 2008, the figure had risen to 34 per cent, and was predicted to reach 46 per cent by 2033. Yet only 9 per cent of museums' core visitors were minorities. The report, according to founding Director Elizabeth E. Merritt, 'went viral'. It 'painted a troubling picture of the "probable future" – a future in which, if trends continue in the current grooves, museum audiences are radically less diverse than the American public and museums serve an ever-shrinking fragment of society' (CFM 2008, 5).

The changing face of Boston mirrors the changing face of the nation, but the MFA's visitor profile has not kept pace. The museum's traditional donor base is white, upper-class and ageing. Because it is privately funded, the MFA urgently needs to recruit a new generation of visitors and donors. This was certainly on the minds of the Art of the Americas staff when they thought about their reinstallation. They wanted to tell stories that appealed to more diverse audiences. They wanted

Bostonians, future Board of Trustees members and tourists of colour to see themselves in the walls. One such narrative is that what is made in America is not just made in the US.

To get this message across, curators added more than just Ancient American materials. The new Spanish colonial gallery contains beautifully crafted religious objects from sixteenth-century Bolivia and Peru that rival those made by the best New England silversmiths. Nineteenth-century American landscape paintings are hung 'salon-style' to drive home that many of the artists who created them studied and worked abroad. To diversify its collection, the MFA made several strategic acquisitions, including Argentine painter Cesar Paternosto's 'Staccato' and a 1943 painting by Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam. Curators opted not to ghettoise these works by putting them in a special gallery. 'There is no gallery of African American art or of women artists,' said Erica Hirshler. 'Women artists should be in the same gallery as male artists. It's not helpful to set them apart in a different room. You cannot change the canon unless you integrate the canon.'

Naturally, the new wing met with criticism and acclaim. Many applauded the museum for its courageous broadening of the American story and were thrilled to see the pre-Columbian and Native American materials so prominently featured. Holland Cotter of the *New York Times* lauded the MFA for asking the question 'what does "Americas" mean?' up front and for doing the 'big, inclusive term justice' by bringing all of the Americas together, 'hook[ing] them up, and seat[ing] them as equals at a hemispheric table'. He concluded:

> in the present political climate … opinions about what America was, is and should be are so polarised and proprietorial. And maybe this is where art itself comes to the rescue. So much about the new Americas Wing is so startling, stimulating and beautiful that you just want to lay down your arms. (Cotter 2010, C23)

But others felt the new wing came up short. Greg Cook of the *Boston Phoenix*, while impressed overall, highlighted significant gaps in the wing's representation of war and social conflict, noting wryly that 'after the American Revolution, social critics need not apply' (Cook 2010).

Moreover, while the take-away message of the new wing is that American art has always been shaped by international forces, whether they be Ancient American, Native American, European or Asian, this is still a national story.[1] Visitors gain a more diverse view looking inward at what shaped the US, but they don't learn much about what that means when they look out – about how that

1 Nevertheless, European influences also predominate. In a scholarly volume produced about the new wing, two chapters on Native American and pre-Columbian influences precede seven chapters on European influences, followed by four chapters on Africa, the Near East and Asia.

interplay shaped the country's connection to the rest of the world. One anonymous museum professional said:

> The 'Art of Americas' is a peculiar thing to do in thinking about the future. While it may sound trite, the community we live in now is not bounded by space and time, cultural boundaries are all merging together. There is little homogeneity but much more cross over and exchange and the creating of new kinds of cultures everywhere. So such a nationalistic push is interesting at a time when the world is really, truly global. They could have done a much more interpretive approach that would have connected America to the world.

America's place in the world, he concluded, is just not a central part of the story.

The Limits to Postcolonial Museum Practice

As studies of the politics and poetics of museum practice have shown, nations perform themselves differently (McClellan 2007; Coombes 2004; Dias 2007), and museums are central stages where these imaginings are articulated and disseminated (Fargo and Preziosi 2004). The creation of many of the world's premier museums coincided with the birth of the nation-state. In the nineteenth century, to be a cohesive 'people' or nation, you had to have culture. Creating a unified 'family' of millions of people who would never meet required a great deal of effort and imagination (Anderson 1983). The new nation's strength depended on its ability to perform itself to its members using knowledge and practices that complete strangers would be able to understand. Museums played an important role in the effort to project a sense of connection, although it only extended to the national border (Macdonald 2003).

While opening up the former royal collections to the broader public democratised art and created more cultured publics, it was never an egalitarian project. Universal survey museums functioned primarily to transmit society's most revered beliefs to visitors (Duncan and Wallach 2004; DiMaggio 2004; Coombes 2004; Zolberg 1996). What was included in the museums' collection and who created it sent clear messages about who belonged to the nation and what the nation valued. The ordering of objects and how they were displayed in relation to each other legitimised a particular social and political hierarchy that privileged some ways of knowing while excluding others (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Because the nation was defined in opposition to other nations and ethnic groups, 'outsiders' such as migrants or non-Christians were depicted as backward or morally inferior. They were unlikely to see themselves represented without serious biases, if at all.

These tensions persist today, and museums actively seek to address them (Mason 2007). The challenge, writes Bennett, is to 'reinvent the museum as an institution that can orchestrate new relations and perceptions of difference that

both break free from the hierarchically organised forms of stigmatic othering that characterised the exhibitionary complex and provide more socially invigorating and, from a civic perspective, more beneficial interfaces with different cultures' (Bennett 2005, 59). Professionals try to reconstruct museums as 'differencing machines' that facilitate cross-cultural dialogue. According respect and recognition to previously marginalised groups, inviting their members to tell their own stories, combining exhibits with educational programming and repatriating objects with questionable provenances are now standard parts of museum practice. Various museums, especially those in former settler societies with official policies of bi- and multiculturalism, have done this with varying degrees of success (Bennett 2005, 46–70).

Meanwhile, others see museums as simply too flawed to redress their historical wrongs. Ghassan Hage, writing of 'zoological multiculturalism', argues that all too often museums become collections of otherness that display diversity as a national possession (Hage 1998). Because the White majority still controls museums' discursive and visual tools, difference is too often depicted in an exaggeratedly self-referential, self-congratulatory manner.

Still a third view dismisses these criticisms. Writing in response to critics who see museum installations and museums themselves as 'never not ideologically motivated and strategically determined', James Cuno asks his readers: 'Is this your experience of museums? Do you walk through the galleries of your local museum and feel controlled in any significant way? Do you feel manipulated by a higher power?' (Cuno 2011, 44). He believes that museums still matter and that 'Enlightenment principles still apply' (Cuno 2011, 7). Collecting, classifying and presenting facts, calling into question prejudice and superstition, and being 'confident in the promise of rigorous, intellectual inquiry to lead to truths about the world for the benefit of human progress' are still at the core of the museum's mission.

These arguments do not pay sufficient attention to how locality shapes museum practice. In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly discuss two aspects of place that constrain how much cultural institutions can change what they do – the role that particular institutions play in the national and urban cultural distribution of labour, and how the urban cultural armature shapes museum practice.

Boston plays a very particular role in the national museological landscape in the United States, just as the MFA plays a unique role in Boston's organisational field. Many tourists come to Boston to learn about colonial American history, and the public expects the museum to tell that piece of the national story. The museum's reliance on visitor fees and benefactors' donations limits just how much the story of American art can be changed. 'European art', said Erica Hirshler, 'is not being asked to tell a story about European history in this context in the same way that these objects are asked to tell our national story.'

Similarly, the MFA plays a particular role in the urban organisational distribution of labour. Just as few institutions could trump its role in telling regional colonial history, few look to the MFA to be on the cutting edge of contemporary American

art. That is what the Institute for Contemporary Art and several New York cultural institutions do. In contrast, the Peabody Essex Museum, located just north in Salem, Massachusetts, can use its colonial holdings to tell a more global story because it is not the 'go-to' place for tourists to learn about colonial America. 'The MFA', said Hao Sheng, Wu Tung curator of Chinese Art, 'is as global as a museum in New England can be. It still has to meet the expectations of Euro-American visitors.'

A city's economic and political genealogy and its early position in the geopolitical hierarchy also shape the kinds of cultural institutions it creates and how they reflect the nation and the world. The values and beliefs of early residents sow seeds that become part of a city's cultural institutions. These resilient cultural structures, such as patterns of social hierarchy, commitments to the common good or moral assumptions about community, appear and reappear throughout a city's history (Alexander and Smith 2003). As they become more deeply rooted over time, they affect the kinds of institutions a city creates, the policies it embraces and the values that undergird them – its ever-evolving cultural armature.

Cities and nations also have deeply rooted ways of dealing with difference – what we might call *diversity management regimes* – that respond to and shape what cultural institutions do. These regimes reflect myths about who belongs to the nation and who can become a member. The United States tells itself it is a country of immigrants, founded on principles of religious pluralism, which has always succeeded at making newcomers into Americans. This historical legacy and response to difference structure what cultural institutions do today and how they get used (or not) to manage diversity.

How the MFA tells the story of the nation and its place in the globe, and the objects it uses to tell it, reflect Boston's cultural armature. John Winthrop, the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, led a ragged yet determined group of disgruntled believers across the Atlantic Ocean to found what would become the city of Boston. Because they believed that saved souls were also wealthy souls, they stressed hard work, thrift and sobriety. They valued education, intellectual achievement and responsibility to the community at large. These traditions and the institutions they established to preserve them laid the foundation for Boston's cultural armature. Even as early as the city's twenty-fifth birthday, writes historian Thomas O'Connor, the 'town of Boston had developed certain basic themes that were not only characteristic of its colonial origins but which also may be considered an essential part of its present- day distinctiveness' (O'Connor 2006, 18).

Boston's founders believed they were creating a city that would serve as a model to the rest of the world. Their 'city upon a hill' would inspire all of mankind, a shining beacon that would attract 'the eyes of all people … upon' them (Winthrop 1838). Boston would never be just any city, but a place distinguished by its accomplishments, achieved in God's name, which benefited mankind.

Early on, however, the straitjacket of strict Puritan ideals began to fray (Brown and Tager 2000). During the early eighteenth century, long-distant trade flourished. As the port towns of Boston and Salem grew, so did the visibility of

different cultures and, more importantly, different *ideas*. But, by the nineteenth century, many of these former sea captains had turned to manufacturing. By the late 1820s, a strikingly interconnected, self-referential group of about forty Boston families, known as the Boston Associates, emerged and slowly assumed control of the quickly modernising city.

Like their Puritan forefathers, this group also stressed public service. They created institutions, not as individuals, but as a cohesive community that shared economic interests as well as last names. By 1861, Oliver Wendell Holmes coined the tag 'Brahmin Caste of New England' to describe what by then was the city's well-developed upper class. Elite Bostonians still felt the region represented and communicated the best of what America offered morally and intellectually. To them, the city was the 'Hub of the Universe', or at the very least the 'Athens of America'.

During the nineteenth century, however, diversity came to town. By the 1840s, more than a quarter of Boston's residents, at least 35,000, were Irish. To care for and control these newcomers, the ruling elite founded charitable hospitals and dispensaries out of a sense of responsibility for the greater good, but also out of a desire to maintain order. While the Irish rejected their proffered lectures on self-improvement, the city's upper crust worried that newcomers would eschew hard work in favour of disease, vice and crime. As Dalzell notes, 'the Irish were not just strangers, they were outsiders' (Dalzell 1987, 140).

After the Civil War, Boston's elite made even clearer distinctions between the United States and Europe and between themselves and the increasing numbers of foreign-born residents. The institutions they created reflected the conflicting legacies at the city's core: a faith in elitism and the power of high culture alongside an impulse to elevate the masses by introducing them to that culture; an interest in and begrudging respect for cosmopolitanism combined with a sense that America needed to chart its own way and that the city and the nation should be a model to the rest of the world, and a suspicion that people who spent too much time abroad were possibly disloyal.

That is why, says Dorie Reents-Budet, the Ancient American materials are still 'in the basement. In another city, like Los Angeles, this stuff would have been on the top floor, but Boston is a Northern European city, not a Latin American one.' This is, on the one hand, about 'the browning of America, but it's also about getting the white folks to recognise that this is okay. That these folks who are coming from Latin America are coming from these countries with this incredible historical heritage.'

Conclusion

Discussions about the changing relationship between museums and their communities need to take the role of locality into account. In this chapter, I have argued that the urban cultural armature and the national and municipal

organisational distribution of labour strongly influence how museums represent the nation and its place in the world, and also limit the extent to which museums can change what they do.

Despite firm commitments by curators to diversify and internationalise the American art story, the new Art of the Americas Wing is still overwhelmingly a celebration of the nation. Visitors expect this from the institution – it has long been its role in the urban and national cultural landscape. Because it is privately funded, it must continue to please its most loyal visitors and benefactors.

Moreover, Boston's cultural armature, and the deeply held values from which it grows, also limit the extent to which the museum can change course. Boston's founders flirted with cosmopolitanism while strongly asserting their position as a role model to the rest of the world. They felt responsible for 'civilising' the teeming masses, but strictly forbade them from entering their clubs.

Demography also allowed the MFA to continue to tell a certain kind of story. By 2010, the foreign-born made up 27 per cent of Boston's population; they came primarily from Asia and Latin America. But such significant diversity is a fairly recent development. Right through the 1980s, most of the city's foreign-born residents were of European origin, and they constituted a much smaller proportion of the population (Lima 2012). Boston also continues to rank high on measures of residential segregation. Among the nation's big cities, for example, it ranks eleventh for the most extreme residential segregation between Blacks and Whites. In Hispanic–White segregation, it is fourth, behind only Los Angeles, New York, and Newark (WBUR 2011). Until fairly recently, then, the pressure to tell a different story that is latent in the city's changing demography has been fairly limited. The city's cultural institutions are now under more pressure to respond to its shifting racial and ethnic makeup, but its persistently high levels of residential segregation reveal that it still has a long way to go. Featuring the Ancient American and Spanish colonial collection so prominently in the new Art of the Americas Wing was a step in the right direction. The final piece of the cultural armature that shapes museum practice is cultural policy. The city of Boston provides relatively little direct support to its cultural institutions and has no cohesive cultural programming.

Locality, then, constrains the possibilities for postcoloniality. The urban cultural armature and the institutional distribution of labour contribute to path dependency. Museums are, after all, as one respondent put it, 'made of bricks and mortar. They are not an agile medium. They can only tell the stories their collections allow them to tell.' What I have argued is that the arc of the narrative is not just determined by what sits in the museum's storerooms, but by the history, demography and policies of cities themselves.

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PART IV
Representation and Beyond

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Chapter 12
The Incurable Image: Curation and Repetition on a Tri-continental Scene

Tarek Elhaik

Curation is the state of exception that has become the rule. Like ethnography, curation has become the air we now all breathe. The routinisation of both ethnography and professional curatorial practice seems to be a symptom of a collective malaise in contemporary culture. Professional curatorial practice, specifically, as the dominant form of curation and modality of relation, threatens to drain the real of its future anterior, of its capacity to generate change through complex repetitions. This chapter is an attempt to grapple with and resist the normalisation of dominant forms of curation in contemporary life.

This re-evaluation of curation stems primarily from my research location at the border between cinema studies, visual culture studies and media anthropology. During the course of my fieldwork, I have learned many lessons from collaborative dialogues with colleagues and interlocutors whose vocation is to reflect on the ontological and epistemological status of contemporary curatorial practices. I have benefited, in particular, from curators, anthropologists, film and art historians, psychoanalysts, cultural theorists, pedagogues and philosophers who have generously guided me while I was conducting a long-term ethnography of intellectual and curatorial life in Mexico City.[1] Like many scholars, artists and other creative researchers, I too was attracted to the contemporary art-alternative-to-academia thesis. Like many, I too have quickly been disappointed by initially promising curatorial efforts that ended up squandering the very potentialities that ignited those hopes in the first place. More and more we witness institutional critiques and collective curatorial efforts gone awry. Often, these culminate in blatant displays of power reminiscent of academic posturing that convert the potentially horizontal into the powers of the vertical, and the difficult 'public use of reason' into a surrender to normative institutional models, the star system and the congregation of usual suspects (often 'representatives' of and cultural elite from the post-colony). Indeed, one should be perplexed by the increasing 'dominant' role played by certain curators in their shaping the terms under which public life ought to be lived and cared for.

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1 I have learned much about the ethnographic and curatorial turn from discussions with the late Olivier Debroise, Maria Ines Canal, Fiamma Montezemolo, Jose Luis Barrios, Jesse Lerner, Cuauhtemoc Medina, Rogelio Villareal, Osvaldo Sanchez, Tayana Pimentel, Lucia Sanroman and Roger Bartra.

As new figures of the public intellectual, curators have managed to create status for their practice by capturing the desires of academics too often trapped in their lonely ivory towers. The latter, eager to breathe a bit of fresh air and to achieve visibility through art institutions, unhesitatingly consent to supply concepts to these omnivorous curators and cultural mediators too busy programming 'one damn thing after another'. Within this ideological framework, deals and alliances are made through a clever use of the vague, emblematic figure of research (in particular ethnography) that often culminates in ostentatious displays. More often than not, 'the art world's penchant for the frivolous and its coziness with an ascendant oligarchy can only confound – or even offend' (Lee 2012).

Repetition and Curation

It is often argued that the hegemonic ascent of the curator in contemporary culture belongs to the historical process of formation of the bourgeois public sphere, the autonomisation of art, the intensification of the rule of experts responsible for diagnosing and caring for our lives, and the emergence of guardians of the social link from the figure of the Human Rights Activist to that of the Cultural Mediator. Moreover, the rise of these figures of care and mediation runs parallel to the subsequent de-politicisation of the social link. There seems to be a compulsive attempt in secular, liberal, democratic public cultures to draw the contours of freedom and emancipation through carefully staged processes of mediations and monitored productions of stable subject positions anchored in territorialised forms: nation, region, city, continent and so on. In fact, this historical background continues to be productive today and very much informs the field of contemporary curatorial practice. As a form of use of public reason deeply moulded by the ascent of both the rule of expertise and the nationalist-cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, the curator's form of curation is none the less constantly threatened by unpredictable visceral outbursts that do not lend themselves to immunisation. The status of their form of curation is in fact beginning to morph and 'cool down' into something close to what Jean-Paul Sartre once called the 'practico-inert':

> The Practico-inert has an intimate relation to the notion of seriality. In order to define a series, Sartre takes the famous example of the queue that forms every morning at a bus stop. The bus queue is an expression of seriality, of a 'plurality of isolations'. The queue is a crowd in the sense that individuals who share the same objective – to get on the bus – come together in the same physical space. But every individual in that queue tends to see every other with hostility, as a potential competitor for a limited resource – a seat on the bus. Each is an obstacle to the aims of the others. Each person is indifferentiated, the only unity being the practico-inert everyone is waiting for, the bus. (Malik 2010)

The current proliferation of biennales and triennales, for instance, is a symptom of the automatisms in the curatorial economy and apparatus of contemporary art. It is a perfect example of both masterful deployments of the Kantian notion of the use of public reason and Sartrian seriality and repetition. Therefore, one ought to ask whether this specific use of public reason can continue to constitute a beginning. My point of departure, my bus stop, so to speak, is 'ethnographic' in both the strict and expanded sense of the term. In the strict sense, I am both a media anthropologist and a moving-image curator sceptical of the procedures at work under the regime of the so-called ethnographic turn in contemporary art. In an expanded sense, because it is the deployment of the emblematic figure of ethnography that has, to a certain extent, prompted many a professional curator to perform spectacular tightrope walking acts that too often ended up stunting the potential of ethnography to make something creative, ethical, and political by adopting a 'radically different epistemology founded on the luminal' (Crapanzano 2004, 8).

Contemporary curatorial work, under the regime of ethnography, has paradoxically shifted towards power and away from potentiality, to put it in Deleuzian terms, towards the monarch and away from those promising practices of freedom. Ethnography has become the alibi that has created new figures of curatorial sovereignty. It is now not only the King but also the Curator who cares for our lives. And the Curator (dispatching and summoning more and more cultural mediators in the so-called postcolonial periphery) cares for us through the powers of the sovereign. It is the professional curator who condenses, with a productivity that should alarm us, three models of power: sovereignty, discipline and control. In light of this, I ask: how do we resist this three-pronged actualisation of power in the context of our societies of control where curation has become the state of exception in which we all live? Can we imagine amidst these regimes a 'real' curatorial state of exception, as Benjamin once put it? Should we perhaps align these resistant forms of curation with the increasing concern among those psychoanalysts actively engaged in the polis to answer the following vital question: 'should we not prevent the discourse of the analyst from being re-inscribed into one of the three other discourses: master, university, hysteric?' (Chiesa 2005).

I join the many who try painstakingly to keep both distance and proximity from the binary economy and historical compromise between academic and contemporary art worlds. Fellow dwellers in those adjacent, ethico-aesthetic and existential territories resisting incorporation and annexation into increasingly neo-liberal academic and contemporary art worlds have begun to take issue with two paradoxical features characteristic of majoritarian curatorial culture.[2] First, we interpret the gluttonous inclusion of geographic regions and provinces under the cosmopolitan rule of curatorial empire and its attendant logic of representation as

2 I borrow the concept of adjacency from Paul Rabinow. The goal of anthropological inquiry is 'identifying, understanding, and formulating something actual neither by directly identifying with it nor by making it exotic. Rather, it seeks to articulate a mode of adjacency' (Rabinow 2007, 49).

a paradoxical effect of the postcolonial and the pluralisation of cultural practices. Second, we see the widening chasm between art, ethnography and life as a paradoxical effect of the age of so-called 'documentary turns' with its attendant participatory events, social art practices, and artists and curators-as-ethnographers.[3] Even more troubling is the gradual expansion of curatorial practice into all regions of life (curating dinners, lectures, conferences, the rituals of relational aesthetics, and so on), on the one hand, and, on the other, the increasing indifference towards the basic clinical, ethical and practical etymological register evoked by the word 'curation'.[4] Curate: from Middle English *curate*, 'member of the clergy'; from Latin *curates* (same meaning) and *cura*, 'spiritual charge of souls'; from earlier *cura*, 'care, healing'.

Furthermore, the postcolonial museum cannot be thought of outside of its current contract with the university and its attendant form of care and pedagogy. The point is not to worry about whether the curator's form of curation and research is 'being subsumed by the academy and its associated discourses and economy', or that we should unify 'the divergent epistemologies that underpin the creative arts, humanities, social and physical sciences' into a universal science of curation (Biggs 2013). Indeed, the curator and the academic will continue to be intimately linked, even taking pleasure in switching roles and trading places from time to time. Yet the current form of alliance between art institutions and the university is a historical form of contract and exchange that remains, in the final instance, contingent. Because of this, it cannot be exonerated from the logic of capitalist exchange on humanist, universal or transcendental grounds, or by the increasingly dubious claim that the university and the museum foster, more than any other institutional context, (neo-)avant-garde forms of care and pedagogy. How can they, given their anomic and hierarchical structures that seldom enable a shared work of mourning? The news is not so gloomy, as some academics and institutional curators have already begun to seize on the potentiality immanent to the field of curation in the most open sense of the term (Cohen 2010; Lee 2012; Montezemolo and Sanroman 2005; Preziosi 2003; Sanchez 2006).

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3 If we put aside Hal Foster's narrow use of examples and understanding of anthropology as 'the science of alterity', his astute critique of the artist-as-ethnographer can be extended to the problematic re-appropriation of the figure of the ethnographer by the team of curators-as-ethnographers at the recent triennale *Intense Proximité* at Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

4 This etymological register is explored, for instance, in the curatorial work and publications of the Mexico City-based collective and journal *Curare.* From a different set of geopolitical concerns Boris Groys's (2009) work is among the finest theoretical elaborations of curation as a figure of health and illness in contemporary culture. I do share his view of the artwork as ontologically ill and in need of curation, applaud his spatial deployment of the cinematic moving-image as a disturbance to traditional forms of display, but am sceptical of his commitment to the museum as the paradigmatic institution where cures are dispensed.

More importantly, other forms of curation are yet to be imagined that will be unrecognisable to both academics and professional curators. These other forms of curation will encourage and foster other relational assemblages, transference, counter-transference, and unruly modes of access to and production of unconscious material. Since this unconscious material cannot be accessed or produced in a cultural institution like the museum, either it may partially re-direct and divert the museum or the biennale from their institutional *telòs* and social finality (an unlikely outcome), or it will be able to come up with other forms of instalments beyond both contemporary art and academic institutional settings. It is my gnawing intuition that the forms of curation to come will return to their ethical and clinical vocation by re-investing social spaces where the rapport between care and the incurable is the point of departure.

The public and private use of reason ought, perhaps, to be counteracted by something intractable (incurable and untreatable). Indeed, some of us feel that we have to re-take the task of curation and its vocation to short-circuit and resist these dominant routes and maps, resist the professionalisation of everyday life and the 'assimilation' of entire geographies under the rule of the Curator.[5] These other forms of curation would enable us to circumvent the politics of the social link and the 'political economy of belonging' (Massumi 2002, 68) at work in majoritarian art curatorial practice. It would enable us to think with media arts, with the lives of others, with alterity, with difference in itself and iterative assemblages that produce unexpected repetitions, the intractability of our personal and collective pathologies, and so on. My aim here is to rethink the term 'work' in curatorial work, reinsert curation within a larger intellectual history of practical deployment of concepts at once clinical and critical, re-engage the tradition of the *anthropologie du lien*, and reclaim the clinical genealogy of curation by inserting it within a history of postcolonial disorders. This re-insertion of curation within a history of disorders is not metaphorical: it has affinities with the central question of what is curative in the psychoanalytic process. In order to answer this question, we first ought to take into account the crucial distinction between the professional curator's form of curation (one hinged primarily on a medical-interventionist model of care; the curator's operation is not unlike the surgeon's) and the form of curation that would be more treatment-oriented and psychoanalytically inflected by an ethics of the incurable.

As I have already noted, my reflections on the clinical dimension of curation owe a great deal to interlocutors with whom I have had the chance to discuss these matters while I was conducting an ethnography of curatorial laboratories in Mexico City. Consider, for instance, the interventionist clinical-conceptual framework of the multi-disciplinary group Teratoma, where art historians and critics, curators, artists and anthropologists explore contemporary shifts in cultural, intellectual and aesthetic productions from a wide range of practices, engaging the effects of economic globalisation and the mutation of cultural geopolitics, aiming at creating

5 Psychoanalysis invites us to evaluate the notion of resistance 'as both a defence and an authentic category of being'.

intercultural networks and circuits. In the words of Cuauhtémoc Medina, co-founder of the Teratoma group and Chief Curator at MUAC (Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City):

> Teratoma is a site of encounters, debates, exhibitions, residencies, pedagogy, dialogues, archiving of textual, visual, physical and virtual information in order to allow production, debate and reception of the various cultures to come in our continent. … For now, we have decided to adopt TERATOMA as a provisional name for our group. As some of you may already know, the name comes to us from pathology: it is a denomination that refers to a type of tumor that has the nasty particularity to generate all kind of cell types, but without organization. As a result of a failure in the cellular reproductive mechanism, often due to the latency of embryonic cells or to genetic disorder, Teratoma has the tendency to grow in the body by combining, in a quasi-monstrous way, neuronal tissue with pelvic bones, semen with mammal glands, and so on Teratoma appears like a double of the affected body, perfectly identical to it, yet acting as its twin, without top or bottom, left or right, or distinction between function and localization. Teratoma is a metaphor that stands for the rejection of at once the ideal architecture of culture and the evolutionist imaginary. It is the illness of a regression to chaos by a colony of cells that acts parasitically towards the symbolic apparatus.[6]

The image of Mexico City as a metastasised urban sprawl has earned the monster the name of 'the Tumor City' (Serra 2005).[7] Teratoma was deployed by its founders as an oncological metaphor, both site-specific and practical to a framing of a curatorial intervention in the body politic of a post-revolutionary political culture ailing from what anthropologist Roger Bartra has diagnosed as a 'melancholic post-Mexican condition'. In contrast, but in continuity with the dialogues initiated with the anthropologists, art historians, artists and curators who were then members of Teratoma, I began to understand the work of curation as an ethnography-based evaluation of this Mexico City-centred clinical landscape, and eventually as a search for an exit from what might be called an onto-oncological form of intervention and conceptualisation.[8] The very word 'teratoma' recruits a

6 Conversations with several members of Teratoma took place in the context of my ethnography of curatorial laboratories in Mexico City during 2004–2007. I am particularly grateful to Cuauhtémoc Medina for sharing with me, in private conversation, the founding document that I quote here, in which he delineates with remarkable rigour the conceptual contours, geopolitical concerns and curatorial objectives of this interdisciplinary group.

7 Sierra is also known for his installation work that performs corporeal inscriptions on the bodies of marginal forms of life, undocumented migrants, sex workers, street children: that is, forms of life reduced to bare life or diagnosed with incurable illnesses.

8 'Cancerous tissue: each instant, each second, a cell becomes cancerous, mad, proliferates, and loses its configuration, takes over everything, the organism must submit

Nietzschean ethics of dosages and maps it on the vitalistic ontology of so-called peripheral national cultures such as Mexico's. Moreover, it evokes and suggests a revision of the national body politic through a symptomatology hinting at an emerging cartography of intrusion. Teratoma, as illness, diagnosis and form of curation, may even help us locate an 'originary susceptibility of the post-colonial [or peripheral] nation-state to intrusion' (Pheng 1999, 239). It enables us to conceptually explore questions of 'immunisations' and curation of the body politic. Yet, in the end, it dangerously extends the aggressive model of the curator as surgeon (at worst) and benevolent caregiver (at best).

Teratoma's curatorial onto-oncology is certainly a rigorous curatorial model that intensifies the relationship between the critical and the clinical. It does indeed point to other forms of curation. Yet I feel inclined to go only so far with it: we need to underscore Teratoma's limits, the model of aggression and intrusion it relies on and celebrates as the only mode of achieving the dissolution of a certain postcolonial nationalist horizon. It enters the de-territorialised regions of the incurable: a complex, psychoanalytical concept. Indeed, the notion of therapeutic action in psychoanalysis that informs the form of curation I'm driving at is in productive tension with the cures of the onco-curator. But the very nature of Teratoma's curation runs the risk of subsuming the psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable within the perspective of a medical epistemology that ultimately cannot be reconciled with it:

> Indeed, care is not treatment. When we speak of treatment within psychoanalysis, we are in an entirely other register than that of care. Psychoanalysis delimits a domain of application in which the concepts and practices of care are hardly applicable. One will thus say that a psychiatrist cares and that a psychoanalyst treats. An interesting French idiom allows us to underscore this difference. When one says of someone that he is intraitable, this means that he is intractable, that he refuses to compromise his principles. In more Lacanian terms, one could say that he refuses to give up on his desire. The notion of psychoanalytic treatment is of this same order. Contrary to care, which centers on the action of the caregiver or the team of caregivers, the notion of treatment is centered on the relation between the subject and something without which his very existence would no longer matter to him/her – that which, in psychoanalysis, we call his desire. (Apollon 2006, 26)

Teratoma's onco-curation and conceptual strategy extends a certain Avant-Gardist and interventionist tendency in Mexican experimental media arts and moving-image culture. This continuity suggests a reliance on the philosophical tradition of vitalist organicism. A parallel can be established with yet another Mexican model

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to its rules or re-stratifies it, not only for its own survival, but also to make an escape from the organism, the fabrication of the "other" BwO on the place of consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 163).

of infusion into the diseased body politic, found in Rubén Gámez's powerful experimental film *La Fórmula Secreta* (1965). The film opens with an image of dimly lit drains and tubes plunged in darkness and connected to an invisible, unidentifiable body. As the camera slowly tilts downward reaching the lower part of the frame, a fast-paced moving image of a shadow of a vulture (the mythological carcass-eating *zopilote*) spectrally hovering over the Zócalo is released, the nationalist public square *par excellence*. Who is being inoculated, who is being immunised, what are the limits of diagnosis and therapeutics – Curatorial Work as symptomatology? – dosed as virulent responses to a self-triggered immunological crisis? What phantoms are these, where are they descending from? What are the disorders plaguing the post-Mexican condition? Who are these non-authored curators? And is the Vulture of *La Fórmula Secreta* searching for the Serpent? The Serpent of Aztec Mythology, as a figure of migrations and mestizo modernity? The Serpent of Asclepius, as a semiological figure of medicine (*semiotiki* in ancient Greece referred to symptoms)?

Can these images be the point of departure for a 'de-medicalised curatorial ethics', as Cuban curator Osvaldo Sanchez once remarked?[9] Whether we are willing or not to think through them, both Gamez's and Teratoma's images intensify in productive ways the relation between organic and inorganic life that constitutes the postcolonial and post-revolutionary national cultures. The intensification of the relation between the organic and inorganic at 'work' in these images is a harbinger of a new figure of freedom, resistance and working-through in collective formations and subjects that we none the less have outgrown. It therefore proceeds from the observation that:

> the metaphor that has replaced the living organism as the most apposite metaphor for freedom today is that of the ghost. It is epitomized by the post-colonial nation, whose haunted life or susceptibility to a kind of death that cannot be unequivocally delimited and transcended suggests the need to reconceptualize freedom's relation to finitude. (Pheng 2003, 383)

I will venture that the mode in which we have outgrown the living organism, as ghosts with anthropofagic desires and appetites, ought not to be 'curated' in medical terms. A combination of both a Deleuzian clinic and a psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable might be appropriate to carry out our works of curation amidst frankly depressed and depressing affective, aesthetic and political landscapes. Indeed, it could be lived, experienced and conceptualised in joyful terms that escape the affective dual economy of melancholia and enthusiasm characteristic of post-Enlightenment political modernity. I am proposing a form of mourning generated by the predicament that haunts the postcolonial museum we are collectively fabulating on and imagining in this symposium and collection of essays. This form of mourning might help us understand the ethico-political and therapeutic

9 Personal conversation with Osvaldo Sanchez at In/Site meetings in Tijuana.

implications of the replacement of the living organism by the ghost. This secession of the ghost from the living organism is the form of curation of our postcolonial national cultures and societies of control. Shedding the living organism as the main metaphor of the disciplined postcolonial nation will be accompanied (cheerfully, I might add) with the disappearance of both postcolonial cosmopolitanism and nationalism, to make room for another form of inhabiting the postcolonial nation under the sign of the ghost. The ghost is anything but a cosmopolitan national. The ghost is only an intensification of the zone of mediation between the organic and the inorganic. It is the task of curation that is often neglected by artists, academics, curators, cultural producers and so on.

The Incurable Image

My task as a media anthropologist and moving image curator, in this context, is neither to be hopeful nor pessimistic about this secession, only to 'invent new weapons' (Deleuze 1995, 182) to resist in new forms, as the former generation – that is, the decolonisation generation – did through the then apposite metaphor of the living organism. Militant cinemas and 'militant images' of the 1960s, such as Gamez's *La Formula Secreta*, operate as a figure of the living organism 'in anguish', to cite one of Glauber Rocha's film titles. The oncological metaphors and images I've been engaging in this chapter are such weapons, nothing more and nothing less. They are images that index a form of curation that has affinities not to medical care, but to psychoanalytic treatment and therapeutic action:

> This notion of treatment requires a radical experience on the part of the subject that calls into question his relation to something that is as important to him as the apple of his eye [la prunelle de ses yeux]. It thus calls for a rethinking of the very foundations of a being's existence and his relations to others. In order for it to be considered a treatment, its particularity must reside in the analyst's desire to constrain the subject to assume an ethical position with respect to the knowledge derived from the experience. The problematic of treatment implies that the objective is to assume the consequences of such a knowledge and thus to take ethical responsibility toward oneself and toward others. This ethical constraint upon the position of the subject with respect to the knowledge derived from the experience and its consequences is the very object of psychoanalytic treatment. This position led Freud to recommend to Tausk that he terminate the analysis of a patient whose ethics seemed to him clearly insufficient. Treatment consists therefore in undertaking a radical experience that gives access to a knowledge; and the analyst expects that the first consequence of this knowledge will be a mutation of the ethical position of the patient. (Apollon 2006, 26)

I call incurable images those images that host this uncanny 'mutation of the ethical position of the patient'. I would like to also suggest that incurable images are

fundamentally modes of inheritance. I am interested in incurable images that point to complex modes of inheriting decolonisation. These moving images enable the mode of curation I have been hinting at here, somewhere between a Deleuzian symptomatology and the psychoanalytical ethics of the incurable. Incurable images are sites of complex repetitions and zones of endurance for the spectator-patient who manages to bypass the enclosure of traumatic wounds by official narratives from both left and right sides of the politico-ideological spectrum. They are tormented by the impersonal forces of history, as noted by some psychoanalysts and psychoanalytical anthropologists (Benslama 2009; Crapanzano 2011; Pandolfo 1998; Pandolfo 2013). Not unlike 'the larger historical dimension in which both patients and analysts are situated' (Davoine and Gaudillère 2006, 15), a dimension of spectatorship seems to haunt the rapport between history and trauma (in the psychoanalytical sense) or between history and becoming (in the Deleuzian sense). Profoundly ethical, this dimension can be inserted in the context of a form of curation-as-clinical-practice, the aim of which is to bring creative relief when faced with the incurable.

I would like to conclude with a dialogue I have been having with the Columbian artist Carlos Castro, and a recent piece of his in particular. It is an allegorical image of politico-symbolic decay in Bogota's Plaza Central, an image that assigns allegorical status to a symbol of postcoloniality. It has affinities with the photogram from Ruben Gamez's *La Formula Secreta*, in that it too is an image of a ghost that hovers around another post-revolutionary nationalist public square *par excellence*. Carlos Castro describes his public installation *That Which Does Not Suffer Does Not Live* (Figure 12.1) in the following terms:

> an installation in Bogotá's main plaza in which I made a replica of a Simón Bolívar statue out of pigeon food and placed it in the same location. Pedestrians were able to contemplate the *transformation* of a statue of Colombia's founding father as it was eaten by pigeons for 12 hours.[10]

In this public, time-based installation, anthropofagic desire is actualised as a relation between the symbolic figure of both pan-Latin Americanism and Third World liberation movements (Bolivar Plazas and statues can be found in cities from Cairo to San Francisco), a nationalist use of public space with potential cosmopolitan implications (including shedding doubts on the future of cosmopolitanism as a useful concept and ethico-political horizon) and an (undesired and abjected) urban non-human species.

Not unlike Walter Benjamin's image of the Angel of History, Castro's public installation can be read allegorically in so far that it sets in motion an assemblage that wrestles with and mediates a schizophrenic historical sense. This provisional assemblage disrupts the public status of Bogota's Plaza Central and opens up a passage between a historiographic matrix and a constellation of affect out which

10 Carlos Castro, private email conversation with the author.

Figure 12.1 Carlos Castro, *That Which Does Not Suffer Does Not Live*, Bogota, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of the artist

unstable subject positions are produced. While everything is set up for a symbolic reading of the scene, I want to suggest that Castro's installation has produced a form of image that also can be called an 'incurable image': one that not only eschews a diagnosis that privileges disruptions brought to the symbolic order of the Nation (which it does, needless to say), but that disorients us by forcing us to return to chaotic affects that cannot be curated in the professional sense of the term. It does so, I will argue, by providing us with a way out from the cosmopolitan-national fantasies that agitate the postcolonial imaginary, on the one hand, and provides us with another mode of curation for our societies of control. The becoming-imperceptible of Bolivar displaces the body politic and visual culture of the Nation onto another scene. I call this 'the Tricontinental scene': a volatile zone of mediation populated with incurable images such as Castro's where we are asked to emancipate ourselves from figures of sovereignty (the monarch, the militant, the curator), on the one hand, and the moral landscapes and affective geographies of cosmopolitan nationalism and Third Worldism, on the other. It might even require us to think of other forms of collectivity through a different deployment of images. What ethical and affective implication can be drawn from incurable images? What politics of the unconscious is to be found in the becoming-imperceptible of Bolivar? Is this something reminiscent of a Warburgian dynamogram? Does the effacement of Bolivar's effigy actualise what Alberto Moreiras (2001) has called

'the exhaustion of difference and the emergence of a second Latin Americanism' that would inaugurate a post-nationalist and post-cosmopolitan work of mourning? What form of repetition does the work of mourning carried out by incurable images point to?

As a moving image curator and media anthropologist, I try to pay careful attention to the ethico-affective operation underlying the clinical concept of 'curation'. It is an outline of curation from the pathic point of view of images. This shift in attention would require us to both engage the production of images as a radically de-authored process and to displace our subjectivities towards a commitment to the pathos of images that have a life and death of their own. This ought to be achieved not by simply displacing the dyadic relation between analysand and analyst onto that of moving image and curator and onto that of spectator and screen, as in classic psychoanalytic visual and media theory. It would have to put us in the role of analysand, and the moving image in that of the analyst. We are images' clinical pictures, they repeat us as symptoms, and we repeat them as diagnosis. The task of curation would then be one committed to participating in collective processes and to forging therapeutic communities through intractable and incurable desires encountered in images. We are the hinterlands of images, nothing more and nothing less: we are images' expressions, bas-relief from the chaotic and infinite world of images, and not the other way around, in which images are formulated as mere representations of our collective and personal ordeals, subjectivities, lives, realities and so on. The task of curation that emerges from this is both *anonymous* and *therapeutic*, tending to and caring for iterative assemblages in contemporary visual culture.

In light of this, I take the 'work' in curatorial work as a composite form of working-through that wavers between two ethical traditions: a psychoanalytical ethics of mourning that laments and re-elaborates the loss and failures that affect us, and a Deleuzian symptomatology, full of belief in the future, that also laments the material returned by the Real, but does so by joyfully seeking to re-assemble and re-actualise those imperceptible potentialities crushed by dominant and indifferent agencies of symbolisation.[11] The work of curation, like the Deleuzian and psychoanalytical ethical operations, begins with a form of attention and care for signs of imperceptible potentialities that lay dormant in sites of complex repetition. This imperceptible, this pathic dimension of curation, is found in what I have called 'the incurable image'. It is incurable in a double sense. In the professional and institutional sense of the term: literally escaping the reach of curatorial practice and its attendant disciplinary institutions (museums, university, nation-state). In the psychoanalytical sense: by pointing to troubles and disorders

11 The juxtaposition of Deleuze's symptomatology with the key Freudian concept of 'working-through' is a symptom less of an impasse or impossibility than of hope: to find help from two of the most powerful theoretical and practical attempts to handle and care for the volatile materials of repetitions. It also goes without saying that the title of this chapter is indebted to Deleuze's own wrestling with the ontology of repetition (see Deleuze 1994).

that cannot be treated and cared for in the bio-medical sense of the term. Incurable images can only be the source of a lament at the threshold of a mourning process hinged on a singular ontology of images and pedagogy of healing. Incurable images are both clinical and non-clinical forms of life. I have evaluated here some of the uses and disadvantages of these incurable images for life. The rest escapes us indefinitely.

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Chapter 13

The Postcolonial 'Exhibitionary Complex': The Role of the International Expo in Migrating and Multicultural Societies

Stefania Zuliani

Rightfully finding its place in the lively international debate that has involved museums since the late 1980s and has given rise to a New Museology which puts the museum and its functions at the centre of a very broad and critical reflection, Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995) has significantly contributed to redefining the requirements and reasons for the affirmation of this institution. The museum is no longer exclusively framed within the history of collecting and its evolution – still very much the case in Italian museology – but is included in the complex network of relations (both conceptual and of power) which have led to the development of modern exhibition devices. Rather than considering the gradual rise of the museum institution as a cornerstone of modernity in an independent and thus reductive manner, Bennett chose to define and discuss 'the exhibitionary complex' in all its complexity. He points out that what he has called 'Technologies of Progress' have found a space of representation and verification not only in the secluded rooms of the museum, but also in other public spaces equally involved in the practice of 'showing and telling':

> The fair and the exhibition are not, of course, the only candidates for consideration in this respect …. Equally, the museum has undoubtedly been influenced by its relations to cultural institutions which, like the museum itself and like the early international exhibitions, had a rational and improving orientation: libraries and public parks, for example. … They are also institutions which, in being open to all-comers, have shown a similar concern to devise ways of regulating the conduct of their visitors, and to do so, ideally, in ways that are both unobtrusive and self-perpetuating. (Bennett 1995, 6)

In contrast to what was proposed by Douglas Crimp in the dense pages of his essay *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993), where, using theoretical tools and categories derived from Michel Foucault, and from *Discipline and Punish* in particular, Bennett suggested reading the museum and institutions related to it within a 'carceral archipelago': 'There is another institution of confinement awaiting such archaeological analysis – the museum – and another discipline –

art history' (Crimp 1993, 48). The author of *The Birth of the Museum*, although keeping Foucault's archaeology as a reference, opted to define the nature of the museum and other exhibiting institutions in terms not of confinement, but of exhibition and organisation of rules, noting in particular that the 'significance of the formation of the exhibitionary complex … was that of providing new instruments for the moral and cultural regulation of the working classes' (Bennett 1995, 73).

Whether permanent or temporary, according to Bennett the exhibition is in fact always a visual system that involves a continuous self-monitoring on behalf of the public, which in the context of the exhibition becomes itself an exhibition according to a control strategy implicating, above all, a revolutionary vision technology:

> The exhibitionary complex … perfected a self-monitoring system of looks in which the subject and object positions can be exchanged, in which the crowd comes to commune with and regulates itself through interiorizing the ideal of an ordered view of itself as seen from the controlling vision of power – a site of sight accessible to all. (Bennett 1995, 69)

The visitor, as Thomas Struth emphasised in his *Museum Photographs* (1993), is therefore both the subject and object of vision, he watches and is watched, he knows and recognises himself, enrolling in a movement that contributes simultaneously to form a new public and a new vision system (see Struth 2008). And this is exactly what happened, not without causing great astonishment, in London during the Great Exhibition of 1851, a key event in the history of the modern exhibitionary complex, a place for regulating the masses and creating an audience. In what is commonly considered the first World's Fair, in preparation for many years and having its roots 'in Biblical bazaars, medieval markets, anywhere that people congregate for barter and trade' (Greengard 1986, 46), it acknowledged the Paris Expositions Nationales as its immediate forerunner, a model to imitate and surpass in size and globalising ambition (Colombo 2012, 44).[1] The Fair had the opportunity to exert its central position as a democratic *panopticon* (Bennett 1995, 69) for exhibition and mass entertainment, and the Crystal Palace was its symbol and modern monument. Thanks to the participation of 12 nations and the presence of a section devoted to so-called primitive peoples, the Great Exhibition of London, which Gottfried Semper described as 'a sort of Babel', was able to reveal the contradictions of the present, not least because of its seemingly confused nature (Semper 1989). It presented itself as a model of universal representation that had a dual nature, operating at the same time by expansion (the Fair as a living museum or encyclopaedia) and contraction – the Fair as a sort of 'global village' (Greengard 1986, 49) – according to an ambiguous scheme which has been perpetuated with remarkable persistence ever since.

1 For an iconographic history of the Universal Expositions, see Mattie (1998).

The Pilgrimage to the Commodity Fetish

The World's Fair in fact continues to present itself as a vast panoply of objects and people – and not surprisingly, it has even been called a 'human zoo' – especially colonial Expos – which, now as then, widely adopts ephemeral, often hypertrophic and even irrational architectural structures. It is also a concentrated and claustrophobic microcosm which portrays, in an emphatic manner, cultures and symbolic productions drawn from everywhere. On the one hand, these are arranged in a declared and even ostentatious educational manner, and on the other, relentlessly reduced to the paradoxically reassuring paradigm of goods.

Expos seem indeed to have represented the epitome of nascent modernity, not just its glitzy showcase. This is due not only to the sophisticated and appropriately provisional exhibits that displayed the triumphant story of technological progress and benefits related to the emergence of a capitalistic model of development, but also to the influence they have had in contributing to the education of an ever-increasing public. What every World's Fair still seems to show today, in an age which is far removed from, and epistemologically irreducible to, the birth of the exhibitionary complex, is a marvellous educational (propaganda?) and entertainment machine, a huge 'edutainment' space, to use the term that has caught on in museum studies in recent years. The contents have undoubtedly changed over the centuries without calling into question the celebratory vocation of all World's Fairs.

In the Fair, of course, the glorious stages and ever-successful results of the triumph of the machine and the achievements of Western civilisation are no longer recorded. Nor is it possible to read it in terms of a potlatch, or ritual gift, that the often astronomical costs and excellence which characterise each Expo might suggest.[2] Yet, while passing from the late nineteenth-century exaltation of technology to the ecological emphasis of the turn of the millennium (Expo 2000 in Hanover was dedicated to 'sustainable development', Expo 2005 in Aichi focused on 'Nature's Wisdom', and in 2010 in Shanghai, the theme was 'Better City, Better Life'), the spirit of the World's Fair remains, at least in intent and official statements.[3] It continues to provide a mirror of a civilisation which has not stopped believing in the advancement of the arts and sciences and the consequences for quality of life and social justice ('Feed the Planet: Energy For Life' is to be the theme of the next World Expo in Milan in 2015). But is it really possible that an institution so deeply entrenched in modern thought, fuelled by the universalistic ambitions of modernity as well as its happiness-seeking utopias, by what Menna (1968) called *Profezia di una società estetica* ('The Prophecy of an Aesthetic Society'), has maintained its mission and value intact in a time that seems to be no longer even postmodern? Is this, as Arnold Gehlen (1961) suggested, the temporality of *post-*

2 Benedict (1983) compared international expositions to the ritual of the potlatch.

3 On this matter, see Official Site of the Bureau International des Expositions: http://www.bie-paris.org/site/ (accessed 10 November 2013).

histoire, marked by a globalisation that has little to do with *mondialisation* and the creation of worlds advocated by Jean-Luc Nancy? The answer was given, ahead of his time as usual, by Walter Benjamin.

As long ago as the 1930s, Benjamin pointed out how the work of art had changed in value in the age of mechanical reproduction, going from a cultural to an essentially exhibitory state (Benjamin 2008). Making specific reference to the Universal Exhibitions, he stressed that these were primarily 'places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish' (Benjamin 1999, 7). The notion of the commodity as fetish – which Benjamin certainly owed to Marx – has now combined with the all-pervasive value of exhibition to take on a further, ominous meaning. For the exhibition – which always involves shift and risk – is in itself an inexorable process of fetishisation, and Giorgio Agamben (2005) goes so far as to speak of the museification of the world. As Walter Benjamin says:

> The world exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which their use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others. (Benjamin 1999, 7–8)

This observation about the universal exhibitions proves to be an extraordinarily effective tool for understanding how the transition from the teleology of the modern period to a *post-histoire* has not at all marred, as one would have expected, the prestige of the modern exhibitionary complex. The triumph of fetishism and the consequent establishment of a mechanism of alienation which, addressed 'to the living … defends the rights of the corpse', has produced the 'sex appeal of the inorganic' (Benjamin 1999, 7–8). As argued acutely by Mario Perniola (2004), this characterises the contemporary moment, resulting in the post-human aesthetic horizon of the late twentieth century. Thus, not only is the crisis of the modern and the emergence of an unstable and complex postmodern condition marked by the 'critical laxity' identified by Lyotard; the processes of decolonisation, postructuralist deconstructive logic and the concept of difference have contributed the downfall of the museum.

Today, it is an institution that is more than ever vital and productive (Zuliani 2009). The Universal Exhibitions have never lost their impact and seductive power, because it is the exhibition itself – the exhibition value and its associated fetishisation – which has stated unconditionally and with absolute pervasiveness its dominance in the contemporary scene. Of course, political and economic situations have changed. Long gone is the time when, for the great colonial powers, World's Fairs were occasions 'to show a sense of their own superiority over the cultures of their colonised dependents' (Benedict 1991, 5) by staging exotic exhibits which included objects and peoples – 'From exotic products to exotic peoples was not a

large step', noted Benedict (1991, 8) acutely. Today, it is rather corporations that have a dominating role within the Universal Exhibitions:

> The major innovations in design and symbol-making in post-World War II exhibitions have come not from nations, new or old, but from multi-national corporations. Their logos have become better known than many national symbols. … Corporations have employed amusement-area techniques such as rides, mechanical monsters and theatrical entertainment. … International exhibitions now seem to reflect a new form of dependency. (Benedict 1991, 8)

Is the Universal Expo Really a 'Genuine World Tour'?

From the paternalistic dominance of colonial empires to the spectacular one of transnational corporations: this is, without a doubt, a significant shift which, far from contradicting, further underlines the continuing symbolic power and the massive media and cost of the Expos (whose financial outcomes, it is worth emphasising, are increasingly likely to be in the red, which makes the tough competition involving the candidate cities to accommodate the 2020 edition difficult to understand).

This actually lends support to those who, like Patrick Young, have rather forcedly wanted to see the Great Exhibitions of the nineteenth century as 'the point of germination for many defining practices of our current media-saturated global order' (Young 2008, 340). This hypothesis, the result of a retrospective look which raises the question of the fake–authentic relationship connected to the exotic presence and performance in the 'first' World's Fairs (in particular, the reference is to the Palais de Colonie at the 1889 Expo), maybe applies too carelessly paradigms from successive contexts and cultural conditions. It is no coincidence, I think, that Young (2008) mistakenly sets the establishment of the Musée de l'Homme too early, in 1878. What definitely remains to be discussed is the meaning of a Universal Exhibition in contemporary society.

This is a multicultural and migrating society that needs to create a 'terrestrial citizenship' (Edgar Morin), but which, unfortunately, is increasingly marked by ethnic, religious and nationalistic conflicts and contradictions that perfectly match the processes of cultural globalisation once again based on the fetishism of commodities and the fetish of financial capital. Can the World's Fair, with its optimistic intentions and vaunted belief in progress, really transform the contradictions and perspectives of a post-industrial and global system which, in order to respond to the crisis of productive systems, cannot avoid creating new relations and new paradigms of economic and cultural development? The question must initially be posed in terms of representation and critical distance. How is the relationship between the World's Fairs and the real world established today? In migrating and multicultural societies, is it possible that the Expo can maintain

its role as a sensational diorama of the world, capable of providing the visitor with the illusion that he/she can access every tradition and culture without much effort? 'In a few hours we have just completed a genuine world tour,' we read in the handbook for the 1937 Paris Expo (Berot-Berger 1937, 83), and as James D. Herbert convincingly pointed out for this World's Fair in particular, 'rather than antecedent to its representations, the real world emerges largely as their product' (Herbert 1995, 109).

The World's Fair arose, then, as a radically different territory, as a 'heterotopias', to quote Foucault, a place whose functioning contradicts all other places. An autonomous system of signs, essentially self-referential, where the common coordinates of space and time are lacking, produces a country with no borders and recognisable history, in which one could at the same time feel excluded from the real world and be the owner of the whole world. This is just, according to Roland Barthes, what happens when one is at the top of the Eiffel Tower, which was built, it is worth remembering, for the 1889 World's Fair as the emblem of a prodigious modernity. More than a reflection, a representation or a synthesis of the real world, the Universal Exhibition is then offered as another world, just as real. It is a construction of meaning that, distanced from everyday reality, could also provide a critical perspective on the latter, maybe even highlighting issues and tensions still unexploded which, although disguised, become readable in the architecture of the national (nationalistic) pavilions, exactly as occurred in 1937 in Paris.

During the Fair, the world looked at itself, just as the public acknowledged itself in the promenades of the Expo. What remains today of that relationship, the result of a difference, of a conscious distance? Looking at the proposals and effects of the 2010 Shanghai Expo, which in terms of sheer size and ambition certainly represents an inescapable and controversial reference point, it seems very little.

We are the World, We are the Fair

'The fair is not a fake copy of a "real" world, but as a simulation it marks the breakdown of the distinction of the copy from the original, of the fair from the world. The world/fair is everything and nothing, simultaneously nowhere and now here' (Nordin 2012). This is the unequivocal and disturbing conclusion reached by Astrid H.M. Nordin, the author of a recent study on the Shanghai Expo. A drastic statement, the result of a reflection which, using appropriate categories and theoretical tools borrowed from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), emphasises the impossibility of identifying even a minimal distance between the World's Fair and the world, both hyper-real outcomes of the contemporary condition. This is a condition in which any form of abstraction can no longer exist, since every possible referentiality is lost – 'No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept'

(Baudrillard 1994) – and the infinite proliferation of simulacra has led to the 'divine irreference of images'. No distinction between reality and imagination, or between true and false.

This is the image that China has given, first to itself – 95 per cent of the 73 million visitors of the Shanghai Expo were Chinese citizens (Padovani 2010) – and then to the world through the national pavilions and those of corporations, located in two different parts of a vast area which, two years after the event, looks like an eerie no man's land, a 'non-place' (Augé) featuring mock-ruins and building sites. These, in turn, promote other huge and equally ephemeral cathedrals of consumption (currently under construction is the Chocolate Happy Land, which will use some of the Arab pavilions), and coincide perfectly with the glowing phantasmagoria of the commodity, a fetish and universal simulacrum, a show no longer 'concentrated' or 'diffuse', but as Guy Debord wrote in his *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 'integrated' (Debord 1990, 8).

There is no longer a show of the world of the commodity dominating life, simply because there is no world other than the very exhibition of goods. 'An uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference' (Baudrillard 1994, 6) in which the presence, of a dusty and even inappropriate legacy, the national pavilions that were so deeply rooted in the tradition of the modern exhibitionary complex, loses all ideological significance and causes no conflict or controversy. In Shanghai, everything, the real and/is fake, is on show and, after all, 'in few places is the question of the real and the imaginary, the true and the false, the original and the fake as pertinent and as sensitive as in contemporary China' (Nordin 2012).

All in all, the important thing is not to escape the accusation of plagiarism (which, among other things, even involved the Expo anthem), but to carefully avoid any infringement of the stereotype: the multi-ethnic and multicultural society is not at all removed or denied, but the macro/micro cosmos of the World's Fair simply exhibits it in a horizontal sum of reassuring clichés: the Italian Pavilion, donated to the Chinese People and renamed the Shanghai Italian Center, still welcomes the coaches of orderly tourists with the music of 'Funiculì Funiculà' and the pop voice of Pavarotti. What remains of the halls of North Africa still evokes an atmosphere of souks, deserts and paper oases, while the impressive China Pavilion, today the China Art Palace, a spectacular upside-down ziggurat colloquially known as the Oriental Crown, which overlooks the glistening spaceship of the Mercedes Benz Arena (which during the Expo was the Shanghai World Expo Cultural Center), is, of course, lacquer red and CCP red.

An 'Educational Turn'

In our 'hyperreal world of simulacra' it seems there is no way to break through the surface: the crime has taken place, reality has been killed, and its shining, lifeless

remains do nothing but increase 'the sex appeal of the inorganic'. The Exhibition – the World's Exhibition – cannot permit conflict, does not tolerate dissonance; it is traditionally sedating. Must we therefore surrender to being witnesses of the phantasmagoria of goods (whether produced by art or by science), to its exuberant performance, which is also the show of commercial diplomacy and corporate culture?

Certain recent signals from the art world suggest that if there is a possibility of corroding an apparently perfect mechanism, this lies in regaining some critical distance through experimenting with new educational practices. It is the 'educational turn' (O'Neill and Wilson 2010; Zuliani 2012) that, by overturning the modern paradigm of education as a means of disciplining, of which the exhibitionary complex was the very site of elaboration and affirmation, reconsiders education not as content delivery, but primarily as an experience of the other, as a site of transit and encounter. And also as a necessary expression and processing of conflict. This is the gap, in many ways uncomfortable and not without pitfalls, in which artists and critics today, along with curators and museum educators, act to counter the sterile purity and authoritarian neutrality of the exhibition. It is a job pursued in residual spaces. It dares to deal in anachronism and even obsolescence, and without identity nostalgia or neo-tribalistic temptations, seeks to defend the right to contradict and query. It is a critical exercise which seeks unique contexts, small communities, that live through contagion and relationship, duration and roots.

It would be nice if the next World's Fair in Milan, unfortunately already suspected of promoting gentrification, did not simply celebrate in 2015 the over-blown epic of 'green' corporations, but endorsed, starting from its planning and building, a necessary relationship with the territory and citizens. This could become the laboratory and document of an educational effort, a patient practice of translation, dialogue and research which would also, but not only, lead to a new type of public art.

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Chapter 14
Orientalism and the Politics of Contemporary Art Exhibitions[1]

Alessandra Marino

In an interview on the conception of *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said recalls his early reflections on the unbridgeable divide between the experience of being an Arab and the artistic representations of Arabness.[2] Eugène Delacroix or Jean-Léon Gérôme's paintings present some of the stereotypes Said decided to investigate. Their images of sensuous women in the harem and of lazy Arab men smoking hashish inaugurated a stream of representation crystallising the East as eternal and incapable of any development, as 'the other' of European progress. *Orientalism* questions the creation of these imaginative geographies and defines orientalism both as a field of knowledge attempting to map the East into a Western understanding and as a political strategy of control sustaining imperialism.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*, the then directors of Tate Britain and the Yale Centre for British Art, Stephen Deuchar and Amy Mayers, affirm that one of the stimuli for organising the event was Said's apparent disregard for the visual image, since his specific interest lay in textuality (Deuchar and Meyers 2008, 6). On the contrary, I maintain that for Said, images were as important as texts, and a novel reading of orientalism can be fruitful to discuss the political implications of contemporary artistic trends.

'Orientalist art' commonly refers to the specific production of images of the Middle East in the nineteenth century; but orientalism is a more pervasive strategy of subjugation and subject-creation that remained active beyond the imperial period. Its logic determines the reiteration of a cultural dichotomy between East and West, promoting the inferiorisation of the Orient. Filtering obliquely through different artistic fields, it can surface in their modes of display. In this chapter, I will explore three recent art exhibitions, held in Germany, Britain and Italy in 2011 and 2012, to follow possible traces of orientalism emerging in their conception and organisation.

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2 The video interview in which Said traces the history of the conception of *Orientalism* is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwCOSkXR_Cw (accessed 27 April 2012).

The first exhibition is *Orientalism in Europe: From Delacroix to Kandinsky* (Munich 2011), proposing a journey through the historical formation of orientalist aesthetics since the nineteenth century. *Migrations: Journey into British Contemporary Art*, at Tate Britain in London from January 2012, is the second one. It displayed a heterogeneous range of productions from immigrants who lived in the UK across four centuries. Orientalism here surfaces as a means to construct Britishness through rearticulating images of migrant others. In the third and final case, I turn to *Open 14* (Venice 2011) to zoom in on the Bangladeshi artist Ronni Ahmmed's installation *The Tomb of Qara Köz* (2011), curated by and staged in collaboration with Ebadur Rahman, which challenges the orientalist binary of East and West and displaces the link between identity and belonging.

Orientalist Art: Passé or Not?

In 2011, the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung in Munich hosted *Orientalism in Europe: From Delacroix to Kandinsky* (January–May 2011), one of the largest recent exhibitions on orientalist art. The show, later transferred to Marseille (May–August 2011), was only one of the events focusing on 'the East' that were scheduled across Europe in 2011. The Musée d'Orsay in Paris at the same time dedicated an entire exhibition to the contested orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose colossal canvases also occupied a relevant place in Munich. The recent proliferation of events about 'orientalist' art reveals a renewed interest in the relation between East and West and in their historical construction. The development of this wave was encouraged by the Tate's exhibition *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (2008), following on over twenty years later from the famous Washington exhibition *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse: European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (1984).

The exhibition in Munich proposed a journey through orientalist art and its sublimation of the East. Images like Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* or *Turkish Bath* (1889–1890), where the exposition of a woman's nakedness places agency in the capturing eye, expose the quest of the Western gaze trying to unveil Eastern beauty. Alternating domestic spaces, views of deserts and exotic architectural cityscapes, orientalist art displays a solid realism and a meticulous attention to detail. However, the painters who acted as ambassadors of Western rationality were also directly involved in the proximity and difference of Arab culture. The artists' personal experience of migrancy sustained the legitimacy of their role as witnesses of a radically different culture.

Fatema Mernissi (2008) defends this standpoint when she focuses on the British painters' experimental representations of night scenes and dreamy landscapes.[3] She

3 She refers to the concept of 'Samar' to underline how the experience of darkness and mystery gave rise to a source of creativity that was indebted with the Arab culture. The artists' suppressed dreamy side was nurtured by the conquered.

refers to John Frederick Lewis's prolonged stay in Cairo to highlight the liminality of painters as subjects living on the borders between cultures. Their attempts to penetrate Eastern cultures, for Mernissi, cannot be grasped if one looks at their work through the lens of Said's idea of orientalism, which creates an unbridgeable divide between East and West (Mernissi 2008, 34).

Mernissi's point of view is fascinating. Her attention to the condition of migrancy zooms in on individual agents of imperialism to stress how colonisation is far from being a coherent project. On the other hand, this accent on personal experience cannot conceal the effect of Lewis and Gérôme's art in promoting the superiority of the West. The political implications of their celebratory works are the main objects of my interest. Rana Kabbani's 'Regarding Orientalist Painting Today' (2008) is fundamental to grasp how British representations of the Middle East enabled an orientalist understanding of the region. She states:

> Delicately, if disingenuously, nineteenth century British Orientalist painting papered over its connection to the rough designs of the Empire. It depicted a world unnaturally emptied of politics, airily overlooking the highly charged events of the period – strikes, riots, rebellions, repressions and blockades; the impoverishment and famine; the communal hangings and massacres – that were the marks of Britain's colonial 'moment' in the Middle East. (Kabbani 2008, 40)

The representation of static worlds and landscapes not only fixed oriental subjects in a timeless frame, creating rigid stereotypes, but also deprived them of any political agency. The paintings avoided representing contexts of war and struggle; they became catalogues of the splendour and the properties of the empire. The apolitical dimension of the Orient emerges together with its 'lure': 'orientalism is nothing if not seductive' (Kabbani 2008, 40).

Since the acknowledgement of oriental fascination is inseparable from the drive to conquer and dominate, the exhibition of these works triggers a reflection on their significance in contemporary European culture. Looking at specific examples, I ask whether and how orientalism, as a strategy of creating and fixing otherness, surfaces in recent displays of orientalist art and art from the East.

Orientalism in Europe promises to unveil images of the Middle East, North Africa and the Islamic Orient displaying 'magnificent' works by European artists from the nineteenth century onwards, including Eugène Delacroix and Auguste Renoir. It traces the origins of orientalism in the French campaigns in Egypt and the resulting Egyptomania, but it also follows 'orientalist' motives in modern works by Vasily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. Timeless stereotypes of oriental subjects clearly emerge through the tropes of lascivious women (Benjamin Constant's *Odalisque*), ecstatic men or aggressive Muslim soldiers (Jean-Baptiste Huysmans's *The captive, christian woman kidnapped by the Druze in Sidon*, 1862). On the other hand, their creation is not addressed as a form of power that supported imperial actions. The meticulous comments accompanying the paintings make no mention of Said's works of 1978 and 1997, nor of the critical discourses seeing Islam

and Orient as categories manufactured via Western representations. The political classifications in play remain unquestioned, and the borders of Europe and France appear natural as well as fixed.

One of the rooms dedicated to 'scientific orientalism' connected the birth of anthropology to the need for representing veritable features of African subjects. But the museum space, filled with statues representing Moroccan or Somali people, did not make room for highlighting or troubling the role of the scientific classifications of human species that were supporting Italian and French colonial enterprises. Although the exhibition provoked critical comments on the political correctness of showing these works, these responses were neutralised by recalling the historical and aesthetic importance of the paintings. The fame of Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapal* or Gérôme's and Klee's oriental spaces determined the popularity of the art exhibition. But what understanding of orientalism did this event support? Although the growing awareness of colonial histories raises general interest, this does not necessarily translate into new reflections on the impact of imperialism and orientalism on common perceptions of Orient and Occident.

In Munich, the seduction of art was under the spotlight, but its political effects were not. The quasi-objective descriptions of the artworks re-directed any possible political criticism towards an appreciation of the techniques of European artists. The spell of the beauty of orientalist art managed to efface the orientalist logic of imperial culture. With the emergence of a new political interest in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, mainly due to the so-called 'Arab Spring', the show declared orientalism to be a two hundred-year-old Western drive to map and represent the Orient. However, the existence of an oriental essence, to be sublimated through art,was not problematised.

Travelling Art, Migrating Bodies

As Mernissi underlines, orientalist artists were migrants whose liminal subjectivity surfaced in their own artworks representing non-Western societies. If the show in Munich displayed these zones of cultural encounters, its complementary double was represented by Tate Britain's *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*. Instead of dealing with Western trips to oriental sites and their exotic depictions, this show presented the reversed gaze of migrants on the British nation.

Taking its starting point in the sixteenth century, *Migrations* viewed British art and identity as the product of a continuous dialogue with Europe, the Americas and the ex-colonies. From Marcus Gheeraerts, Dutch painter at the court of Elizabeth I, to contemporary artists from former imperial territories, the show ambitiously proposed to reveal how migration has shaped British art until the present. In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, the current director of the Tate Britain, Penelope Curtis, discusses the significance of the title *Migrations*, referring to its elasticity. 'Migrations' may refer to travels taking place across space and time,

as well as forms and genres. This indicates the transmutation of aesthetics, the plurality of contexts of production and artistic fruition.

Its path through contemporary video art includes *Handsworth Songs* by Black Audio Film Collective (1986), Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) and Zineb Sedira's *Floating Coffins* (2009). *Handsworth Songs*, on the Birmingham riots, dislodges orientalist and racist stereotypes of migrants as apolitical or criminals, creating a platform where they speak as British citizens. Its aesthetic innovation of the language of documentaries constitutes a social and political intervention. Combining personal accounts, news reports and other footage, the narration counteracts prejudicial and mainstream media representations of other cultures and identities.

In Hatoum's *Measures of Distance*, the overlapping of Arabic writing, photos and English commentary provokes a similar destabilising effect. Dealing with the exile and relocation of Palestinians in Lebanon and Britain, the video questions the very possibility of a unitary national identity. None the less, even though single artworks provide ground for calling into question particular histories and global powers, their display in a single exhibition and under a unifying theme diminishes their impact.

The organisation of the collection in rooms condensing the essence of entire centuries and following one another in chronological order makes all the works merge into the overarching theme, betraying their enormous differences. The various genres, times and places displayed stretch the word 'migration' in its plural connotations, with the effect of raising doubts on the very purpose of the exhibition. The gathering in a single space of very diverse works organised in chronological order produces a homogenising effect: it neutralises the disruptive messages of some works in favour of portraying a linear development of artistic trends. The juxtaposition of Flemish or Italian painters migrating to Britain for art training, such as Marcus Gheeraerts, with Indian and Caribbean artists, including Avinash Chandra and Sonia Boyce, obliterates the colonialist background and favours a multiculturalist genealogy of Britain.

The equation of different migratory routes and contexts crafts an image of Britain as a warm and welcoming 'hub' for artists since the sixteenth century. This background preludes the transformation of the country into an adoptive mother for the former colonial subjects. A blurb commenting on the works of the twentieth century points to the freedom gained by those who moved to Britain and came in contact with the international language of modernism. While sounding a positive note on migration as cross-cultural exchange, this statement is orientalist and unidirectional: marginal cultures have to be directed towards the centre to access European knowledge.

In this show, orientalism works in three ways. First, the decontextualised display of migrants' artworks, simply inserted in a chronological timeline running parallel with British history, has the effect of anaesthetising their political potential. Second, the variety of positions the artists assume as political subjects is reduced

to their condition of migrants. Third, the exhibition posits the host country as a pole of attraction and a warm hub for international artists. Continuing briefly with the second point, it is clear how the removal of the contexts of war and political turmoil in orientalist paintings supported the diffusion of images of oriental subjects as apolitical. Similarly, in the Tate exhibition, the erasure of specific contexts of travel and migration minimises the political impact of the works in the context of their production. This juxtaposition ends up creating an archetype of the migrant as a bearer of a distinctive form of subjectivity.

Sudeep Das Gupta warns against the theoretical codification of a migrant aesthetics that generically accounts for any migrant position. Voices and stories told by the subjects themselves risk being silenced by the very framework in which they find a space. Das Gupta writes:

> Can one talk about a migratory aesthetics in the ontological sense of its political value, even if one recognises its variegated styles? I don't think so. Rather one might ask how a close reading of an intensely personal story, told in first person, migrates through multiple voices and across multiple spaces – and what that reveals about the ways in which we situate the migrant, enclose him within our own theoretical protocols and make him the subject of aesthetic reflection. (Das Gupta 2008, 200)

Ironically, creating a continuous narrative flow on subjects and ideas migrating to Britain, the exhibition itself does not absorb the lessons proposed by the very works it contains. For John Akomfrah, the fragmentary aesthetics of *Handsworth Songs* shows the fictitiousness of homogenous cultural and national identities, which are open archives to be reconfigured by marginal narratives.[4] Instead, showing that there have always been migrants, some of whom have positively contributed to the growth of the country, the exhibition simplistically integrates migrants within the master narrative of the nation.

Art De-orientalising Culture?

Arguably, the problem with the exhibition *Migrations* is the framing of different works in a collection that presents itself as coherent and cohesive. The unity imposed by a restrictive chronological logic linking the rooms exposes the structural limit of the museum, whose space cannot convey the heterogeneity of the artworks.

4 Akomfrah affirms: 'The archival goes to the very heart of how identities are constructed and how they circulate in any culture because diasporic identities, in the absence of monuments that attest their existence, have repositories of what they mean in the very thing that's supposed to deny their existence' (Akomfrah 2012, 106).

This classic model of the museum space, however, is not the only existing one. Various art exhibitions and travelling fairs, such as *Manifesta*, have developed new conceptual frames and reinvented modes of display. A less prominent, but interesting, example is the Venetian exhibition *Open*, which reached its fourteenth edition in 2011. It invites artworks to be displayed in the streets of the Venetian island of Lido. The lack of a central structure suggests a resistance against any rigid logic of art display, so that the audience walking outdoors can stumble into installations that blend within the fluid texture of the maritime city. *Open* is structurally and thematically dedicated to mobility. In the same period of the Biennale, where the disposition of artworks follows a national rationale, *Open* proposes to look at the lagoon as a metaphor for travels and cultural innovations.

Against the crystallisation and labelling of art in relation to the nation, *The Tomb of Qara Köz*, featured in *Open 14*, proposes a dialogue between fluctuating historical memories and ambiguous cultural constructions (see the cover of this book). The tomb is dedicated to the Mughal princess Qara Köz, central character in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), where she appears as a courtesan at the Medici court. The installation consists of a pyramidal structure made of Plexiglas, each level of which is filled with plastic cups containing painted eggs. The eggs are decorated with various representations of the princess's life in films and literature and depict a variety of intertextual references. The transparent materials used (plastic and Plexiglas) do not block the view, and promote the integration of the work within the Lido. The eggs, carrying fragmented stories, seem to float in a chaotic order, and reflect the fluidity of Venice and its history of East–West encounters.

The presence of the Mughal princess Qara Köz at the Medici court constitutes a story of hybridity at the core of the Italian Renaissance. Against the discourse identifying the early modern codification of Italian language and revival of Roman history with the birth of a national identity (an argument instrumentally reactivated by fascism in the twentieth century), the memory of Qara Köz reveals an ancient cultural and economic bond with the Orient.

The Tomb of Qara Köz stresses the importance of revising hybrid histories to counteract the current reinforcement of local identity claims, as in the case of the anti-immigration party the Northern League. Paying homage to the work *Fairytale* presented by Ai Weiwei in *Documenta 12*, when 1,001 Chinese people were brought to Kassel to become the audience for the exhibition, Ahmmed and Rahman invited Bengali immigrants to Venice to record memories of their journey of migration. The aim was to reconfigure the city as a space of overlapping voices of migrants and texts, including Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.

In Calvino's book, images of Venice filter through all the represented cities. In the main palace of Fedora, for example, every room contains a glass sphere with a miniature of the town in an ideal form. The citizens of Fedora can choose their favourite miniatures and imagine living in their dream-town: on the shores of a canal that does not exist any more or in the streets reserved to those elephants

banned from the 'real' Fedora. The structure of Qara Köz's tomb is reminiscent of Calvino's description of this palace. In the installation, each painted egg carrying the fragment of a story is an instrument for imagining a new relation with Venice and its representations. Interestingly, Calvino highlights that the palace with the small-scale reproductions of Fedora is a museum. Seen in this light, Ahmmed's installation also deals with new possibilities of art display. It envisages an image of the contemporary museum as an archive to be constantly reactivated in relation to the audience.

The night before the exhibition was officially opened, people stole some of the eggs and broke them against the floor and the adjacent walls. Every time the installation was restored, it was damaged again.[5] Some persons asked if they could keep one egg, activating a wide range of intimate and personal reactions with the installation. The public interacting dynamically with the artwork counteracted the fixity of the traditional concept of art fruition in the museum space. The reference to Fedora re-signifies the museum as an open archive. It challenges a view of the museum as a collection of works ordered by a sovereign rationality. Rather than burying or consecrating national histories, the envisaged museum, postcolonial and intercultural, could provide tools to reflect upon society and cultural change in a less structured and more interactive way.

With its stress on simultaneous temporalities and trans-border encounters, *Qara Köz* questions the power play initiated by capturing the subject in predefined frames, but it also promotes a process of de-orientalisation of the fictionality of dominant narratives defining East and West as monolithic blocks. The complex overlapping of narrations, autobiographies and images opposes the unilateral power of colonial domination and nationalism. A wider range of encounters highlights unexpected circumstances of travel and the creation of new aesthetics. In *Open*, Ahmmed's installation allows continuity between spaces and times that are too often compartmentalised in museum rooms and exhibitions. The city of Venice is revitalised by imagined and witnessed stories of migration, resisting fixed subject positions and inherited aesthetic forms.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed three recent art exhibitions, *Orientalism in Europe: From Delacroix to Kandinsky* (Munich, 2011), *Migrations: Journey into British Contemporary Art* (London, 2012) and *Open 14* (Venice, 2011), to trace a relation between the recent rise of interest in migrant art and the renewed attention to orientalist art in Europe. It indicated that emphasising the liminal subjectivity of orientalist and migrant artists could lead to romanticising the condition of migrancy and to effacing the colonial or imperial context of production of the

5 A tomb made of eggs strikes us as an apparent contradiction; built of living material, it points out the continuity between life and death, deconstruction and recreation, fixity and movement.

artworks. Moreover, the extensive catalogues of orientalist paintings on display in Munich and the British migratory art exhibited in London expose the limits inherent in more classical forms of museum exhibitions: the homogenising force classifying artists and their work in relation to their belonging appears orientalist.

On the other hand, the third exhibition presents a different trajectory. The dispersed site of *Open* in Venice suggested an alternative to the linearity of the museum exhibition. In that context, a close look at Ahmmed's *The Tomb of Qara Köz* pointed out the possibilities of exhibiting art after orientalism. In the fluctuating space of the lagoon, this mausoleum incorporated fictional and historical narratives to perform overlapping identities and the deconstruction of binary oppositions of East and West.

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Chapter 15
What Museum for Africa?

Itala Vivan

The question above raises interconnected cultural and political issues begging to be answered, both in Europe and Africa. A vision opens up of a future embracing the past yet steeped in the present. Such a question finds a keen listener in the postcolonial ear, quick to perceive the jarring frictions resonating in our contemporary world. At this point in history, the former temples of European empires – museums invented by imperial hegemonies – have gradually lost their original mission as absolute indicators of a universalising canon. They are often unable to metamorphose into the convincing alternatives required by an era of major changes. This is particularly true when Africa is involved. Yet, throughout the processes of change and its representations, a need persists for places and sites where human cultural artefacts can be collected, discussed and offered to a mixed and diverse public sharing a common concern for knowledge. This addresses a widely perceived aspiration towards creating a dialogue via objects. Hence the urge to renew existing museums through a process of re-creation, as well as to invent entirely new museums featuring places and spaces suited to and expressive of our present, weaves a dialogue with interlocutors no longer as passive targets of the museum discourse, but as free and active subjects of their own cultural role.

A Vexed Issue for both Europe and Africa

This chapter asks what a museum designed to accommodate, preserve and exhibit African artefacts could be. How should such a museum be designed and organised if it is located in Africa, and thus addresses the very producers of the cultures it represents, or subsequent generations? And what if the museum devoted to Africa is in Europe, with European citizens as its primary constituency? The two horns of the dilemma spark from a single issue – breaking colonial stereotypes and creating new spaces for dialogue, insight and interaction. Our theme splits into two directions, variants of a common postcolonial discourse told as either heterodiegetic or homodiegetic narratives.

The theme expands further, because there are many existing museums in Africa, and even more in Europe, created to collect and display artefacts of African origin. How do these museums fare when submitted to postcolonial critique? For the purposes of this analysis, it is useful to select a few museums and ask whether and why they appear qualified and/or suitable to satisfy the needs of

postcolonial societies and waves of global diaspora. Existing museums belong to different categories and historical periods, and are therefore rooted in vastly different political and cultural concepts – art museums, museums of ethnography, archaeology, science; museums created in colonial times, like the Tervuren, or after the end of colonisation, like the Branly or the Sainsbury Room. And what about African museums in Africa, like the Fondation Zinsou at Cotonou, the Musée National du Mali in Bamako or the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg? What obstacles should be avoided? What precedents rejected? What lessons should we learn from experience? What theoretical basis should provide the foundation for an ideal museum worthy of being called postcolonial?

From Colonial Museum to New Museum

The museum was born within European cultures: it first followed the drive of the European Renaissance, and then the impetus of revolutions generated by the Enlightenment. With the boom of empires, it was transformed into an effective storeroom for the (self-proclaimed) universal civilising mission that supported colonialism ideologically. Rivers of ink have gone into describing the sources of such an institution throughout history (Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

The museum has constantly changed: from the Galleria Celeste of the Gonzaga in Mantua – created to collect artworks according to the court's taste – to the giant collections of the Vatican Museums and the Musée du Louvre; from the *Wunderkammer* of exotic curiosities to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial expositions in London, Vienna and Paris. This flux shows an unceasing inner dynamism, with the museum as witness and example of its own time, even when it aims at enacting the past and celebrating memory, or when it undertakes the task of setting a perennial, universalising canon.

In our problematic and turbulent third millennium, vertiginous rhythms in technological innovation and unremitting accelerations in communication have speeded up the world, a world demanding to be perceived, narrated and represented in a fluid space, open towards the future. Museums face new challenges along with new epistemological perspectives, as witnessed by a growing inventiveness in the creation of museums (Marstine 2006). To answer our question, it is necessary to plunge into the zeitgeist and adopt it – that is, to enable the museum to express its own time according to a principle of necessary subjectivity (Appadurai 1996). With regard to African cultures and their representations, the museum must become truly postcolonial, not only chronologically, but constitutionally.

From Europe's Imperial Exposition to the Museum

The prototype of colonial exhibitions was the great exposition of imperial times, still apparent in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale at Tervuren. Established

in 1897–98 by King Leopold III of Belgium, the Tervuren, with its great variety of exhibits, remains a typical example of collections and displays structured as an encyclopaedia of empire. This is still true in spite of its fairly recent renewal. The poet Stephen Gray recently visited it. His postcolonial gaze reveals the accumulation of materials classified and enclosed in glass cases,

> carvings (fetishes, masks,
> with nails implanted or without, teeth, chips
> of mirrors and beadwork,
> incredibly naked and polished and later clothed)

prevented from telling their story and weaving the larger history of the ravages of colonialism to explain their relationship to Europe. He concludes bitterly:

> Here no chains, chopped hands,
> no shrunken heads on poles, nor the bullets that killed
> the brutes, nor is one ever named.
> … as we … drive off in rain
> the fat black rubber tyres bite and squelch
> on the broken stones, I hear
> the moan of those ten million souls we in comfort
> take our ease and
> sit upon, the progress of this great atrocity. (Gray 2009)

The Tervuren is a classic example of the systematic othering of the colonised world. Animal, vegetable and mineral exhibits are placed on the same level as scientific and ethnographic curiosities and various artefacts, all serving to illustrate the conqueror's power. Amputated from history, they are there to create wonder (Greenblatt 1991; Lionnet 2004), but also a vague repulsion mixed with a shiver of fear.

Strangely enough, the very recent Musée du quai Branly in Paris (2006) gives the visitor a similar impression. Hordes of beautiful artefacts assembled from former Paris public collections are displayed as a kind of non-European art that Jacques Chirac would have liked to (but dared not) define as primitive. Instead, they call it *art premier*, the same unfortunate adjective used for the Pavillon des Sessions (opened in 2000) at the Louvre (Amselle 2005; de L'Estoile 2007). The long controversy around the Branly bears witness to its extremely difficult birth, due to the resolute will of President Chirac along with the inspiration and active co-operation of the collector-merchant Kerchache. The result is a stylish building designed by Jean Nouvel, plunged into a dense garden recalling a savannah. The semi-obscure interior frames the African section – designed as a sequence of caves and walls in reddish clay. African critics and museologists were largely negative, criticising the de-historicisation of artefacts immersed in a sombre darkness, reminiscent of a colonial past (Musa 2007; Ndiaye 2007, 12–17; Traoré 2007).

Alban Bensa even described the Branly display as a 'loud and baroque scenario constantly reminding the visitor that these works are other and come from a remote otherness' (Bensa 2007, 169; my translation). Personally, I find the quai Branly display vastly disconcerting – technological forests darken Nouvel's windows, suggesting mysterious undertones. Artefacts are exhibited as exotic and remote, belonging to an indistinct otherness. There is no sign of a postcolonial renewal, in spite of its proud motto, 'The Branly, where cultures meet'.

Several great European museums have devoted their attention to African artefacts. The British Museum developed its Sainsbury Gallery (1999) for materials previously hosted at the former Museum of Mankind, as well as its own collections, including the wonderful Benin bronzes. Specialists have disapproved of various aspects of the Sainsbury Gallery. Christine Eyene, in particular, has criticised its 'ethnicising scenery' (Eyene 2007, 139; my translation) and the way ancient and contemporary works are exhibited one next to another without apparent reason. Furthermore, the Benin bronzes' captions do not explain their link to the slave trade.

In the last decade, however, the British Museum has undergone an interesting reorganisation due to its director, Neil MacGregor. His interpretation of the museum's functions opened new perspectives, in particular improving the approach to non-European exhibits. In a successful BBC broadcast followed by a book, MacGregor outlined the British Museum's mission: 'to tell the history of the world by deciphering the messages which objects communicate across time' – objects that 'speak of whole societies and complex processes rather than individual events, and sometimes have meanings far beyond the intention of their original makers' (MacGregor 2010, xv).

The British Museum's African collections have always been, and still are, adverse to categorisation, mixing items of ethnographic nature with works of enormous artistic value. This is the birthmark of most European collections, proof of the European reluctance towards reading African art. The European gaze marked Africa as the absolute other, hence the unwillingness of European art critics to evaluate African artworks as 'art' until their 'discovery' by the modernist generation of Paris artists. Yet even nowadays, established critics often seem embarrassed by the work of contemporary African artists, especially when hailing directly from Africa rather than from the diaspora. Museums in Africa could help in understanding and evaluating African art, as shown, amongst others, by the examples of the Fondation Zinsou, the Musée National du Mali and the National Gallery in Bulawayo. Thanks to the galleries in the Benin capital of Porto Novo, local artist Romuald Hazoumé's impressive works were exhibited in 2007 at the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Slavery and Museums

In this light, it is worth exploring exhibitions on slavery within European museums of Africa. The bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade (2007) has seen a

Figure 15.1 International Slavery Museum, Liverpool. Ibo village with young man (reconstruction). Photograph by Itala Vivan, 2007

number of initiatives, including the first International Slavery Museum – mounted in a wing of the old Maritime Museum in the port of Liverpool, formerly the hub of the triangular trade. It was a unique opportunity to invent something new in a field with no precedents. Unfortunately, curator and consultants missed the boat. They offered a display organised along lamentably old lines, starting with the reconstruction of a pseudo-African village similar to those in the infamous colonial expositions (Figure 15.1).

I attended its inauguration and judged it negatively – in spite of occasional details showing goodwill and a certain perceptiveness, such as a dark room creating a blank interval within the exhibition symbolising the frightening Middle Passage (Vivan 2008).

The representation of slavery is a very special case. It directly implicates Europe and America as well as Africa. One cannot evade the necessity of involving history at every step of the display, even though the persistent shirking of responsibilities has dulled memory and awareness on one side, while on the other present-day racial experience has transformed the immediacy of pain into a dull throb. Very few material objects survive. An astute representation should be based on a strong and fearless conceptual imagination. How to represent the horror and atrocity of the slave trade, its peculiar tragedy as a prolonged holocaust? Art appears most

Figure 15.2 Zanzibar Slavery Memorial (detail). Photograph by Itala Vivan, 2010

effective in recreating slavery's abyss of de-humanisation – for example, the grey and lonely statues of a monument in Zanzibar (Figure 15.2).

The empty spaces of the Maison des Esclaves in Gorée cry out to the ocean as it licks the outer walls with a sinister rhythm. The Slave House in Cape Town stands as a concrete historical memory finally freed from a mask trying to erase slavery imposed first by colonialism and then by apartheid. But up until now, it has been impossible to create a meaningful museum of slavery able to go beyond the status of archive or memorial, or (as in the case of Zanzibar and Gorée) deeper than an evocation through sheer imagination.

The changes within European museums of Africa arising out of historical events, political suggestions and the popular imagination are a challenge to researchers. For example, Annie Coombes (1994) has examined Victorian and Edwardian England in this manner, unveiling underlying mentalities and social constructs.

Museums in Africa

The necessity of reinventing museums – if not altogether inventing new ones – is even stronger in Africa, although the institution is not indigenous to the continent.

There, until the end of colonialism, the few existing museums, including those in Egypt, were designed on European models, if not directly by Europeans. Following a concept used by Mary-Louise Pratt, James Clifford has called museums 'contact zones' (Clifford 1997, 192–3), indicating a transformational space where arts and cultures hitherto marginalised are supposed to be integrated (Ndiaye 2007). However, such an integration is still a long way off. The persistent duality between the 'self' of hegemonic cultures and the 'other' of Africa – with all its attending stereotypes – can only be overcome via postcolonial approaches that should work for Africa as well as for the West.

Even though it belongs to the same conceptual field, museum practice in Africa differs from the West because of its past histories and present cultural conditions. Memory might need museums in order to survive, but the haemorrhage of art and artefacts from Africa – first caused by colonial plunder and then by greedy collectors and commerce – has been persistent and destructive. It has even been suggested that new African museums might have no objects (McLeod 2004). In the mean time, the wave of requests for the restitution of symbolically rich pieces mounts – but to no avail. One exception here would be the British Museum. At one point it sold Nigeria a small number of Benin bronze plaques and managed to sedate the reaction of public opinion by explaining they were duplicates. A feasible solution would be to develop a co-operative network through which African museums could obtain meaningful loans for long periods. A good example is the Branly's temporary loan of the Béhanzin throne to the Fondation Zinsou. However, there are concerns because the often precarious conditions in African museums make such loans risky.

On gaining independence, African countries focused on museums and made an effort to transform them into showcases of national prestige. Subsequently, weak cultural policies reduced early interest, negatively impacting on museums such as the Musée Monod in Dakar and the Lagos National Museum. There are instances of remarkable public initiatives, like the Musée National du Mali (Malé 2002). Furthermore, small institutions funded by private or international sponsors (like the Fondation Zinsou) appear fruitful. Françoise Vergès sought to create the Maison des Civilizations et de l'Unité Réunionnaise – where displays and installations were intended to represent Réunion's creolised society.[1]

South Africa, a Special Case

Post-apartheid South Africa is unique. Old museums have been converted according to different concepts and principles, changing representational perspectives and including new histories. New museums were created to host stories previously suppressed and/or denied, and tell the long history of resistance and revolution.

1 Unfortunately, recent political changes in the island's administration have brought an end to the Maison and closed it down.

Figure 15.3 Liliesleaf Farm and Museum, South Africa. Curiosity cabinet with memorabilia and documents. Photograph by Itala Vivan, 2012

Such a transformation might well be defined as utterly postcolonial in its essence (Vivan 2012).

Built to celebrate European art traditions, colonial wars and achievements, old museums excluded Africans – considered objects of conquests and bearers of what apartheid culture called 'ethnic art'. The Cape Town South African Museum housed, amongst other artefacts, a group of plaster casts of the San people (Bushmen), sculpted based on real human beings in the nineteenth century. In 1993, artist Pippa Skotnes made an installation with the broken pieces of such casts – a gesture meant to deprecate the colonial gaze, denounce the KhoiSan genocide and celebrate a new approach to difference by releasing and raising voices from the past. However, the living San people disapproved, perceiving the artwork as offensive, causing a cultural incident in the history of racialised South Africa (Davison 1998; Skotnes 1996). This episode highlights the difficulty in dealing with the tortured history of a colonial past, raising the question of who authorises and narrates a memory which is very much alive in Africa.

Since 1994, nobody in South Africa has damaged or destroyed monuments, memorials and sites of colonial pasts, white conquests, or even apartheid triumphs. Public art collections were redesigned to accommodate African art of excellence.

Old buildings housed new selections of artists, while new museums were created for contemporary art without racial distinctions – in Johannesburg, for instance, Wits University created the Wits Art Museum. It was, and still is, an extraordinary flourishing of new museums varying in inspiration but convergent in scope.

I recently visited the newest offering, a strangely attractive museum near Rivonia, where the underground African National Congress leadership was arrested in 1963. The old Liliesleaf Farm and its surroundings remain an authentic witness to the legendary tale of the Black Pimpernel, Nelson Mandela. The restored farm and cottages emerge as a theatre of hide-and-seek – the sites of a risky mission full of adventures that have gone down in history. A unique blend of historical reality and secrets of the struggle create a strongly suggestive atmosphere. Some sections have been left empty, apart from life-size photographs; other spaces have been turned into technological distributors of information (Figure 15.3). This is a model cultural museum.

Again in South Africa, one can find an imaginative example of inventive cultural sites embodying postcolonial inspiration – the Tshwane Freedom Park, soon to include archives and a museum. Designed by a team of artists, architects and intellectuals, it sits on a hill facing the bleak Voortrekker Monument of Boer inspiration. Its stones and vegetation are entirely indigenous. Its design tells an alternative history: Africa as the cradle of mankind and birthplace of new liberties. Inner spaces of meditation and remembrance induce thought and contemplation. The meandering Wall of Names bears the names of thousands of people who died for freedom. Here too there were contestations, from those who wanted the Wall to include soldiers who fought in Mozambique and Angola against democratic governments.

Johannesburg's Constitution Hill is another model example of a new postcolonial venue – created on the site of the old English Fort, former symbol of colonial power, and infamous prison before and during apartheid. The very building of the Constitutional Court is a visual representation of the principles of freedom, transparency and inclusiveness it embodies. Next to it, the old prisons for men and women have been transformed into a cultural museum. Here the new generations can read their past while enjoying the beauty of luscious gardens and a stunning view over the city of gold, Egoli, the African name for Johannesburg.

South Africa is an example of how museums can play relevant roles in the process of nation-building, especially when communities have to deal with a past of divisions, struggles and wars induced by colonial oppression.

Abandonment and Transformation

The House of Wonders in Zanzibar – a stately building originally erected as a private princely palace – is now a cultural museum hosting Swahili cultural artefacts in an effort to celebrate tradition and create unity (Figure 15.4). The exhibits refer back to a world of mixed races and cultures. The activities in Zanzibar's Stone

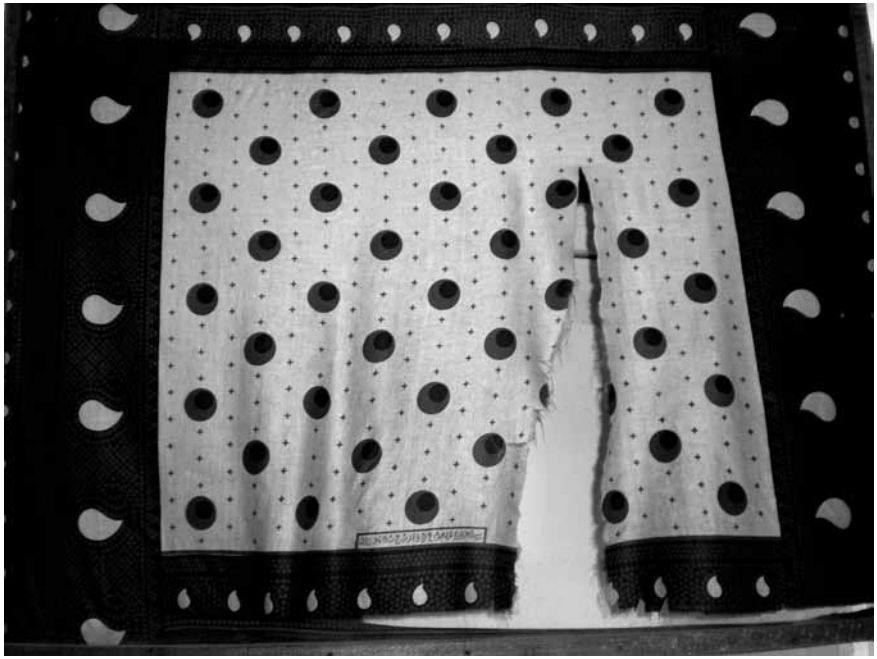

Figure 15.4 The House of Wonders, Zanzibar. A torn and dusty kanga, symbol of neglect and decay. Photograph by Itala Vivan, 2012

Town are portrayed, and the history of commerce along the coasts of East Africa is told, featuring life-size and model dhows (Sheriff 2000). Unfortunately, the whole museum has fallen into disrepair and many precious items have disappeared.

Similar situations are regrettably frequent in African museums, abandoned by public institutions or mismanaged by the state, even though they are full of treasures. This is the case with the Lagos National Museum. There, extraordinary Nok statues are left to disintegrate in open courtyards. The derelict sites, monuments and museums often (but not necessarily) originated in the colonial era. They may have been abandoned out of hatred for colonialism. Examples include Italian-style buildings in Asmara and a plaque for the Italian soldiers who died in the battle of Adua. Even Saint-Louis in Senegal has fallen victim to a similar attitude: it was once a superb colonial settlement, now a melancholy old town.

Public African indifference to old African art is not due to carelessness. It is symptomatic of cultural schizophrenia, writes Yacouba Konaté (2007), referring to African artefacts being discarded, sold or thrown away as garbage by their owners due to the pressure of colonial value systems. As suggested by Frantz Fanon, this situation needs to be counteracted by a cultural integration of the African self: a process that could find an ideally fluid space in the museum.

The postcolonial museum should be innovative and situated in local cultures, needs and customs, refraining from imported and compulsive models reminiscent of colonial rule and hegemony. It would thus become a viable cultural experience and practice for the societies it is addressing. Its shape and structure could result in a space for social experiments from below, open not only to material artefacts, but also to the immaterial heritage of African cultures, including their oral traditions and literatures.

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PART V
Future Memories, Alternative Archives

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Chapter 16
Egyptian Chemistry: From Postcolonial to Post-humanist Matters

Ursula Biemann

Egyptian Chemistry has involved making a radical break with my long-term investigation of migratory systems. The move from a postcolonial to a post-humanist practice is by no means simply an expansion, embracing a larger, more universal scope. On the contrary, it involves a fundamental shift in the metaphysical understanding of how differences come to matter. In the case of *Egyptian Chemistry*, it became a voyage into molecular structures.

The question of how reality constitutes itself, how things materialise, and specifically what role an artist can play in this, has been on my agenda for years. I have engaged with a number of tools that could help me understand the dynamics of discursive practices in the material world. A crucial instrument in this investigation has been feminist theory, deeply influenced by postcolonial and race theory, which introduced the notion of performativity as a way to rethink the production of differences and boundaries, both in terms of identity and geography. A number of cultural geographers have contested the view of space as a neutral backdrop against which events unfold. First and foremost was Henri Lefebvre, who insisted that space and society are mutually constituted and that space is an agent of change, playing an active role in the unfolding of events. All this required a rethinking of how reality can be imagined without fixed coordinates.

The Spatialisation of Migration

These theoretical concerns were at the heart of *Sahara Chronicle*, a video-research project on the clandestine transit-migration across the Sahara which I conducted during 2006–2009. For the most part, the migrants in question are from West Africa, and use the Sahel zone and the Maghreb as a transit space to reach the Mediterranean. In a number of field trips to Morocco, Niger, Libya, Mauritania and Senegal, I trailed the hotspots, documenting their vast migration system. This ensemble of videos does not pursue a notion of absolute space as rendered in maps with grids that locate naturally bounded features such as land or a people. Such a form of representation turns a dynamic temporal process into real, physical things inside a named container. *Sahara Chronicle*, on the contrary, is a videocartography project that maps the correlation between economic factors,

historical conditions, spatial and epistemological practices, cultural specificities and ecological developments, all of which play into this particular kind of mobility in the Sahara. Attention was focused on Agadez in the heart of Niger, which is the capital of the Tuareg and an important traffic node for migration toward Libya and Algeria. The unresolved forceful division of Tuareg territories, now redistributed among five nations, has forced them into a transnational existence by definition. They practise a very fluid kind of unbounded space that clashes with the laws of land ownership of the occupying powers. The Tuareg rebellion for independence in the 1990s was directly linked to the uranium mining that had been going on in their territory without their benefiting from the wealth generated. So they sought alternative economic opportunities and began to traffic in migrants.

Sahara Chronicle works with a notion of spatialisation as a never-ending, power-laced process engaged in by a wide variety of actors – water bearers, smugglers, Red Crescent personnel, rebel leaders, drone surveillance sensors, refugees, fishermen and so on. My approach to migration in this and other works is that of an intertwined system of great agency, topographic knowledge and connectivity that together generate migratory space. I use the video camera as a cognitive tool to write counter-geographies, geographies which, rather than affirming and reinforcing control regimes of borders and mobility, document the ways in which people subvert and transgress borders and obstacles that have been imposed on them. I favour a systemic approach to migration over one grounded in the migratory experience per se.

The installation is a direct reflection of these aesthetic strategies in that the videos are exhibited simultaneously as an arrangement in the museum space, some on monitors, some projected. So there is a temporal dimension of synchronicity as well. With its loose interconnectedness and its widespread geography, *Sahara Chronicle* mirrors the migration network itself. It does not aim to construct a homogenous, overarching, contemporary narrative of a phenomenon that has long roots in colonial Africa and is extremely diverse and fragile in its present social organisation and human experience. No authorial voice, or any other narrative device, is used to link the carefully chosen scenes together. The installation is an account of the spatial practice of migration by means of logistic nodes, border passages, places of hiding, regrouping, detention and so on. The space in between these specific sites is only brought together in the minds of the viewers. Implicating such minds in the geographic production, as it were, is a way of using them as a psycho-social resource to complete and extend the work. This, and a number of previous videos I have made, are all based on the premise that reality is something that comes into being through the movement of people and that this is how space unfolds and becomes meaningful. I do this by using investigative fieldwork as an artistic practice so that it becomes part of the process of reality-making and world-making.

I use the term ‘counter-geography’ to describe the imaging of the subversive practices of space and mobility of clandestine migrants, weaving a complementary narrative to the classic media representation of illegal migrants. The latter images

tend to focus on surveillance and containment, mostly pointing the camera at failed attempts to flee. My videos fill a representative vacuum left by classic media images. Fieldwork is central in my performative understanding of artistic practice, for it takes into account the fact that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing, but from a direct material engagement with the world. That is how artistic practices inscribe themselves in the processes of materialisation that are going on all around. That is how I inscribe myself in the space of mobility which I document.

The Performativity of Definition

This whole question of how things materialise is tremendously important if one aspires to have any sort of impact on the world. How do matter and meaning intertwine? This elementary question is relevant to institutionalisations of all kind, including museums. Strangely enough, quantum physics can help with this question, for it takes the notion of performativity to a whole different level. For quantum theorists too, reality is not something pre-existing 'out there', it comes into being by measurement – that is, through attempts at defining boundaries and properties. Quantum physics asserts that the properties of an object are indeterminate *before* its measurement. It is not that we do not *know* the object before that moment, but only once it has been measured is it clear whether it is particle or wave, or more remarkably, both particle *and* wave. Indeterminacy is a state that is difficult to grasp and actually quite disturbing. Only in the instant of observation is it identified as either a particle, in which case it has weight and is positioned in space and time, or a wave, and thus unlocatable, pure energy. The indeterminacy is resolved by the process of measurement with all its specificities, human, technological, institutional and so on. It is this performative moment that generates matter through a differentiating act. The object observed is inseparable from the agencies of observation, and the two intra-actively constitute each other in making worlds. This is how we can be part of the world in its differential becoming. This is not the same as participatory observation – although this too is a form of quantum behaviour – nor as saying that context determines perception and hence the meaning of an object, as in an institutional critique which assumes that all you have to do is recontextualise an object for its meaning to change. Quantum theory demolishes any claim that we can have a knowledge *of* the world, from above and outside, and tells us that there can only be knowing as part of being. It is not simply an epistemological understanding, but also an ontological one. This is how reality constitutes itself, both materially and discursively.

By the same token, it is not enough to put the observer/knower back in the picture and merely acknowledge our situatedness – as feminist theory proposed by introducing a positioned epistemology to counter a universalising humanism. It goes a step further by taking account of the fact that we are part of the world's differential becoming. Difference *is* what matters, as theoretical particle physicist

Karen Barad writes in her insightful book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Difference is the process of mattering. The world articulates itself differently. That is how one part of the world makes itself known to another part of the world. Part of the world becomes bounded and propertied in its emergent intelligibility to another part of the world. This process generates complementarity. Measurement produces determinate values for the measured quantity, leaving the complementary quantities indeterminate. We are constantly producing a world, half of which remains invisible. What matters is marked off from that which is excluded from mattering, but not once and for all. Exclusions constitute an open space of agency, they are the changing conditions of possibilities. So far, critical social theories have mainly focused on the power relations that produce exclusions with the aim of reintroducing and strengthening the invisible complementarity, much as I have done with videos that place female assembly workers or clandestine migrants back in the picture – to bring the invisible into visibility. Everyone can see the utility of this strategy: it does something concrete, has a defined purpose, has an effectiveness built into it. But given the fact that the world continually articulates itself differently, there is no doubt that it is also a Sisyphean labour.

Quantum behaviour helps us understand what knowledge does and how it relates to being. It demonstrates that practices of knowing and being are mutually implicated, not isolated entities. And furthermore, knowing is not a human privilege. As Barad argues, every living thing able to distinguish between self and the environment of which it is a part, by recognising danger, food, shelter and so on, in order to survive, is involved in this process of mattering. The performative humanist impulse to categorise, differentiate and study has created hard boundaries of demarcation, which have kept large parts of the world from mattering 'in a certain way'.

The museum is not simply a place to store, represent and exhibit previously existing facts and artefacts on difference, it is the apparatus through which difference comes into being. The greatest problem the museum faces in postcolonial times is not a matter of inclusion or exclusion, but the fact that the museum itself is the discursive-material apparatus through which this very distinction matters (through criteria, typologies, by creating differentiality, judgement). The museum is a boundary-drawing device. More importantly, perhaps, the material-discursive apparatus of the museum not only interprets what has already materialised, but sets the criteria for the conditions of future possibilities. Quantum physics teaches us that the limitation is not imposed by the actual information the observer has extracted about the object of interest, but lies in the information that could in principle be extracted within the constraints established by the preparation. The mere fact that things become distinguishable creates possibilities of definition.

So, to challenge traditional epistemology, we cannot merely welcome females, slaves, animals and other dispossessed others into the field of the knowers from which they have been excluded, In any case, this self-empowered process has been going on for quite some time already, and now a more radical post-humanist vision is needed. The 'postcolony' is neither a place nor a time period, but first

and foremost a critical engagement with humanist principles. The postcolonial museum is one that challenges Humanism. This goes beyond a critique of Eurocentrism to propose one that fundamentally rethinks the nature–culture dynamics and the way mind and matter interrelate, not as two separate units, but from within, in a molecular alliance, so to speak.

Egyptian Chemistry: A Reconfiguration on a Molecular Level

Let me now turn to *Egyptian Chemistry* (2012), a new video research-creation.[1] The project basically explores the chemistry and agro-ecology of the Nile. Like *Sahara Chronicle*, it is a composite work, made up of a number of videos. With *Egyptian Chemistry*, I have pursued my effort to dislocate the container model of space as well as the spatialisation of time as a simple continuum. In addition, I engage here in a third relation that now needs reconsideration: the mind–matter dynamic. For this reason, I turned to quantum physics and to other proliferating theories in the range of speculative realism and relational ontologies, such as Bruno Latour's actor–network scheme, and all sorts of emerging theories that plead for the democracy of all actors, human and non-human. Now that the boundaries of gender and ethnicity, as well as those between humans and technology, have been rigorously dismantled, we are face to face with the last stronghold of difference that separates us humans from the world. I see an interest, and indeed a certain urgency, in seriously engaging my artistic production – my fieldwork, signifying practice, organising system, my whole cosmology – with the possibility of overcoming this fictitious boundary that sets us apart as subjects.

Egyptian Chemistry explores the hybrid water ecologies of Egypt, and the Nile in particular, to probe transformations that take place from within. Egypt is a hydraulic civilisation. Egyptians have long built large-scale engineering projects like dams and canals, and launched land reclamation ventures on a literally pharaonic scale in order to reallocate water across time and space for communities and entire ecosystems. There is almost a mythical dimension to the impact of the High Dam on the fate of Egypt. When I first came to Aswan, the scenery was eerie. The naked concrete structure looked like a spaceship crashed into the river valley. Driven deep into the ground and partially submerged, it backs up the water coming from Ethiopia. The High Dam is a time barrier. It has changed floods, seasons, crops and species. The planetary positioning is one of discontinuity.

It has been clear to every president since Anwar Abdel Nasser that to be in power in Egypt, you need to be in control of water. This has prompted a huge land redistribution campaign in favour of the peasants. In the 1990s, under the

1 *Egyptian Chemistry* was first exhibited in a smaller version at Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum in November 2012, and complete at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein in March 2013.

Figure 16.1 Video still from Ursula Biemann, *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012. Earth sampling at Toshka, a giant land reclamation project on the Upper Nile

neo-liberal rule of Mubarak, local food, and particularly wheat production, which is a staple for millions, was aggressively replaced by export crops cultivated by large-scale agro-industries. Nasser's land reform was systematically dismantled.

Hydraulic infrastructures are absolutely vital for the national food supply since there is virtually no rainfall in this country. These built environments – these hydro-engineering projects – are an expression of how governments conceive of 'nature' and place it at the service of society; they embody particular ecological paradigms. Any dam, barrage or irrigation canal paves the way for the commodification of water. By processing and facilitating water, it automatically becomes something that can be charged for. Egyptian peasants take it for granted that in their lush Nile Valley, farmland comes with the appropriate amount of water. And for the time being, Egypt has not proceeded to privatise water, although large amounts of Nile water are diverted to service developments for industrial agriculture in the desert.

Toshka (Figure 16.1) is one of these colossal development projects, drawing water from Lake Nasser into a desert depression. Sterile lands, out of bounds for human life, are turned into field labs for testing new ways of being human. Parallel valleys, desert colonies and artificial food production have manufactured a world in which science is programmed to overcome nature, turning desert dust into soggy fertility.

Egypt's topography is changing. Extensive irrigation is drawing heavily on the underground aquifers, causing the Nile Delta to sink at the rate of a centimetre a year. Among the futuristic land reclamation ventures, there is a pioneering integrated seawater agriculture project on the Red Sea called New Nile Co. Apart from food

production, the project will also attempt to build up biomass with mangroves and other seawater plants to compensate for the dwindling ground, which will leave the delta exposed to rising sea levels. More importantly, the ecology of the Nile has changed due to the High Dam and a series of barrages built in the last century. These structures have put an end to the migration of fish from Ethiopia through the Mediterranean into the Atlantic and back. High-quality species suited to fast-running currents have disappeared and made room for the large, lazy tilapia. And, as a result of the diminished supply of oxygen that used to speed up their anaerobic decay, organic pollutants have now turned into biochemical combat units infecting pools and reaching land through the billions of irrigation canals. All these changes reconfigure Egypt on a molecular level.

Egyptian Chemistry explores the interaction between hydraulic, chemical, natural and human forces which together form the hybrid ecologies of Egypt. Inscribed in these Egyptian hydraulic agro-ecologies are countless histories – those of modernisation, continuous land reforms, artificial fertilisation, insect migration, peasant activism. These historiographies of water culture and politics have a decentralising impact, and resist, to some extent, the neo-liberal agro-management models which have prevailed in the last fifteen years. Sidelined by neo-liberal government policies affecting credit lines, fertiliser and water supplies, small farming in the Nile Valley has become unprofitable and the young generation has moved to the cities seeking work. The urban centres where the revolution broke out in January 2011 were full of people from the villages who had experienced a continuous aggravation of their livelihood. The revolution has unleashed new visions and initiatives, in particular the desire for non-governmental organisation and visionary sustainable projects. I went deep into the Delta to meet some of the peasants who have recently begun to organise themselves into unions. Under Mubarak, unionising was prohibited, so I was curious to hear what their main concerns were. Shahinda Makal is a leading activist in their struggle.

Before being tamed by the engineers, the Nile was more generous and democratic. With every high flood, it spread its fertilising mud evenly over the entire Nile Valley. Then, with the introduction of hydraulic structures, fertilisers became chemical, marketable, and hence subject to the political mechanism of agricultural subsidies: a matter of the social sphere.

It is these pivotal sites where natural and social processes intersect that are of most interest to me. We take it for granted that scientific and engineering efforts are generally directed toward making nature a better and more efficient resource for the human species. The focus is understandably on human achievement. But if we see past such anthropocentric visions, we have to admit that indeed, humans have used the force of the Nile, but so have lazy fish, suspended pollutants, ammonium nitrate, cement factories and wheat crops, all of which have their say in the video. The river has to be thought of as a hybrid interactive system that has always been organic, technological and social all at once. The Nile is like a machine with enormous potential natural agency – electric, genetic, chemical, thermal – a comprehensive expression of nature's capacity to produce energy.

Figure 16.2 Video still from Ursula Biemann, *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012. Water sampling in the Nile Delta

This approach sees human agency as one among many actors in the generation of a situation, some of which are signifying, others not. A particularly interesting site in this respect is the hydraulic model of a section of the Nile near Asiut where a new dam is to be built. The physical model is the size of a giant factory floor and is an exact reproduction of the Nile bed over a stretch of 3 kilometres. It is used to test the river's behaviour when obstructed by hydraulic architectures. The engineers drop paper scraps from the high ceiling down onto the running water, and the serial photographs of the operation reveal the flow patterns of the river so that the structures can be adjusted accordingly. The model acts as the temporary interface between water and mind, between hydraulic force and mathematics. Together they form a hybrid consciousness.

As a coalescing agent interacting with so many vital functions, water vigorously shapes Egyptian life. But it is *not* enough to speak about the aesthetics of a hydraulic culture simply as a set of recurring spatial and infrastructural motifs, we have to consider water – this indispensable primary substance, this ur-liquid – as a dominant structure of experience that passes through the very molecules of a historical reality. In conjunction with hydraulic technologies, water is not only deeply transformative, it generates a whole range of new products. Altered water chemistry changes soil quality and entire agro-ecologies, thus shaping land management, urbanisation, food supply chains and other collective organisations such as farmers' unions and revolutions. The bonds between all these components are neither causal nor simply economic. The ontology behind *Egyptian Chemistry* is that they form into dynamic interactive clusters equipped with agency where desert developers and tiny water pollutants unfold equally effective actions.

The art project is based on field research where water samples were taken at 16 locations along the Nile and around the Delta wetlands (Figure 16.2). Their chemistry was probed and the locations documented in their socio-ecological configuration. Additionally, in a series of fairly short videos, *Egyptian Chemistry* brings the knowledge from multiple sources – from atmospheric physics to hydraulic modelling, peasant activism, agro-science, metaphysics and ecology – into a single forum, forming an epistemogram or a sort of epistemological cartography.

This more wholesome approach goes back to an ensemble of practices encompassing chemical, biological, metallurgical and philosophical dimensions, represented by the original name Al Khemia, long before the epistemological division into disciplines and subdisciplines set in. Al Khemia happened to be the ancient word for Egypt, meaning 'the Black Land', possibly due to the muddy Nile floods periodically fertilising the land. The term alludes to the vision that, before anything else, the earth is a mighty chemical body where the crackling noise of the forming and breaking of molecular bonds can be heard at all times.

Metachemistry as Organising Principle

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the project does not use geography as a co-ordinating principle, it draws on metachemistry as a theory that explains the transformation of matter in its molecular structure. In chemistry, substances

Figure 16.3 Video still from Ursula Biemann, *Egyptian Chemistry*, 2012. Water chemistry laboratory in art installation, Contemporary Art Forum, Alexandria

are characterised entirely by their willingness to bond and transform into new compounds. In a highly selective disposition, molecular bonds are constantly forming or breaking, inducing radical shifts in the identity of matter, relentlessly reworking the planetary composition. Chemistry is a theory of internal relations, a recursive system where no class is defined in isolation. Everything that is, results from previous reactions. There is no beginning, only chemical insiders and their sequential genealogies.

The core motif in *Egyptian Chemistry* is the collection of water samples at specific sites along the Nile, some of which are rural, some industrial, others urban. Another video, directly related to the first one, documents the same young Egyptian, this time in a white coat, as he brings the Nile water samples into the installation of *Egyptian Chemistry* at the Contemporary Art Forum in Alexandria, where he rebottles them into chemistry lab glasses (Figure 16.3).

Egyptian Chemistry is almost an attempt to invent videographically a new form of materialist universality, one that is fragile, plural, ragged, full of holes, yet somehow coalesced by the muddy oneness of the planet itself. This new proposition works along the lines of scientific naturalism, the methodologies of the social sciences, particularly ethnography, but also with poetry, aesthetics and the mythic imagination. I am not primarily focusing on strategies of representation. I have come to realise that if we only culturalise the discourse in terms of the physical and chemical transformations our planet is currently undergoing by prioritising meaning and representation, we fail to address a deeper problem. For if we are to speak about the non-human world – weather patterns, organic pollutants, copper atoms – it will not suffice to deploy an anthropocentric discourse. Not everything comes into being through human intention, we need to examine the ways in which human and non-human realities emerge together in a variety of formations. Rather than through a particular set of criteria, this is more likely to happen through the hybrid consciousness engendered by the assemblage of technological, social and natural stuff, where some elements signify, others do not. Metachemistry grasps this turbulent instance of physical and epistemic change and propels us into a slightly altered dimension that can only be invoked mythically through space travel, time barriers and the interbiospheric mobility of species.

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Chapter 17
‘The Lived Moment’: New Aesthetics for Migrant Recollection

Peter Leese

Looking back from 2010, John Berger described *A Seventh Man* as ‘a little book of life-stories, a sequence of lived moments – such as one finds in a family photo album’ (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 8). In 1975, when it was first published, writer John Berger and photographer Jean Mohr intended their ‘book about the experience of Migrant Workers in Europe’ as both social critique and political intervention. They hoped, not entirely in vain, ‘to start a debate, and to encourage, amongst other things, international working-class solidarity’ (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 7). Yet while it was initially dismissed by critics in the mid-1970s as an awkward mix of poetic and polemic, this portrayal of ‘lived moments’ subsequently found an unexpected readership. In translation, the book was taken up in the global South. It continues to be read in Istanbul, Madrid and Damascus, in the places from which migrant workers set off, and by those who themselves become migrant workers.

The appeal to this particular audience suggests an approach, a set of aesthetic strategies, which incorporate their subject, which speak to the experience of migrants rather than merely ‘on behalf of’ or ‘for’ those whose lives they describe. In the search for richer, more meaningful presentations of migration in the context of the museum, Berger and Mohr’s ‘subjectivist’ approach suggests a rendition of migrant experience which is meaningful because, for those who have lived it, it is recognisable. I will return to this idea at the end of the chapter, but note here that just as in 1975, the lives of labour migrant workers who arrive from beyond Europe’s borders often go unacknowledged, undetailed and unexplored. *A Seventh Man*, by contrast, is filled with vivid, individual specificity as it details the ‘set pieces’ of migrant experience: departure, transit and arrival. The authors attend closely to the mixed emotions that accompany separation, to the disorienting sensations of arrival at an unknown destination:

> Everything looks new. The way people walk and move about at different levels, as though each level was unmistakably the ground. The surfaces walked on, or touched. The unusual sound which a usual movement makes. The seamless joints between things. Even glass looks different here, thicker and less brittle. The newness of the substance of things combines with the incomprehensibility of the language. (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 71)

In such passages, and in the composite figure of 'He: The migrant', *A Seventh Man* tells one variation of a common story, and having lived such a life, former or present migrant readers may better recall and consider their own circumstances. In addition, reviewing this account across the years since its publication, migrant readers may better measure change from generation to generation, movement from there to here, the passage of time from past to present.

The changing ways in which journalists, social commentators and sociologists, engravers, photographers or film-makers have attempted to render, or preferred to avoid, such 'lived moments' is a revealing theme in the historical exploration of migrant experience. This 'subjectivist' approach has its own traditions and conventions, but remains the concern of a politically engaged minority. To fully describe how Berger and Mohr communicate the experience of migration, and to consider more fully how it might prove useful for an archive or museum, requires an elaboration of the tradition to which *A Seventh Man* contributes, and of the artistic techniques which the authors developed. To assess the continuing relevance of the 'subjectivist' aesthetic, I here consider a more recent account within the same tradition. Michael Winterbottom's 2002 feature film *In This World* has many connections to *A Seventh Man*, but also develops its approach to reflect the new global economic system as well as more recently expanded notions of autonomy, individuality and agency which Berger and Mohr acknowledge have emerged since 1975 (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 7–10).

Berger and Mohr's Migrant Aesthetic

A Seventh Man intervenes in a protracted, highly politicised tussle over what it means to be a migrant. This mattered in 1975, as it does today, because the pooling of mobile labour has been integral to the development of global capitalism: since the time of European indenture and the emergent slave trade in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such workers have powered the growth of transnational economies. The meaning of migrant labour is especially revealing for Berger and Mohr since an understanding of systematic exploitation morally discredits capital's profit-driven self-justifications.

Historically, the usual form of migrant representation is 'documentarist': observation from afar. The less common form, of which Berger and Mohr are among the most compelling advocates, is 'subjectivist': intimation from 'up close'. Both approaches are continually present in the long tradition of migrant representation and life-story-making: for example, in the indistinct boundaries between 'observer' and 'migrant' accounts, the 'fictional histories' of the eighteenth century, or in the engraved portraits and reportage of the nineteenth century (Bannet 2011, 1–3; Leese et al. 2002). In the latter part of the twentieth century, Berger and Mohr capture a moment of rising interest in subjectivity as they re-work an older set of aesthetic strategies which give weight to particularities of time and place, to specific social relations and mentalities. As *A Seventh Man*

puts it: 'to try to understand the experience of another it is necessary to dismantle the world as seen from one's own place within it, and to reassemble it as seen from his' (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 96–7). The difficulty is, then, to imagine the absence of opportunity, dignity and choice which confronts the underfed. Yet any naming of the task itself misleads, since there can be no straightforward evocation of another's state of mind: 'The subjectivity of others does not simply constitute a different interior attitude to the same external facts. The constellation of facts, of which he is the centre, is different' (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 98).

A Seventh Man emerges from a growing post-Second World War interest in culture as ethnography and the democratising possibilities of the mass media. The parallel rise of oral history in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, is both as historical discipline and as grassroots activist movement (Abrams 2010, 3–9). Berger and Mohr add to these concerns their scepticism of conventional evidence, documentation or archives, and their acute awareness of intersubjectivity between author, audience and subject. Both these themes are explored in their restless working out of avant-garde techniques: for instance, in the single- or double-page spreads which juxtapose a holiday poster with a snapshot of elderly women and young children in a village, or in a photograph of workers waiting on a railway station platform (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 184–5 and 220–21). Other kinds of contrasting, re-contextualising visual evidence are employed: work manual diagrams, historical or publicity photographs, and paintings; a wide-angle view of a factory worker on a shop floor on one page, and a close-up of that same worker's face on the following page (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 108–9, 114 and 172). This mixing and matching of images to create new visual contrasts as well as to suggest new meanings is enhanced by the lack of identifying references to time or place. Without such references, each picture takes on an artificial or 'fictional' quality, and heightens the reader's awareness of how the subject, the migrant, might see or even stand inside such a scene. Similarly various written sources are quoted in the text, but for the most part they are only cited in the 'Acknowledgements': Attila Jozsef's poem 'The Seventh', which gives the book its title; Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*; economic and political commentaries; Joyce's *Ulysses* on people and trams in the city, and Karl Marx and Henry Ford, with their diametrically opposed views on repetitive labour. Here again the authors explain their intention not to 'divert attention from a larger truth' by reference to specifics of time or place, but rather to achieve for their account a 'universality' (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 241).

A Seventh Man emerges from Berger's engagement with the oppositional artistic and political theory of the inter-war years. Its authors are interested in wider notions of truth that can be gleaned from a particular consciousness, but at the same time, in the consciousness of migrants there is a symptom of a more commonly felt estrangement inherent in modern capitalist society. Hence, for instance, the cultivation of a 'dialogic' relationship between image and text, or creation of image/text contrasts in genre and typology, which finds its antecedents in Tucholsky and Heartfield's *Deutschland, Deutschland über*

Alles (1929). Likewise, Berger's model of meaning production, his awareness of how to allude to the consciousness of migrant workers, is informed by Lukacs's exploration in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) of social relations as 'reified' (Roberts 1998, 129–34; Merrifield 2012, 62–4). *A Seventh Man* is in this sense a profoundly political work. It attempts to disrupt the apparently objective relations between migrant worker and host society by visualising the experiences and expressing the emotions of those who are otherwise hidden, thereby exposing the 'production' of their human awareness. Simultaneously, *A Seventh Man* seeks to disrupt and remake the awareness of readers, from whom the common human experiences of movement, mobility and displacement, the economic basis of human relations, are equally hidden. Berger's opening statement plays out this thought:

> In a dream the dreamer wills, acts, reacts, speaks, and yet submits to the unfolding of a story which he scarcely influences. The dream happens to him. Afterwards he may ask another to interpret it. But sometimes a dreamer tries to break his dream by deliberately waking himself up. This book represents such an intention within a dream which the subject of the book and each of us is dreaming. (Berger and Mohr [1975] 2010, 11)

Berger and Mohr's intention is, then, to refuse the distinction between fiction and history, between word and image, between subject and object. By placing all of these within a dialogic framework, writer and photographer seek to expand their working method, which has at its centre the humanistic values of 'empathy, exile and metaphor'. As Nikos Papastergiadis suggests in his discussion of Berger's work: 'We need a form of recognition that is neither sentimental nor abstract, a code of interaction between the self and the other that admits the reflexivity of both positions and a mode of criticism which opens that potential space within society for responding to alternatives' (Papastergiadis 1993, 5)

The purpose of Berger and Mohr's visual and textual strategies, as John Roberts argues in *The Art of Interruption* (1998), is the creation of a counter-archive. Through this process of gathering and displaying, a collective, democratic expression of 'the lived moment' becomes possible. The effect of this counter-archive is also to disassemble and remake our interpretive framework, our sense of who migrants are and how they live, which in turn allows us to better grasp 'the experience of another' (Roberts 1998, 133). As Berger writes in the third of his major collaborations with Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (1982), it is by this process that the deceptive 'now-ness' of photographs achieves a truth-telling quality: 'It allows what they [photographs] show to be appropriated by reflection. The world they reveal, frozen, becomes tractable. The information they contain becomes permeated with feeling. Appearances become the language of a life lived' (Berger and Mohr 1982, 289). By jamming the wavelengths of normal transmission, by amplifying, repeating and de-familiarising, Berger and Mohr draw attention to viewer, subject and audience. Objectification gives way

to possible interiorities, so that the audience may see a version of the migrant's own 'image-memories'.

Michael Winterbottom's Migrant Aesthetic

A Seventh Man is part of a larger set of concerns expressed by Berger and Mohr across three books. It is preceded by *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor* (1967) and followed up by *Another Way of Telling* (1982). All three books address the lived experience of impoverished rural people. This loosely connected trilogy also examines the aesthetics of photography, the wider social world of visual experience and expression, as well as the 'meaning of appearances' (Berger and Mohr 1982, 7). Another central theme is the cultural deprivation of significant portions among any given population, particularly their lack of resources to interpret, articulate or transmit their own experience. Yet, as Berger argues in *A Fortunate Man*, this lack of resources should not be taken to mean that the inner experience which cannot be expressed is straightforward or simple. Rather, each holds within her- or himself a 'complex convergence of philosophical traditions, feelings, half-realised ideas, atavistic instincts, imaginative intimations, which live behind the simplest hope or disappointment of the simplest person' (Berger and Mohr 1967, 110). In this view, those who suffer physical and cultural deprivation are unable to 'translate' their feelings into words which clarify experience. Behind this carefully framed statement is the political rage which drives *A Seventh Man*: the analysis of inequalities in the global economic system, the romantic Marxist view of labour alienation, the disgust at Western Europe's persistent, unthinking neo-colonialism (Merrifield 2012, 62–4).

A more recent instance of the 'subjectivist' tradition, a rare example to rival Berger and Mohr's account, is Michael Winterbottom's 2002 feature film *In This World*, which its director has described as an explicitly political response to the 'asylum seeker' debates of the early 2000s in Britain:

> *In This World* responds to a chronic virulent strain of anti-immigrant scaremongering in the right-wing British tabloids like the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* …. Whenever I come across them, I'm always astonished by the huge amount of space given to stories about bogus asylum seekers and people invading our country …. It's an obsession. We were lucky with *In This World* – in Britain it got a lot of press coverage and sparked discussion about immigration, and maybe someone who saw it would spend an hour thinking about what it's like to be a refugee. (Winter 2010, 62–3)

To better convey 'what it's like to be a refugee', the film blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction, creating a singular tale which can at the same time describe the experiences of many. The film complements and enhances the achievement of *A Seventh Man*. Its less rigid structuring of experience lets in more of the fluidity

of real-world events; where Berger and Mohr's migrants seem powerless, *In This World* grants event and personality greater space to manoeuvre.

The film traces a journey made by Jamal and Enayat, two displaced Afghan boys, ethnic Pashtun, who live about twenty-five miles from Peshawar in northwest Pakistan, in the Shamshatoo refugee camp. Through family connections and finances, they arrange to have themselves smuggled out of Pakistan in order to head for what they hope will be a better life in Europe. To achieve this, they have to travel across Iran and into Turkey, go from Istanbul to Trieste hidden with others in a freight container, then get to Marseilles. Their journey eventually leads to the Sangatte refugee centre in France, and then on to London. Like *A Seventh Man*, *In This World* is loosely structured around a series of intense, lived moments. It shows those who have already been moved on once as refugees displaced for a second time, now from what little remains of their family. They are set adrift, but also strive to better their lives. To make the film, production crew, director and non-professional actors travelled along one possible route that refugees were known to take. Moreover, the two main actors, Jamal Udin Torabi (Jamal) and Enayatullah (Enayat), were recruited from the Shamshatoo camp, and so were likely candidates to make the journey in reality.

Like *A Seventh Man*, *In This World* plays with distinctions of artifice and actual: devices such as voiceover, text and map on the screen make the film in some respects document-like, but as Winterbottom said in one interview:

> The film does play with what's true and what's not …. Take Jamal. He's an Afghan refugee; his parents are refugees; he's young enough that he was actually born in the camp. Most of his family live in one of the camps next door to the one we filmed in. His brother and sister in the film are really his brother and sister. His mum is alive, but in the film she is not, so that is fictional. (Winter 2010, 61)

Just as Berger and Mohr draw on the political and artistic tactics of a compressed, tense historical moment, the inter-war era, so Winterbottom turns to an earlier filmic scene to generate his own creative play between fiction and document. The director has in particular stated his admiration for early post-World War Two film-makers such as Andrzej Wajda, Jean-Luc Goddard and Lindsay Anderson (McFarlane and Williams 2009, 12). These directors shared, at least early on, a self-consciously artificial realism: a mixing of film stocks, an unpredictable contrasting of visibly 'mobile' camera shots, hand-held, or vehicle-moved, for instance; each is at times improvisatory too, using non-professional actors, outdoor cityscape locations and oblique storytelling techniques. Moving back further, Winterbottom's film reflects Roberto Rossellini's 'neorealist' trilogy of the middle 1940s – *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948). Both directors display an intense awareness of locality and landscape, both record situations within which 'social actors', as opposed to professional actors, respond to their surroundings, and finally, both are engaged in an urgent search for a means to respond to, argue

against and explore more deeply the drama of large-scale contemporary events (McFarlane and Williams 2009, 31).

Yet while *A Seventh Man* and *In This World* use interposed section titles, and while each cuts from the location of one key scene to the next along their route, *In This World* has a less obviously schematic structure. Where Berger and Mohr have 'Departure', 'Work' and 'Return' as the three section headings of their account, Winterbottom uses place names to locate his series of 'lived moments'. Where Berger and Mohr create a disruptive collage of visual and textual material, Winterbottom has his own vocabulary of disruptive devices: harsh, digital shots of barren landscape precede a difficult negotiation with a border guard; a blurry outdoor sequence is rendered with night-vision to express the danger and panic of an illegal border crossing between Iran and Turkey. In one extraordinary scene, light is all but abandoned in favour of shouts, bangs and increasingly desperate cries as the travellers are trapped in a cargo container. These devices are often associated with moments of stress, fear or danger, especially when moving out of one country and into another (Farrier 2008, 229–30). In addition, the sense of social constriction which increasingly burdens Jamal and Enayat as they travel away from the world they know is signalled by a continual narrowing of physical spaces. The two protagonists become physically and emotionally boxed-in as they move from their relatively open refugee camp onto a succession of buses, pickup trucks and lorries, dark concealed hiding places and railway undercarriages, backrooms and basements.

'The Lived Moment'

One anecdote from Winterbottom captures his wider sense of how migrants can partly tell themselves rather than wholly be told by others. During the post-production of *In This World*, Jamal, the story's main protagonist and the film's main actor, returned from Pakistan to Britain, this time as a real refugee, to claim official asylum status. Winterbottom describes editing the scene in the film where Jamal leaves his family in Shamshatoo camp:

> Jamal was actually in the cutting room watching [the editing]. So by that point he'd actually become the character in the film and didn't know when he'd ever see his brother again; didn't know when he'd go back there, and it was one of the strangest things to see the way in which the film that was supposed to be a fiction based on reality had then become a reality itself. (Farrier 2008, 224)

This fluidity of circumstance and sense of possibility is not much present in Berger and Mohr, but even in Winterbottom's film, the portrayal of agency has its limits. Enayat, after all, dies inside the shipping container which ought to have taken him to Trieste. So, while it is possible to read *In This World* as an unusual variation on the 'road movie', in which an appealing, cheeky protagonist travels

with his companion through danger and adventure towards the final achievement of success and manhood, the story is more complex. Within the larger structure of the film, one action – border crossing – is constantly repeated in a succession of episodes. After each crossing, Jamal and Enayat are left apparently closer to their destination, yet they are still faced with the fear, danger and exhaustion of moving forwards, still not at their final destination, still compelled to repeat the same difficult task under slightly different conditions, each time with no apparent gain. Likewise, in *A Seventh Man* political, economic and legal forces conspire against the migrant so that his experience can be read only as tragedy. Since migrants cannot articulate their own lives, Berger and Mohr have no need to quote their words directly. They listen intently, but do not report in straightforward direct speech what they hear. *A Seventh Man* disregards the ways in which speaking a migrant journey can elicit new versions of the autobiographical self. It fails to acknowledge that by recycling, reworking and rethinking former events, the migrant may consider not just how the past could have turned out differently, but also how a changed future might still be.

What Berger and Winterbottom *do* suggest by their explorations of subjective migratory experience is an alternative archive for cultural memory. This archive no longer resides in the physical space of the museum, but in the imaginative space of the audience; it exists in their sensations and thoughts responding to word/image combinations on the page or to the movement of light on a screen. Such an archive is constituted by creating aesthetic experiences which allude more effectively to the subjective sensations of the mobile displaced, by the accumulation of precisely detailed, collective, 'lived moments' which are continually reinterpreted in retrospect. Gathering and preserving this index of experiences – the act of archiving – here means registering in the audience an interpretation of the destabilised self. Each entry in this archive answers questions like 'How does it feel to travel and live beyond the boundaries of a settled society?' or 'What happens to migrants who become misplaced in international welfare and legal systems?' Where existing archival practices merely register objects or voices as distant remnants, this 'subjectivist' memory system constitutes the postcolonial museum through aesthetic analysis. What Berger and Winterbottom finally register is an inner sense of the mental, physical and geographical instabilities within the spaces of otherness. What the postcolonial museum might seek in its imaginative engagement with the heterotopic is a closer intellectual *and* aesthetic engagement with 'the choices of the underfed'.

The objections to Berger and Mohr's vision of migrant experience are well expressed by Salman Rushdie, who acknowledges the compassion and originality of *A Seventh Man*, but is less convinced by its despondency:

> To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant is not simply transformed by his act; he

> also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridisation that newness can emerge. (Rushdie 1991, 210)

Nevertheless, Berger and Mohr's achievement is substantial, and remains a rich source of aesthetic strategies for the portrayal of migrant experience. By visualising a common migrant 'family' of blood relatives, of experiences and of continual recycled images, *A Seventh Man* creates a family life-story portrait, a photographic *aide-mémoire*, a fictional history in snapshots, which is itself now passed down across generations to re-make future lives.

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Chapter 18
Coding/Decoding the Archive

David Gauthier and Erin La Cour

Although the concept of the archive is ambiguous in its connotative multiplicity, which obscures any singular consolidated theory, it is precisely the ambiguous quality of the archive, and indeed archival production from inscription to output, that is interesting to examine. What the archive is, what it produces and what its political and ideological ramifications are – all important areas of inquiry – lead on to more all-embracing questions: what is the purpose of the archive, what do we 'gain' or 'lose' in archival practice, and what can it transform?

On the one hand, the use of archiving machines has created a sense of cultural 'loss', outlined, for example, in Friedrich Kittler's (1987) discussion of how the advent of the gramophone made learning to read and play sheet music obsolete. On the other hand, however, through the use of machines, we culturally 'gain' what could not otherwise be archived, such as live recordings of Mississippi Delta blues musicians whose music was not, and could not in fact have been, properly transcribed. But do these senses of 'loss' and 'gain' merely reveal a nostalgic folklorisation of culture – or isn't the archive always mediated, and thereby, as Jacques Derrida has noted, 'produces as much as it records the event' (Derrida 1996, 17)? Recent discourse on archiving machines has suggested that the 'consignation' and authority of the institutionalised archive can be undermined, for example, by open-source archiving systems designed to suit the needs of under-represented cultures, and through digital memory that, in its total recall, levels predetermined hierarchies and obscures the value assigned to cultural objects. Through an examination of the materiality of archiving machines, how and what they code and decode, we aim to critically evaluate the supposition that archiving machines can lead to a means of performing the interpretation of archival material that is more dynamic than institutional discourse.

Asserted to be anarchival in their 'unruliness', archiving machines have been promoted as capable of actively processing archival storage systems, allowing for the creation of new materialities, new classifications, and thereby new perspectives on subjectivity through the objectivity of machines. But do archiving machines actually work as tools to 'get rid of [a] political "double bind" which is the simultaneous individualisation and totalization of modern power structures … to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries' (Foucault 1982, 216)? Because machines are based on systems of control and representation, we argue that their ability to disorder, reorder and/or produce archival material – while certainly

disruptive to previous manifestations of institutional archival order – merely leads to processes of re-territorialisation in producing new subjectivities, and therefore returns to the same 'political double bind'.

Our aim, therefore, is to uncover these subjects by means of problematising their production. Rather than examining the machine's essence from its material or informational foundation alone – that is, its substance – we look instead at the process of 'errors' as revealing and exposing the problematic aspects of computational machines. We posit that by revealing the political ramifications of the archive, the *problematic event* of the technological 'error' allows for a performative transformation of the archive. Therefore, we assert that 'errors' serve as ontological ground from which the subjectivity imposed upon us by the medium of the archive can be undermined, which can lend an innovative approach to practical applications in artistic and archival research and practice.

The Institutional Archive

In order to discuss the workings of the archive, we find it useful to examine the intersection between Jacques Derrida's writings on the archive and Michel Foucault's critique of institutions. Although Foucault is obviously associated with his critique of the archive, we would like to focus attention on where his critique of institutions is in accordance with Derrida's writings on the archive. This point of overlap between the two is where we find the most productive definition, because what we are concerned with exploring is the performative aspect of the archive – that is, both what it benignly seeks to accomplish and how it is used to mediate cultural memory across various sites.

Foucault argues that the archive does not work as 'the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity', including its institutional collections and their discourses of remembrance (Foucault 1989, 145). Indeed, though he offers an extensive critique of institutions, he maintains a separation between such systems and the archive. He writes:

> Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call archive. (Foucault 1989, 145)

In his discussion of the archive, Derrida starts from a different premise. For him, the archive carries with it its historical connotation of *arkhé*, which as he reminds us 'names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*' (Derrida 1996, 1). Although, to some extent, Derrida is in agreement with Foucault that the archive

can never represent the sum of culture, he nevertheless asserts that 'the concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhé*. But it also *shelters* itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it' (Derrida 1996, 3).

Derrida, then, can be seen as offering an eclipse of Foucault's idea: while for the latter the archive can only collect statements, not judgements, for Derrida the archive is still, even if forgetfully so, power-laden through its institutionalisation. He writes:

> A science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it. This right imposes or supposes a bundle of limits which have a history, a deconstructable history …. This deconstruction concerns, as always, the institution of limits *declared* to be insurmountable. (Derrida 1996, 4)

Pointedly, for Derrida, the archive speaks to both how it is formulated and how it is mediated. He writes: 'At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible' (Derrida 1996, 3). Like the *arkhé*, institutions become scenes of the domiciliation of the archive, both visible and invisible, and actively seeking out homogeneity to maintain order and authority. For Derrida, then, the action of the archive, what comes out of the (incomplete, forgetful) collection, has very real societal applications and political implications in its working '*a priori* against itself' (Derrida 1996, 12).

While, again, Foucault does not consider institutions as such to be manifestations of the archive, his critique of them raises similar concerns to Derrida's writings on archival power. Derrida's assertion that the hypomnesic nature of the archive 'assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression', which works to ensure forgetfulness and the destruction of the intention of the archive, directly speaks to Foucault's concerns about institutions. Foucault writes:

> The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (Foucault and Chomsky 2006, 41)

For Foucault, the workings of institutions belie any neutrality they claim to have, much in the same manner as Derrida's sites of archival power; as neither 'memory [n]or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience', the archive in its exteriority, in its institutionalisation, is always orchestrated and orchestrates' (Derrida 1996, 11).

Towards an *Anarchive*: The Mediation of Archiving Machines

As scenes of domiciliation of the archive, museums and libraries devoted to cultural heritage are mediators of unordered archival material, sequencing, recomposing and forming subjects and objects in small aggregates of displays following specific categories and narratives – epochs, genres, techniques and so on Following the principles of archiving, these cultural institutions identify, classify and unify cultural objects and consign them to their archive, generally 'coordinat[ing] a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration' (Derrida 1996, 17). Cultural discourse is thereby segmented into logical quantities, divided into chapters and rooms, recombined into books and exhibitions, and consolidated as collections through an institutional operation of differentiation and ordering of the entropic archive which represents it as an evidentially based, historically sound whole.

While Foucault can be seen as the last historian and first anthropologist, his concept of *épistémè* created a rupture in this homogeneous view of the archive. *Épistémè* made visible the archive's design and fractured the context of history into discrete, isolated islands of loosely coupled statements (events and objects) which lay themselves open to being recomposed and reformulated. As Arjun Appadurai notes: 'Foucault destroyed the innocence of the archive and forced us to ask about the designs through which all traces are produced …. [H]e showed that all evidence was born in some sort of nostalgic gaze' (Appadurai 2003, 16). Indeed, *épistémè* questions the normalising practices of the historian's evidential and linear-narrative view, underlining that it is merely institutional discourse that is homogenous, not the archive itself – that the archive is not a *form*, but an entropic *medium*.

Archiving machines speak to this concept of the archive. While their sequencing, classification, combination and ordering are similar to those of institutions, they use different taxonomies and means of coding/decoding objects and subjects. Rather than operating solely at the level of discourse, they operate at the level of medium; their archival (re)mediation is less about history, narrative and evidence than it is about memory, mnemonics and information. As Wolfgang Ernst notes:

> For mechanical storage as place of memory all data is of equal significance – unlike the literary perpetuation of spontaneous recollection in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. For this Goethe employed the archivist's technical term of *Repertorium*: 'a listing compiled in terms of general and special headings, and all kinds of letters and numbers'. A cybernetics of storage and an administrative infrastructure come into play prior to any cultural memory. (Ernst 2005, 97)

The referentiality of the archival medium is posited as constituting the archive's substrate, its memory, levelling all elements it holds as a whole. Nowadays, the anthropological lens of recollection and remembrance is being upset by the

archaeological lens of memory, which is bolstered by and fused with the power of machines. Through techno-logic, we are able to undermine past archival structures, such as those found in institutional discourse, by means of reordering the systems upon which they are built. The homogeneity of the archive of the past – built on a system of cultural capital-infused decisions that led to differentiation from inscription to interpretation to enacted power – can be upset by the technical ability of machines.

Because machines work on the level of mnemonics and media, they can disorder what seems to be ordered in previous manifestations of the archive; for example, through algorithmic deconstruction of literary texts into bags of words, current world literature analysis is able to extract latent semantics from heterogeneous sets of corpora which 'focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems' (Moretti 2000, 57). Unlike passive documents, digital archives never stay put, being necessarily reproducible, transferable and dynamically indexable.

This anarchival unruliness of machines reveals a different perspective on archival material; freed from narrative historical discourses of past archival systems, machines exemplify what Friedrich Kittler has called a 'technical differentiation of optics, acoustics, and writing' that creates 'a clean division between matter and information' (Kittler 1987, 115). On this division, he notes:

> In order to optimize writing for machines, it must no longer be dreamt of as an expression of individuals or as a trace of bodies. The forms, differences, and frequencies of letters have to be reduced to formulas. So-called man becomes physiology on the one hand and information technology on the other. (Kittler 1987, 115)

The birth of this so-called man, physiologically addressed through formulas and information technology, has consequences for the conventional philological study of narrative. Not only are the linear forms of narrative transformed by technology, but the message transmitted through media channels stops being one of man per se, and becomes rather one of the medium itself; as Walter Benjamin has pointed out, media renders storytelling dubious (Ernst 2002, 626). Since current information technologies are themselves capable of producing symbolic forms (copy, paste, record, cypher, decypher, transform, combine, transmit and so on), narrativity is eliminated and the aesthetic performativity of the medium replaces the story.

However, while this ability of machines reveals that the homogeneity of a narrative historical perspective of the archive is faulty, it ultimately creates a new system of order and representation. Since the symbolic is regarded as information, both man and apparatuses are directly addressed by the signifier – the medium – or in other words, both are intended to be programmed (Kittler 1987, 116). Thus, even as the anarchival unruliness of machines upsets the narrative weft of the archive, it none the less also points to a new type of control, order and representation, where recollection is replaced by mechanical memory, ethics

is transformed into statistics and the unconscious becomes stochastic neural networks. The inscription of algorithmic programs and data-flow manipulation is the new order that is authorised in the archive and culture at large. In this way, though machines promote a new sense of subjectivity, they are still entrenched in institutional discourse, and therefore point to a process of re-territorialisation rather than a refusal of the 'political double bind'. In his discussion of Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, Hal Foster notes that the aspect of *collage* brought about by such systems, while it liberates us from previous narrative structures, also still constrains us:

> After photographic reproduction the museum was not so bound by walls, but it was bordered by style. What is the edge of the archive without museums? Perhaps its limit takes the form of an illusion – of a superficial mobility of signs that covers a profound stasis of system. Perhaps the library has returned, but as a container in which other orders are melted down, then set in deep freeze. An entropic archive, a new Alexandria. (Foster 1996, 116)

Indeed, rather than truly disrupting past systems of the archive, machines are only able to manipulate what is already present in the archive, disordering, reordering and/or producing from a limited set of material. Because of this, while new subjectivities can be explored, machine technology ultimately leads back to the same problematics of order and stasis. In this light, the discursive work of machines is ultimately no more neutral in its mediation of archival material and subjects than traditional narrative historical archiving practices.

Transforming the Archive: The Breakdown of Representation in 'Errors'

The recurrent issue of order and stasis in the archive can be critically investigated through an inquiry into the system of representation of machines and how they mediate our understanding of the archive. In examining the automatic negentropic processes that are necessarily introduced by machine technology, we can uncover the performative aspect of the archive introduced through technological 'errors'.

Paul Virilio asserts that the accident, 'the hidden face of technical progress' as he calls it, 'in a certain way, is a miracle in reverse. It reveals something absolutely necessary to knowledge' (Virilio and Lotringer 2005, 63). An 'accident' (or 'error' or 'glitch') is a *problematic event*, in the Deleuzian sense, from which deduction and thus knowledge 'moves from the problem to the ideal accidents and events that condition the problem and form the cases that resolve it. "The event by itself", writes Deleuze, "is problematic and problematizing" (Deleuze, quoted in Smith 2003, 415). We posit that in this way 'errors' not only reveal the system of the machine, but can also be seen as confrontational to the order and stasis of archival systems.

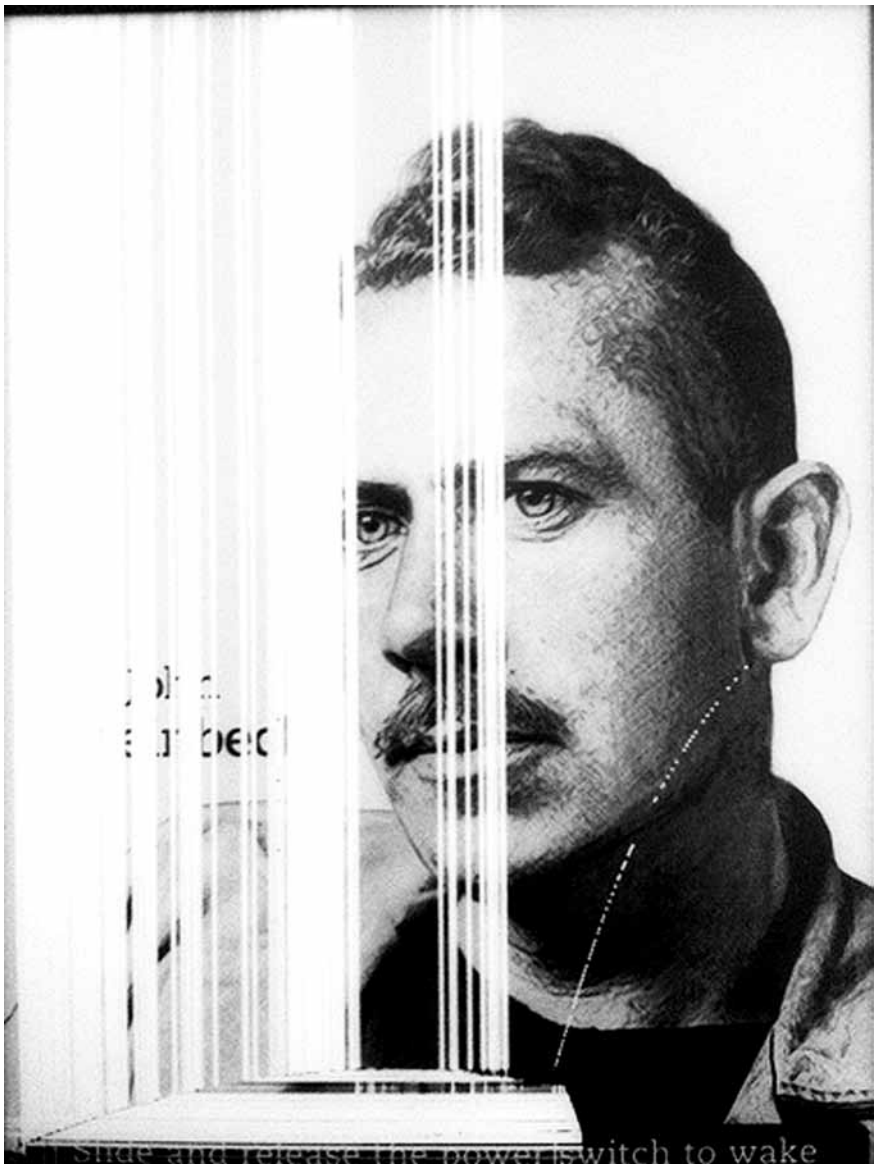

Figure 18.1 **Alex M. Lee, 'I dropped my book and now I can't read my book', 2012. Black and white photograph of a damaged Kindle e-reader. Reproduced courtesy of the artist**

In order to elaborate on this ability of 'errors', we must first understand two foundational concepts of cybernetic machines from which information is defined and thus automatic differentiation operates. The first is *entropy*, the measure of disorder of a system, and the second is *negentropy*, the measure of order of a system. As the father of cybernetics Norbert Wiener explained: 'Just as the amount of information in a system is a measure of its degree of organization, so the entropy of a system is a measure of its degree of disorganization; and the one is simply the negative of the other' (Wiener 1948, 18–19). In the light of these fundamental principles of information theory, cybernetic machines are by nature negentropic. They order the organic and inorganic in a highly controlled, complex and structured system tending towards self-conditioned stability.

In his early work, Wiener focused on the study of *effective messages of control* as constituting the science of cybernetics, precisely because he assumed that self-regulating systems tend towards entropy. Using quantisation thresholds, systems of tolerances and control feedback, the cybernetic machine structures and discards chaos, instituting a normalisation of the organic and inorganic in its quest for producing and sustaining negentropy. A *problematic event* shows a system in a state of entropy, or more precisely, the 'error' shows the process of transition from a state of negentropy to a state of entropy. In so doing, it exposes the fundamental process-oriented nature of a cybernetic system – that is, control based on information representations. 'Errors' are, technically speaking, *deviation processes*: deviation from the norm or centre, a control hiccup, a derailment off the tracks of order.

These grounding principles of cybernetics can be used to direct our understanding of the machine's system of representation, based on differentiation of signals of entropy *vis-à-vis* signals of negentropy, which culminates in determining information. About the totalising operations of representation, Deleuze writes:

> This operation is carried out by a method which ensures a monocentricity of all the possible centres of finite representation, a convergence of all the finite points of view of representation. This operation expresses sufficient reason. The latter is not identity but, rather, the means of subordinating to the identical and the other requirements of representation that part of difference which escaped them in the first sense. (Deleuze 2004, 342–3)

Thus all computational events, whether fluctuating voltages entering a computer processor, rays of visible light entering a camera or simply data streams received from a network, are claims which need to be quantified through a system of thresholds, made discrete and ordered according to the machine's internal system of representation, its grounding principles. Deleuze writes about these representational events or claims: 'the object of the claim (the quality, difference) finds itself placed in a circle; the arcs of the circle are distinguished to the extent that the ground establishes moments of stasis within qualitative

becoming, stoppages in between the two extremes of more and less' (Deleuze 2004, 343). The cybernetic machine institutes this circle where events (or 'inputs') are evaluated and differentiated. All sorts of causes (voltages, currents, electromagnetic waveforms and so on) are normalised in order to produce sequences of well-known effects, translated into discrete and finite sets of symbols, which in turn are rendered as information (*order*) or discarded as noise (*disorder*): 'Difference is thought of here in terms of the principle of Sameness and the condition of resemblance rather than as pure difference – which is the quality of the event' (Deleuze 2004, 342). In this light, representations are an illusion, subordinating the difference of the causes to the resemblance of the effects.

In his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Vilém Flusser illustrates this assimilation by positing that programs are modelled on a Cartesian model of thought. He explains:

> According to Descartes thought consists of clear and distinct elements (concepts) that are combined in the thought process like beads on an abacus, in which every concept signifies a point in the extended world out there. If every point could be assigned a concept, then thought would be omniscient and at the same time omnipotent. For thought processes would then symbolically direct processes out there. (Flusser 2005, 67)

Programs simulate Cartesian thought as they attempt to create a universe where concepts are assigned to every possible and probable point in the extended world out there. In his discussion of the photographic apparatus and its universe, Flusser continues:

> To every photograph there corresponds a clear and distinct element in the camera program. Every photograph thereby corresponds to a specific combination of elements in programs. Thanks to this bi-univocal relationship between universe and program, in which a photograph corresponds to every point in the program and a point in the program to every photograph, cameras are omniscient and omnipotent in the photographic universe. (Flusser 2005, 68)

However, this bi-univocality of program and universe directs a reversal in the vectors of significance. He notes: 'the program does not signify the photograph, the photograph signifies the elements of the program (concepts)' (Flusser 2005, 68). In other words, a photograph does not represent the 'world-out-there' but rather the 'world-in-there' – it is a coded simulation of reality based on the program's own system of representation. As Deleuze and Guattari remind us: 'simulation does not replace reality … but rather it appropriates reality in the operation of despotic overcoding, it produces reality on the new full body that replaces the earth. It expresses the appropriation and production of the real by a quasi-cause' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 228).

By derailing the program's system of representation, a *problematic event* reveals this over-coding of simulation and simulacrum, thereby critically positing the vector of significance reversal between the 'world-out-there' and the 'world-in-there'. What we see through 'errors' is a struggle of the 'world-in-there', the fundamental forces of divergence and de-centring of entropy over designed circuits and automatic logic, plunging the event of such phenomena into 'a groundlessness … which resists all forms and cannot be represented' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 334). 'Errors' as a process determine the indeterminate:

> Something of the ground rises to the surface, without assuming any form but, rather, insinuating itself between the forms; a formless base, an autonomous and faceless existence. This ground which is now on the surface is called depth or groundlessness. Conversely, when they are reflected in it, forms decompose, every model breaks down and all faces perish, leaving only the abstract line as the determination absolutely adequate to the indeterminate, just as the flash of lightning is equal to the night, acid equal to the base, and distinction adequate to obscurity as a whole: monstrosity. (A determination which is not opposed to the indeterminate and does not limit it). (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 344–5)

As pure difference, the quality of the *problematic event* exposes the aim of archival systems, whether narrative historical or mediatic, to subjugate and make subject to; 'errors' reveal that these subjectivities, the hidden face of mediation, operate at the level of the Same and the Similar. In their fragmenting of the principle of Sameness and the condition of resemblance, 'errors' present the de-centring of order and stasis, and are thereby able to instantiate Difference as depth of the indeterminate.

Conclusion

In the postcolonial condition, the museum as purveyor of cultural memory and promoter of subjectivities has had to be critically evaluated. The opening up of museums to account for repressed cultures, objects and discourses has moved forward to consider how such accounts may be still – or even further – obscured in their new-found representation. From attempts to allow members of marginal communities to speak of and for themselves, to allow artists and curators playing with the medium of the museum to demonstrate its hierarchical and fragmentary nature, the concept of the museum is in a state of dynamic change, forced to constantly rethink its practices of 'othering'.

As we have argued throughout this chapter, the 'error' problematises the production of subjectivities in archiving machines. As a breakdown of control, the 'error' exposes the machine's regulatory system of order and stasis, thereby freeing us from the distortions of representation such systems create. In this context, 'errors' offer a productive instability that resonates with the postcolonial

critique of a preceding order. They offer a way out of the ever-present 'othering' inscribed in archival practice, ultimately allowing for a transformation of our perception of the museum.

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Afterword: After the Museum

Iain Chambers

As the MeLa research project obviously draws on a series of interdisciplinary and transnational approaches in elaborating its critical perspectives, it was highly fitting that the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' should have hosted the conference *The Postcolonial Museum: The Pressures of Memory, the Bodies of History*. The history and development of 'L'Orientale', both in terms of its research and teaching programmes, have been continually shaped by questions of transcultural research and the accompanying need to develop interdisciplinary approaches in registering the diverse and complex formation of the modern world. Here the past, as a linguistic, cultural and historical archive, has consistently been researched in proposing an altogether more critical sense of the present. Looking elsewhere towards extra-European worlds, particularly in Africa and Asia, 'L'Orientale' has consistently sought to establish its critical and academic presence on the threshold between a European inheritance and extra-European histories, cultures and languages.

The work that has been produced in this university and which feeds into the MeLa project encourages us to consider how Europe is placed on an altogether more extensive map: one that is central to its making, but which also exceeds its geographical and cultural confines. This emerging critical space – interdisciplinary? transnational? postcolonial? – is surely what is common to 'L'Orientale' and the ongoing research and concerns of the chapters presented here. It is not by chance that probably the first international conference in Italy on postcolonialism – *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* – was held at 'L'Orientale' two decades ago.

The rites and rituals of the archival procedures and architectural organisation of the museum produce texts, documents, objects, experiences that are identified, classified, catalogued, explained and interpreted in regimes of knowledge, power and truth. The volume *Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices* produced by the MeLa research group in Naples proposed a preliminary critical survey of such historical and cultural procedures.[1]

Extending these considerations, I wish very briefly to touch here on two dimensions; the first one is captured in these words from Irit Rogoff:

> The old boundaries between making and theorising, historicising and displaying, criticising and affirming have long been eroded. Artistic practice is being

1 Available online at http://www.mela-project.eu/publications/949 (accessed 10 November 2013).

> acknowledged as the production of knowledge and theoretical and curatorial endeavours have taken on a far more experimental and inventive dimension, both existing in the realm of potentiality and possibility rather than that of exclusively material production. (Rogoff 2003)

To this, I wish to add this reflection from Angela Dimitrakaki:

> Representation is an ontological features of the exhibition, which acquires sharper contours in cases of multicultural and multiethnic shows. But as 'authentic' art today tends to be biopolitical, affective and about knowing rather than representing the social, we are also forced to ask: is the exhibition the optimal mode of 'our' encounter with art? (Dimitrakaki 2012)

Without comment, I wish now simply to bring in the second dimension. This consists in considering the context of extra-European temporalities and spaces. Here the modern museum, as a European-derived modality of knowledge and cultural power, has to register the highly charged pertinence of excluded times and spaces to the making of modernity, particularly in the harsh light of the intertwined centralities of colonialism, imperialism and global migrations. At this point, the museum becomes another space: a *heterotopia*, an unsuspected site for the critical diagnoses of the modernity it seeks to exhibit and explain.

The community of time – that is, the seemingly shared time of the narration of the European nation – is here interrupted when other times and constellations of belonging enter the museum. The purpose of the conference leading to this book was to propose a collective investigation and discussion of this emerging space and its critical impact on the museum yet to come. All of this, as Achille Mbembe reminds us, is to transform the archive from a collection of seemingly past affairs and dead matters into a series of vital procedures – that is, into an exercise of living powers and possibilities.[2] Here the past refuses to pass, it insists on its right to return and to interrogate and ghost the present: this is the troubling debris of the past that exceeds the museum that historically sought to systematise, pacify and ultimately silence this inheritance; in the end, this meant to cancel its contemporary pertinence.

What emerged from two intense days of papers and discussion, and hopefully resonates in the writings in this volume, are a series of prospects that, orbiting around the *power of curating* and the *curating of power*, pose how, why and where to interrupt and disturb such a circular, self-affirming logic. The seemingly flat plane of capital and cultural reproduction is hypothetically confronted with multiple scales of belonging and their mixtures of acceptance, resistance and

2 Achille Mbembe, *After Post-colonialism: Transnationalism or Essentialism? – Part 2*, video lecture at Tate Modern, London, 1 June 2010, http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/after-post-colonialism-transnationalism-or-essentialism-part-2 (accessed 14 April 2013).

refusal. Modernity is not as flat as a map. In a historical moment when all is increasingly monitored – from the local level to the trans-national – we have also to acknowledge that not all is captured and netted by capitalist cultural surveillance. If migrants crossing the field of vision most immediately produce an interrogative shadow, there are also many other, less tangible, manners of deviating and re-working the logic that assumes all can be screwed into place. Resistance to the present neo-liberal phase of capitalist accumulation, played out in multiples scenes and localities, operates with a heterogeneity that consistently challenges the seriality and historicism of the existing curatorial economy.

If the modern curator recognises in this space an ethical interrogation, how are these different powers and potentials to be registered? The 'incurable images' (Elhaik, Chapter 12 of this volume) and the incurable wounds and killing fields of modernity (Mbembe 2001) disrupt the 'neutral' ethnographic masquerade of the curatorial operation. If objects, histories, cultures, people were once wrenched out of their context in order to be put on display and exhibited as European knowledge, today this has to be unwound from its colonial premises and handed back to the world it once presumed to define and own. In the sharp light of the gallery space and the illuminated caption, can the *impossibility* of a healing be exposed? Can the modern museum house what amounts to a historical and ontological cut when its collection and criteria are re-routed through a radically diverse accounting of time and space? Beyond mere adjustment and modification, the museum as a critical space needs to become something more, something else.

To propose a postcolonial museum is therefore to cultivate a historical, cultural and ontological wound. It is, as Ranjana Khanna (2007) argues, a cut that remains incurable. This is to entertain an economy of rupture and becoming that bleeds into the present (Elhaik). Here 'difficult heritages' (Macdonald 2007; Gravano, Chapter 8 of this volume) can never be fully accommodated.[3] Despite our resistance, they insist with the demand for a response, *not a resolution*. Opening up holes in time produces spaces in which re-membering resonates precisely with what the institutional archive and its memories cannot house. Between the absolute concentration of the Occidental museum, rendering the world transparent to its will, and the diffusion of the intangible there emerge other horizons of sense. The museum, as a physical and metaphysical site of memory, ultimately poses the interrogation of the very nature of the discursive organisation of knowledge.

The deliberate undoing of any liberal understanding of belonging as a property secured in the dark archive of the mausoleum-museum raises the question of the body politic that is infected (Rahman, Chapter 5 of this volume), and inhabited by uncanny ghosts that dismantle the world and reassemble it from another perspective. Operating with this critical malady, while striving towards a more collective, democratic archive (Berger and Mohr 2010; Leese, Chapter

3 The notion of 'difficult heritage' was introduced by Sharon Macdonald at the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Archaeology and History Annual Conference in 2007.

17 of this volume), the museum becomes a practice, an event. As a suspended interrogation, the museum can no longer be claimed by a singular history or culture. This leads to a wisdom that comes from losing one's original mind and embarking on other routes, proposing a reasoning that is irreducible to the tyranny of a unique rationalism.

Just to consider how 'objects' might belong both to the former colonised as well as to the colonising power is to delve into questions of property and ownership that are completely over-determined by Occidental jurisdiction and legal practices. In brief, it is to touch the heart of a political economy that *a priori* frames the power of the museum as an Occidental institution. As Françoise Vergès explores the issue, the defeat of the once colonised and contemporary subaltern nevertheless can create lines of flight towards archives without objects to be claimed and possessed. Unexpected entanglements around spaces that are simultaneously geo-physical, cultural and historical – the Indian Ocean and the project for a museum on the island of Réunion, for example – produce a multi-temporal palimpsest. Working with local coordinates, and with a map that does not simply emerge from below, or from the ground up, but is already suspended in multiple temporalities, histories and cultural fluxes and flows, is to step outside the linearity of both the Euro-museum and the ethnographic confines of an 'authentic' local folk culture. This means refusing the linearity of 'progress', and abandoning futile attempts to 'catch up' with modernity. It means proposing another cultural matrix in which 'absence is not a lack' (Vergès, Chapter 1 of this volume). Absence, not as a lack, but as an interrogation, produces a slash in the temporal-spatial coordinates of an imposed History.

Then there is the indifference of the site and the setting. The humanist paradigm can be refused by responding to other measures drawn from the climate, the soil, the chemistry of life, that refuse to be readily indexed and mastered. This leads to critical reflection on the limitless drive of capitalism and colonialism when South–South affinities break-up the North–South links. To refuse to be bonded in a 'victimhood' imposed by the predatory economy that carries the name of Occidental humanism is to take life beyond anthropomorphism into another location, beyond representation and a subject-centred ontology (Biemann, Chapter 16 of this volume).

On this threshold, we recognise the signal of the limits of representation and the announcement of the post-human (Gauthier and La Cour, Chapter 18 of this volume). This is an ecology of matter that matters. From personal machinery to the open and frayed networked fabric of the planet, we are pushed beyond the merely technical and its humanist intent. Collecting errors as a counter-image of our will to power provokes other practices that challenge the assumed algorithms of our lives. Dismantling history and exposing it to the infections of the world is to undo the Kantian pact that guarantees the sovereignty of the Occidental subject and the critical distance between a stable, accumulative authority and the inert objects of its aesthetics and knowledge. When others refuse to be othered, the exhibitionary machinery of knowledge finally begins to stutter in the violent circuits of a moribund narcissism.

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