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Imprint

Public Performance Detox Dance by Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv with participants of the symposium

Detox Dance is a public performance performed in Square Dance manner. Our easy-to-learn dancing patterns have been inspired by movements of relaxation, martial arts and fragments of Roma Dances. Every participant is part of a liquid social sculpture. By moving together and sharing a common public space we celebrate a moment of common activities into a joyful becoming "The Future is Roma".
Mo Diener, RJSaK 3rd of June 2017

Roma Jam Session art Kollektiv (RJSaK) is the first art collective in Switzerland dedicates its activities to creat new fresh images of the Roma minority. Based in Zurich, the group works transdisciplinary with members from the arts, acting, and design, and collaborations with guests from different fields. Since its first intervention in 2013 at a local art space, RJSaK has performed in Zurich at Manifesta 11 Parallel Events, Kunsthaus Zurich, Shedhalle as well as in other cities. Apart from its public art performances, the collective is engaged in political activism with various NGO's and in a working group at the federal office of culture BAK, currently in the process of shaping the rights of minorities with regards to Roma, Sinti and Yenish communities in Switzerland.

MEETING POINT

Editorial

Dorothee Richter & Ronald Kolb

This issue compiles the outcome of the symposium at the Kunstmuseum Basel and a summer academy at the Zurich University of the Arts, concerning one of the most urgent topics of our times. You will find contributions by the guests of the symposium and additional articles by scholars and practitioners connected to this topic. We also invited artists for a related exhibition at the OnCurating Project space—which came together as a shared project curated and organised with students of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating—because our aim was to make a multiplicity of voices from the arts accessible. The outcome is shown in an additional publication "Decolonizing Art Institution. A shared exhibition", with a report on the Summer Academy by Giovanna Fachini Bragagli.[1]

Colonial Pasts and its Present

We find the traces of colonialism everywhere, as Walter Mignolo pointed out in his famous publication that modernity's "darker side" is coloniality.[2] The achievements of the Renaissance for European countries could not have happened without the exploitation of other countries and people. In his publication, Mignolo has chosen the Louvre as an example of the museum's function to separate ethnographic museum objects (which were basically looted from other countries) from the art museum. We would also like to call to mind the history of the first public museum, the Fridericianum in Kassel. It was (and we quote from the website) "designed in the spirit of the Enlightenment and built by Huguenot architect Simon Louis du Ry, Fridericianum opened its doors in 1779 as the world's very first purpose-built public museum." [3] But one has to know that the Landgrave Friedrich II sold soldiers to the British to finance this museum. Many of these soldiers were captured against their will and shipped over, either to the UK or directly to North America to fight against the rebellion for independence in the British colonies. So, from the beginning there have been class struggles, colonial ideology, and colonial battles involved in the relations between museums and their financial foundation. From this perspective, issues of so-called "race," class, and gender are always intertwined in aesthetics, in the arts, in art institutions, and their ideologies, and should therefore also be considered together in rethinking a decolonial horizon. In 2011, Andrea Fraser argued that the art market is strongest in countries with the biggest gap in income between the super rich and the very poor. (Fraser explores this matter using the GIINI Index of Income Disparity since World War II in many different countries.)[4] This is another reason why we are sceptical about relocating traditional Western paradigms and traditional Western formats of fine arts one-to-one in other contexts, as they might end up just as a means of distinction. To merge cultural artefacts and backgrounds, to question them, to go along with the actual needs of actual people living in the context of institutions, to follow and archive specific cultural artefacts and everyday cultural objects would be of keen interest for us.

De-Colonizing Art Institutions

What we would like to undertake here and now is to share some ideas with you, in some very specific contexts, about how one could think about revealing and changing patterns and power structures. Walter Mignolo mentions that colonization was a global project, so de-colonizing art institutions would as well be a global (or mondial) concept, but this means that it would be different, it would react to each context, it

would react to a historical moment, it would react to the local specificities. We see this as an ongoing project, one that will need many different protagonists, colleagues, cultural producers of all sorts, and political activists.

The contributions by Woon Tien Wei, and Eyal Danon share ideas on specific art practices rooted in a local agenda.
Woon Tien Wei (Post-Museum) explores in his contribution, *Still Here Somehow: Artists and Cultural Activism in Singapore's Renaissance*, the shift of artistic practices in Singapore from community-based cultural activism to a professionalized state-driven and spectacle-seeking form of fine art production, with the help of artist Koh Nguang How. The director of the Center for Digital Art (CDA) in Holon, Israel, **Eyal Danon** follows the transformation of the Center from an art institution for the art community in the first place to a community-based and activist-driven art center in a deeply rooted exchange with the neighbourhood of Jessy Cohen.

De-colonizing is thought to be a horizon, in the way Derrida spoke about a democracy to come. De-colonizing Art Institutions can only be a shared project, with different tasks in each geopolitical and social context. It will mean something different in Switzerland or Germany than in India, China, or South Africa. It will mean something else if we speak about art academies, art museums, or "Off" spaces. And, of course, we cannot provide any clear solutions. What we want to achieve is to form bonds of shared interests, to develop a platform for exchange, and there is a certain urgency behind this. As Adam Szymczyk describes the ongoing severe changes between 2013 and 2017 in *The documenta 14 Reader*: "We have witnessed—both locally and globally—the implementation of debt as political measure, the gradual destruction of what remained of the welfare state, wars waged for resources and the market, and the resulting multiple and never-ending humanitarian catastrophes. This darkening global situation has leaned heavily upon our daily (and nightly) thinking about, and acting on and for, documenta 14."[6]

Against the uncanny background of post-democratic societies, populist megalomania, and alternative truth scenarios—and with all that a strengthening of the nation state—, it is urgent once again to open vistas of new global public spheres, of finding new perspectives in international solidarities beyond "race," class, gender, and social political differences.
Nikos Papastergiadis reminds us in *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* that, "The discursive turn in artistic and curatorial practice, with its wild embrace of hybrid identities and its committed efforts to hijack capital, was also aligned with a desire to build a new global public sphere,"[7] Our efforts are linked to this idea of a global public sphere, be that through new formats in exhibition-making or through publications.

New practices are developed and presented in inspiring ways by **Sabih Ahmed** (at the Asia Art Archive), by **Jeebesh Bagchi** (as a member of Raqs Media Collective), and by **Shwetal A. Patel** (Kochi-Muziris Biennale).

In **Raqs Media Collective**'s associative contribution, *Sources, Itineraries, and the Making of a Thicket*, the concept of origin is questioned by describing different projects on which Raqs Media Collective worked. The term "sources" is used as a metaphor—in personal life as predecessors, or on a geographical and political level—and can be chosen individually on a global scale without being restricted to state borders or local history patterns.

In *What Does the Revolt of Sediments Look Like? Notes on the Archive*, **Sabih Ahmed** draws a line from the concepts of memory and geography understood from a pre-digital time in colonial roots (uttered by Edward Said in 1998)[8] to archiving and map-making in the contemporary digital age, where archives are more likely to be organized individually and accessible globally. He also spoke about his involvement in the Infra-curatorial project "Striated Light" at the 11th Shanghai Biennale. Titled *Why Not Ask Again?*, it exemplifies his thoughts in relation to the renowned archive of artist Ha Bik Chuen.
Shwetal A. Patel reports on three large-scale group exhibitions in Gwangju (South Korea), Suzhou (China), and Yinchuan (China) in 2016 and researches their different settings for "alluding to future potentialities, and the inherent pitfalls, of this vastly popular genre of exhibition-making and critical thinking."
Shwetal A. Patel also interviews Shaheen Merali on the Panchayat Collection, an archive with the focus of documenting "interactions within a globalising artworld of Black and Asian artists, as well as documenting their commitment to the intersection between race, class, gender, policed sexualities, and (dis)ability."

The Global West/ the Mondiale Other?

The contemporary globally active art world proves to be an extremely contradictory field. Nowadays, it cultivates an exchange that transcends the boundaries between cultures and continents through so-called global museums or globally operating art biennials and festivals, at least for a certain audience able to travel around the globe. Yet, this should not blind us to the fact that in the end a certain perspective of the Western history of art and culture claims primacy over global contemporary art and especially its markets. Traditional Western genres such as sculpture and painting are just more marketable. Museums and art institutions all over the world therefore tend to have a uniform appearance. In format and content alike, they cater to and follow "Western" examples. Contemporary art is, as such, a Western concept, as Peter Weibel once remarked. This is now in the process of negotiation.
In what way the Western art world tries to rewrite art history into a more inclusive story is questioned in the article by **Claire Joan Farago.**

Understanding only marginal moments of a society during our travels, it felt strange to visit an art opening in Cape Town, where everybody was white (including us) except the artist and the waiters – or seeing white cube exhibitions in extremely impoverished surroundings, where the population had no access to unpolluted water as in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Recognising us as part of the international art world in this picture made us feel extremely uneasy. Which artistic and curatorial practices would be able to make a difference or indicate social change in this surrounding? Which practices would be inclusive in Western countries and give access to art to different groups in the multiple diverse societies of today? These questions are taken up by **Dorothee Richter** in her contribution.

Or another example, we learnt that in Cape town the biggest museum of African Art was to be built and has recently opened, a project initiated and financed by the German former PUMA boss, Jochen Zeitz and it is he and his museum director Mark Coetzee, who are now in the position to define what African art is. Cape Town's Zeitz MOCAA is developed together with other tourist attractions and shops in the harbour area of Capetown. The famous quote by Edouard Glissant "The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place,"[5] comes immediately to mind.

From our perspective, it would be so much more interesting to consult the many curators and art historians in South Africa with a discursive and research based practice to think about what an African museum could mean, and open up formats and contents, and to think profoundly of an archive, or how to exhibit with a travelling performance festival or something else. One could mention some of the curators from South Africa who would be worth consulting, for example, Nkule Mabaso, curator of the University Gallery in Cape Town, who is in the process of organising a connected conference on decolonizing art institutions in Cape Town; Gabi Ngcobo, who will curate the next Berlin Biennale, Khwezi Gule, the director of the Soweto Museums, Same Sizakele Mdluli, art historian from the Wits University in Johannesburg, or Ntone Edjabe from *Chimurenga*, a magazine that is engaged to open up a cultural sphere between music and fine arts, between politics and policies. One of the problems with contemporary museums is that they have an agenda embedded in their scopic regimes.

In her essay, *On Blackwomen's Creativity and the Future Imperfect: Thoughts, Propositions, Issues*, **Nkule Mabaso** scrutinizes the situations in which black female artists find themselves in South Africa. On the one hand, they are not recognized by art history's still colonially shaped canon, on the other hand they often are marked in stereotypical roles. With Nontobeko Ntombela's curated exhibition *Contact* (as a restaging of the first commercial exhibition of artist Gladys Mgudlandlu) and Gabi Ngcobo's exhibition *PASS-AGES: references & footnotes*, she names two examples that are to break with this (non-)representation of black women artists.
Same Mdluli depicts in her contribution, *Chasing Colonial Ghosts: Decolonizing Art Institutions in "Post-Apartheid" South Africa*, the current situation of exclusion in art institutions in South Africa. Up until now, a great deal of black artists have still not been recognized by museums. She points out that museums have the power to "mark" history by incorporating art into a representational mode, but they can also "make" history by engaging the audience on a different level in terms of that representation.

Questioning the role of art institutions

This means, in our context, that a traditional exhibition setting also produces specific subjectivities. In a traditional Western paradigm, this would mean a subject in the white cube, in the glass cave, who imagines being seen from all sides and who would therefore start to control him/herself. The bourgeois subject, as Tony Bennett claims, is an ideal citizen who controls him/herself. Following this thought, decolonizing would mean another sort of museum or art institution, another format, another public, another production and distribution.

In that regard, the contributions by **Michelle Wong**, **Binna Choi**, and **Sophie Williamsons** can be mentioned: Michelle Wong portrays the making of an Biennale – she was an Assistant Curator of the 11th edition of Gwangju Biennale, South Korea 2016 titled *The Eight Climate (What Does Art Do?)* – in light of *Train to Busan*, a 2016 summer zombie movie. She looks at labour situations of the making of a Biennale and the curator as someone manovering such large scale exhibitions in global context from the perspective of production.

Binna Choi reads two films – *Nothing but Goodness in the Colony: The Dutch Indies in Pictures, 1912–1942* and Ousmane Sembene's *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) – in light of colonial and decolonial thinking through the sense of labour and wage and draws relations to Annette Kraus developed project *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* at

Casco, Utrecht, where the relation to an art institution and its own structure of labour is questioned.
Sophie Williamson's article, *On Cultural Translation*, tries to reach out beyond categorization of "the other" from a language-based perspective. She describes the actual political situation of polarization, which might be overcome by artistic modes of living and practices.

Seen from this perspective, the effort to open up the cultural sphere in museum practices without changing other paradigms is part of neoliberal capitalism, which acts in many ways across borders. Therefore, we have to scrutinize in detail precisely in which way this opening/globalization in art institutions is performed and instituted. The contribution *Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn* by **Ivan Muñiz-Reed** for example discusses the decolonial term provided by Walter Mignolo and other "non-Western" scholars in the context of curatorial practice. Against this background, he examines key exhibitions with decolonial strategies like *Altermodern* by Nicolas Bourriaud, Tate Britain, 2009, or *Magiciens de la terre* by Jean-Hubert Martin, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989.

Claire Wintle researches UK museum practice with world cultures collections between 1945 and 1980. The collection process in this phase was deliberately unaware of political contexts, but it made possible "decolonized" museum practice, and even was sometimes a "mask for progressive political change" as she claims. British museums helped to establish museums in postcolonial countries, and they were also in return influenced by them. The intertwinedness of the coming together of these collections with mostly private donors has made it "a shared collecting practice based on a changing, more equitable political relationship, and the self-confident global status of these new countries."

But let's turn around and have a look at our own context here and now: the structural racism of European universities and further education, art institutions, and the xenophobia of European societies. Or to say it in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "So capital is in fact borderless; that's the problem. On the other hand capital has to keep borders alive in order for this kind of cross-border trade to happen. So therefore the idea of borderlessness has a performative contradiction within it which has to be kept alive."[9] This acknowledges the danger for art institutions to be stuck in a performative gesture of inclusion, which may not change a lot, again: symbolic politics are nothing without real politics. Some insights into the contradictions and struggles here in Switzerland were developed by **Sophie Vögele** and **Philippe Saner** from the research project Art School Differences, as well as by the anthropologist **Rohit Jain** (ISEK - Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft, Uni Zürich) and **Marie-Laure Allain Bonilla** (University of Basel) looks into the collections of Western Museum in her article "Some Theoretical and Empirical Aspects on the Decolonization of Western Collections"

Rohit Jain describes in his article, *How to Be Affected in Postcolonial Public Spaces? Ethnographic Remarks on a Multifocal World in the Making…*, how "other" subjects foremost with colonial backgrounds are seen and treated in Switzerland in everyday life. From this embeddedness in daily routine he argues, with Hamid Dabashi's recent essay "Can Europeans Read?", that the hegemonic power balance of "East" and "West" has clearly shifted. He goes on to explore possibilities of real encounters by presenting various projects that have taken place in Switzerland in recent years.

Sophie Vögele and **Philippe Saner** question the self-given imaginary of Switzerland as a neutral state of humanitarian tradition presumably dissociated as a nation from the colonial processes in the past. Their research project, *Art.School.Differences. Researching Inequalities and Normativities in the Field of Higher Art*, scrutinizes Swiss universities' imagined diversity policy and the colonial power relations still in place.

As a closing remark, we would like to return to the notion of a "democracy to come." In the following, we rely on a rereading of Derrida by Daniel Matthews; in the notion of a democracy to come, there are certain impossibilities or contradictions embedded in it, and the first one is the contradiction between democracy and sovereignty:

Democracy, on this reading, is always at war with itself, never capable of resolving its inner tensions and contradictions. To put it in terms that echo Derrida's earliest concerns with metaphysics of presence, we could say that democracy is never ***present*** but is always ***deferred.*** In its claim to presence ("this is democracy here-and-now") democracy evokes the sovereignty that calls forth its destruction. Democracy is, then, never fully present in the (sovereign) claim that democracy has arrived or been achieved. It is in this sense that democracy is always 'to come.' Significantly, the 'to come' here is not the positing of some horizon of possibility for democracy, as if it were just an *Idea* (in a Platonic or regulative, Kantian, sense) that we must move towards. Rather the 'to come' expresses the dislocation that structures the very possibility of **democracy from within**. The futural inference of the "to come" (*à venir*) is, however, significant. Derrida distinguishes between "the future" — thought of as a future-present, predictable and programmable — and the *à venir* which names an unforeseeable coming of the event, a rupture or disturbance that is unpredictable and open, without *telos* or knowable destination. The 'to come' in Derrida's formulation, then, points to a transformative and disruptive potential at the heart of democracy, it points to a promise of change in the here and now.[10]

Throughout the contributions, concern is uttered as to whether processes of decolonizing (or de-colonizing) reiterate power structures in favour of the global power players in the end, insofar as decolonizing has to be closely related to social and political changes and to social and political non-governmental initiatives in order to be relevant in the given contexts.

Notes

1 This issue arose from the **symposium "De-colonizing Art Institutions"** at Kunstmuseum Basel, June 21 and 22, 2017, with the speakers **Sabih Ahmed (Asia Art Archive), Jeebesh Bagchi (Raqs Media Collective), Binna Choi (Casco), Eyal Danon (Holon Digital Art Archive), Kadiatou Diallo (SPARCK), Same Sizakele Mdluli (**Lecturer, Wits University**), Rohit Jain (ISEK, Uni Zürich), Shwetal A. Patel (Kochi-Muziris Biennale), Dorothee Richter** (Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK). We are grateful to **Søren Grammel** to make this happen with us! The symposium was accompanied by a **Summer Academy** in Zurich held by the Further Education, Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts from June 13–24 and an **exhibition** with the same name at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich.
2 Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity," in Sabine Breitwieser, Cornelia Klinger, Walter D. Mignolo, eds., *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism,* MACBA, Barcelona, 2009.

3 See Fridericianum website. Accessed June 4, 2017. http://www.fridericianum.org/about/fridericianum.
4 Andrea Fraser, "L'1%, c'est moi," in *Texte zur Kunst,* Nr. 83, Berlin, 2011.
5 Edouard Glissant, see http://www.azquotes.com/quote/641419.
6 See Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness. Learning and Working from Athens," in Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk eds., *The documenta 14 Reader, Prestel, Munich, 2017, p. 23.*
7 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, Polity Books, Cambridge, 2012, p. 114.
8 *Landscape Perspectives in Palestine,* a talk held by Edward Said in the Birzeit University in the West Bank in 1998.
9 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, see http://www.azquotes.com/author/43070-Gayatri_Chakravorty_Spivak.
10 Daniel Matthews, "The Democracy To Come: Notes on the Thought of Jacques Derrida," in *Critical Legal Thinking, Law and the Political, April 2013. Accessed June 4, 2017. http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/04/16/the-democracy-to-come-notes-on-the-thought-of-jacques-derrida/.*

Dorothee Richter is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, and head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts, Switzerland; She is co-director with Susanne Clausen of the PhD in Practice in Curating Programme, a cooperation of the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading, as well as the publisher of the web journal OnCurating.org; Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she was initiator of *Curating Degree Zero Archive*, which travelled to 18 venues in Europe; Curator of Kuenstlerhaus Bremen, at which she curated different symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts and an archive on feminist practices, *Materialien/Materials;* recently she directed, together with Ronald Kolb, a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera* (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart 2013, Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Wien, 2014, Kunsthochschule Hamburg 2014, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, 2014, Kunstverein Wiesbaden 2014, University of Reading 2013, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich, 2013; Kunsthalle Sao Paolo, 2014; Ostwall Museum Dortmund, 2015, Kibbutz College Tel Aviv, 2015; Universität Lüneburg; 2015; Museum Tinguely in Basel, 2015, Lentos Museum in Linz, 2016), and she is working at the moment on a video archive on curatorial practices together with Ronald Kolb, with 100 interviews of contemporary curators and curatorial groups.

Ronald Kolb (b. 1978) studied Visual Communications with an MA degree at Merz Akademie, University of Applied Arts, Design and Media, Stuttgart, Germany and runs a design studio (together with Volker Schartner »Biotop 3000«, www.biotop3000.de) with an emphasis on publications and web design i.e. for Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg, ifa (Institut for Foreign Affairs, Germany), Donaueschinger Musiktage, Badischer Kunstverein, ZKM, and so forth, He was an Associate Professor at Merz Akademie Stuttgart, University of Applied Arts, Design and Media from 2009–2015 and is now the scientific researcher at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK with Dorothee Richter. He works as a filmmaker and editor (i.e. Flux Us Now. Fluxus explored with a camera, www.fluxusnow.net) from 2014 working on a long-term project on curatorial practices together with Dorothee Richter and is an honorary vice chairman of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart since 2014.

Still Here Somehow: Artists and Cultural Activism in Singapore's Renaissance

Woon Tien Wei

Drawing from my experience as an artist/curator based in Singapore, I have observed that some artists (including myself) have devoted a lot of time to organising and curating exhibitions or art administration and art writing. These "extra activities" in which the artists engage have created opportunities and situations which would not have come about unless the artists "volunteered"/"sacrificed" their art-making time.

I need to clarify that these "extra activities" are not unique to Singapore's art scene but are a common practice in art scenes around the world. This journal focuses on these "extra activities" within the cultural context of Singapore's Renaissance. I consider these kinds of "extra activities" a form of cultural activism, as these activities are responding to the need to create an environment conducive for art and towards the creation of a flourishing art scene.

Also, I need to highlight that activism is discouraged and its actions limited due to the historical context where the People's Action Party (PAP) government progressively reduced the power of civil society initiatives since the 1960s.[1] Within this context, the art scene subjected to the same historical process rarely participates in "activism" circles, and the form of cultural activism is not subjected to the same language and methodologies often used in civil society movements. Instead, I am looking at more nuanced and subtle forms that emerged from the art scene that can be conceived as cultural activism in relation to the development of the art scene in Singapore.

In this essay, I defined cultural activism in Singapore as the art community taking action within the field of art and culture where such actions are not seen as subversive but constitute a form of ground-up, community-led cultural development. For these artists, these cultural activist motivations give a unique character to their practice, and for some artists, they have been strategically worked into their artwork.

Renaissancing Singapore

From 2000, Singapore underwent a period of rapid cultural development and liberalisation introduced through new cultural and social policies by the Singapore government. The Renaissance City Master Plan most clearly articulates the government's commitment to this change and how it was motivated by Singapore's move towards a knowledge-based economy.[2]

The "Renaissancing" of Singapore has transformed the cultural landscape significantly. This process transformed the image of the city, with the emergence of world-class performance venues and museums altering the city's skyline. The public has more options and opportunities to access arts and cultural events due to the increasing number of art festivals and art venues. There are more opportunities made available for arts practitioners in the areas of funding and spaces. With "more" of everything cultural, the government through its various agencies and statutory boards has

become more entrenched in the development of the arts. The middle management of these agencies and statutory boards has become influential in determining and envisioning the role of arts here.[3]

At the same time, the Singapore government implemented a series of liberalisations in the form of casinos, bar-top dancing and later opening hours of clubs and pubs. They liberalised political spaces through the creation of Speaker's Corner.[4] However, the embracing of the cultural and the liberalisation process have been criticised as merely "gestural," as the government remains cautious of "disruptive" works, and continues to exercise control over the outcome of artworks and programmes through various methods, including registration, funding, licensing and censorship (Lee, 2005, 2007; Ooi, 2010). Hence, this government-led cultural development envisioning a vibrant global city of the arts seems to define and limit art's role as market-driven, decorative and non-disruptive.[5]

Community-led Cultural Development as a Cultural activism / Side-lining the Cultural Activist within Fine Art

The arts community is a loose group of people who belong to the group by virtue of their profession and interest. However, within this group, there are many views which each person holds dearly, and when the Singapore government decides to push for certain policies, there will be artists who will agree and converge as well as those who will disagree and resist. At times, members of the arts community may engage through initiating community-led cultural development projects to develop arts and culture based on their resources and managed independently of the government.

In this way, community-led cultural developments provide an alternative vision to the government-led cultural development, and hence, I defined these community-led efforts as a form of cultural activism within the Singapore context.

Despite more of the "arts" with Singapore's Renaissance, the government-led development tends to privilege art that produces a spectacle, plugged into the global art network and non-disruptive in nature. Under such circumstances, projects with a dimension of cultural activism that are often community-led with fewer resources are easily overshadowed and sidelined by the spectacular and international art projects.

Through analysing the following case studies of community-led development projects here, one can understand the different motivations that shape their cultural activism. The studies further address questions concerning the significance of their cultural activism and their role in complementing or contesting Singapore's Renaissance.

Koh Nguang How and His Archive

Koh Nguang How is an artist who holds a unique and important position in the art scene in Singapore. He started his artistic practice in the late 1980s with The Artists Village and by being part of the burgeoning contemporary art scene; he started to document the performances and art events by The Artists Village and his peers. Over the years, his documentation and collection of materials have broadened to include art in the 1930s to early 2000s. Koh's collecting and documenting has resulted in a huge comprehensive archive of materials on Singapore art. Since the formal institutions of Singapore have not been consistently building an archive of art, Koh's collection has become more rare and precious.

教育

INSTITUTIONS

Koh's art archive can be regarded as a form of cultural activism; he has managed with meagre resources to build a collection in his HDB flat[6] that is more comprehensive than any art institutions in Singapore. I have chosen to discuss Koh's practice because his practice embodies the motivation of cultural activism. This is seen in his activity in maintaining his collection of art-related documents, motivated by the fact that he felt no one was doing it and that these documents needed to be "saved" from disappearing. Gradually, Koh's art archive became a central resource and integral to his art practice, or one can also say that this archive begins to envelop his practice. His art practice consists of working in the multiple roles of researcher, curator, and artist, which includes the activities of collecting and documenting art-related development.[7]

Singapore's Renaissance may have brought about an increase in art infrastructure and institutions with the arts getting more support since the 1990s.[8] How do the art institutions like the museums view community-led initiatives like Koh's art archive, which were developed before the Renaissancing of Singapore?

His collection and wealth of knowledge on Singapore art are valuable, as proven by the art institutions who regularly engage Koh to be an advisor and to loan his collection. Koh has also revealed that art institutions have previously approached him with an interest in purchasing his collection, but they were "insincere," and the transaction never happened. In 2008, Koh was engaged by the National Museum of Singapore as a researcher to provide research materials and photographs for "Documenta 50 Years"[9] while several Singapore artists were commissioned to produce artworks. He commented that the museum did not consider him an artist as they did not commission an artwork by him and that perhaps his "art" did not look like sculpture or painting.[10] From his CV, it is evident that he has more often been engaged to play the role of a researcher than that of an artist.

Koh's role as a researcher who collects and an artist who creates are often seen as two separate practices. This view should be challenged, as I argue that it is the cultural activist in Koh who started the collection process, and as it developed, he had to merge it into his practice strategically, and it is the combination of the two that makes his practice unique. Since the archive and his art are one and the same, the conjuring of the materials from his archive for research or artistic commissions is essential for the legitimisation of "being an artist" in Singapore and for maintaining the visibility of the collection.

At the point of writing, Koh has received more recognition as an artist than when I first started studying his work in the early 2000s. In the following, I will highlight *Errata* (2004–2005) and *When Photographs Become Drawing* (2009) and discuss how these two works reflect his artistic strategies in Singapore's Renaissance.

Errata

Koh was invited as a resident researcher for the independent curatorial team at p-10's inaugural residency programme[11] in February 2004. Through this, Koh was invited to bring a part of his archive to p-10's space to share with the curatorial team. The objective was to find a way to frame Koh's extensive research and create an exhibition to give more visibility to his work and his collection.

This resulted in the production of the *Errata,* and the project was exhibited in p-10's project space at 10 Perumal Road (16 September to 14 October 2004). Subsequently, it was exhibited at the Central Library of the National University of Singapore (2 to 16

March 2005),[12] and in the then-Singapore History Museum (15 August to 25 September 2005).

Errata was a joint effort where Koh was the researcher and p-10 the curators. The full title of the project—*Errata: Page 71, Plate 47. Image caption. Change Year: 1950 to Year: 1959; Reported September 2004 by Koh Nguang How* (Errata)—states the exact location of the error Koh spotted in the book *Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art* written by Kwok Kian Chow and published by the National Heritage Board/Singapore Art Museum in 1996 (Kwok 1996). This book is very important as it is the only significant scholarly book published on Singapore art history. Koh spotted that a painting by Chua Mia Tee was incorrectly captioned as having been painted in 1950 instead of 1959 as he believed. The project framed that an errata should be made to change the 0 to a 9. By changing the number in the year, the project "recovered nine years in the history of art in Singapore," and in doing so, would unfold or even re-order Singapore's art history.

In the following paragraphs, I will proceed with the brief walk-through of the project to provide an understanding of the installation and the other activities held in conjunction with the exhibition. I will also highlight some of the concepts and issues covered in the project.[13]

Upon entering the exhibition space, the visitor saw shelves filled with books and documents, video monitors, tables, chairs, a black board, and a metal cabinet. The visitor was greeted by the gallery sitter and handed a pair of gloves, a pencil, and a clipboard with an exhibition worksheet, and a flyer containing basic information on the project was printed in the four official languages of Singapore: English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. The visitor was also given a worksheet that was an interactive element allowing the visitor to perform their own research work with the materials in the exhibition. The entire project consisted of 269 artefacts—all of which pertained to the error found in the book *Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*. The artefacts ranged from publications, photographs, paintings, and woodcuts, which were either from the 1950s–1960s or contained references to the period. Koh had marked out pages in the books with Post-it notes. Some of these would have some comments he had written while doing his research. As the visitors explored the collection, Koh's notes connected with them and offered insight into his research methodology.

In addition to the *Errata* collection, a series of artworks by artist Koeh Sia Yong[14] was exhibited. Koeh's artworks are fine examples of works done in the Social Realist style, a style that is often affiliated with the Equator Art Society. The artworks that were shown in the exhibition were paintings, and the woodcut prints were made during the 1950s and 1960s. The paintings were *Portrait of Indian Man* (1966)[15], *Cannot Grow Vegetables Anymore!* (1966), *Studying* (1966), and *Indian Balloons Seller* (1961), and the woodcut prints were *Scene of Bukit Ho Swee Fire* (1961), *Extortion* (1957), and *Flood at Potong Pasir* (1957). This was a rare opportunity to view the actual works instead of seeing them only in books; in fact, some of these works had never been exhibited since they had been made.

In addition to the exhibition component, there were guided tours, and an education pack for teachers was also released during the first exhibition at p-10. With the education pack, teachers were provided with additional background information and context of the exhibition, thus allowing them to conduct a tour of the exhibition

themselves with their students. A series of workshops and talks accompanied the exhibition as part of the project.

The Artist-Researcher

Errata was well received by both critics and the public in all three sites where it was exhibited. Singapore curator Eugene Tan saw *Errata* as a "challenge to the unquestioned status of institutions." Through the questioning of the error in a book authored by Kwok Kian Chow, the then-director of government-run SAM, the project challenged the accuracy and objectivity of Kwok's government-sanctioned account of art history in Singapore by highlighting its omission of an art movement that was thought to have Marxist links.[16] Although it is correct that *Errata* challenged the dominant account of art history by the Singapore Art Museum, the project also aimed to dispel the myth of the Equator Art Society's "Marxist links." Curator Storer said *Errata* was a "selection from Koh's comprehensive archive that formed a critical narrative of Singapore art history and its institutional representation."[17]

Errata was a complex project. It dealt with the history of art in Singapore and how art history was implicated in the social and political struggles in Singapore's history. Some historians like Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli have produced work which has aimed at critiquing the problem of this dominant narrative of Singapore history, and other political detainees have also begun publishing their memoirs to tell their side of the story.[18] Hence, there is a revisionist movement that is taking place in other fields, and *Errata* could also be seen as one of the first few within this movement in the cultural field.

The *Errata* project highlights the value of the artist-researcher role, which is very relevant in the cultural context in Singapore. As discussed previously, the government-led development in Singapore's Renaissance tends to privilege art that produces a spectacle that is plugged into the global art network and is non-disruptive.

Within this context, the environment is not conducive for the areas of research, art history, art criticism, or contentious topics. Without them, art remains decorative, and artworks merely objects of cultural consumption in the newly envisioned Singapore Renaissance. Hence, the activist-artist-researcher can potentially engage this crisis, and *Errata* showed the potential of such work.

One of the more memorable and meaningful experiences of *Errata* is how the project engaged with the troubled reputation of the Equator Art Society in art history. According to Kwok, the society was associated with the Social Realist Movement in Singapore during the 1950s. According to Koh's research, some members of this society were arrested under the Internal Security Act for communist activities,[19] and at that time, some art societies were suspected to be fronts for communist activities. Communists and Marxists were "villainised" by the Singapore government, and all associations, real or imagined, were seen as a threat to national security.[20] Hence, the arrest of the society's members probably fuelled the rumours of the society having "Marxist links." With such allegations, it is not a surprise to find so little information available about this art society. The surviving members, including Chua Mia Tee, the artist whose painting was wrongly dated in Kwok's book and became the "inspiration" for *Errata*, would not speak publicly about their experiences with the society or their involvement with it. Although the Equator Art Society did have activist/political intentions, they deny any allegations or links with the Communists or Marxists, but the society suffered repression as though it did, with very real personal consequences

for its members. This is reflective of the climate of fear which resulted in Singaporeans becoming disengaged with politics.[21] Also, some laws are vague and open-ended, creating "self-censorship" in the arts,[22] Chua and other artists from the Equator Art Society have chosen to remain apathetic to the group's position in art history. In this way, art through this silence and absence of "politics" and "social" context became depoliticised.

Due to its possible links with the political struggle between the Communists and PAP for Singapore, the Equator Art Society was a sensitive topic that was avoided and hidden. With *Errata*, a space for the discussion on the society was created, and Koh managed to convince Koeh, who was the last president of Equator Art Society, to "come out" and share his archive relevant to the art society. It was not easy to do so, as the climate of fear was very real. In addition, it was rare for artists of different generations to mix, and due to many of the older artists being Chinese-speaking, there was also a language barrier. It was Koh's dedication and sincerity that allowed him to develop a rapport with Koeh and other members of the older generation of Singapore artists, eventually convincing them to share the "sensitive" materials.

Errata was, therefore, a groundbreaking project, as contemporary art in Singapore rarely referred to its own history or admitted any influence from earlier Singaporean artists, and the art of the past has not been used as material in contemporary art.

Koh and p-10 felt that it was important to discover this missing chapter in our art history and the roles the artists in the Equator Art Society played in it. This was done through the *Errata* exhibition that showed a more complete collection of the society's materials, which included films, photographs, and exhibition catalogues. In addition, there were workshops and talks with Koeh.[23] The talk was attended by several previous members of Equator Art Society, including Chua Mia Tee. It is important to note that this was the first time that a talk about the Equator Art Society was made in public since the society was disbanded in 1972.[24]

Through *Errata*, we found that the society was an active group of young artists who had strong beliefs about how art should reflect life. At the peak of the society's history, it had 800 members and was divided into different wings: art, theatre, and literature. This new information revealed an art society with a multidisciplinary and multicultural outlook, and hence, a very interesting and different dimension of art in Singapore art history. As a result of their re-emergence through *Errata*, Equator Art Society members have started to be included in public talks at SAM, and SAM became more open to exhibiting the artworks made during that period. In addition, Chua's painting, *The National Language Class* (1959), the "inspiration" for *Errata* became an inspiration and title for a play by Singapore theatre group Spell #7 in 2006 (Spell #7 2006). The visibility created by *Errata* for the Equator Art Society has debunked the myths of it being motivated by extreme politics, and has given Equator Art Society a significant place in art history. In this way, *Errata* is important to the discourse on art history.

Errata provided the strategy in exhibition-making and art-making for Koh, who was often seen to be performing two separate roles, both as researcher and art-maker. With *Errata*, Koh's two roles were merged, and he was seen as an "artist-researcher."[25] Koh's practice of collecting and archiving art-related materials, the cultural activism aspect, was often sidelined and not considered as part of art-making. *Errata* brought Koh's activist work to the central focus of the exhibition, and as a result, the "cause" in the form of his archive became visible. Therefore, *Errata* created an interstice which

allowed the archive's "cause" to take form through the exhibition. The exhibition became a site for distribution and dissemination, where the archive's "cause" was easily consumed as a cultural object while potentially engaging the issues of Singapore's art history. This was realised through engaging with Equator Art Society and questioning the representation of it in the main narrative of Singapore's art history. In another way, *Errata* was an art project that was informed by cultural activism. It highlighted the "artist-researcher" as a cultural activist, framed the "cause" room in p-10's project space. According to Koh, *Errata* allowed him to exhibit and share many of the historical materials on Singaporean art. SAAP@p-10 was an archiving project that was a continuation of his work on documentation and archiving on Singaporean art. "Both projects helped in sorting out part of my collections; at the same time, dealt with issues concerning storage, data-entry and basic archiving practices."[26]

When Photographs Become Drawings

Errata showed Koh as an "artist-researcher" and framed his activity and collection in an exhibition context. Since then, Koh has continued to develop this position in his practice and has created Singapore Art Archive Project (SAAP) which formed the archive.

When Photographs Become Drawing is an artwork made by Koh in 2009 for a group exhibition entitled *Drawing as Form* (2009), organised by TAV at Sculpture Square.[27] This work is different from *Errata* in a several ways. One, Koh was the sole author of this work. Second, it was an artwork exhibited in a group exhibition. Third, it showed the methodology in Koh's art-making. I have chosen to highlight this work because it articulated Koh's position as an artist-researcher vis-à-vis the artist/cultural activist and showed a different strategy in engaging the issue of the "archive."

When Photographs Become Drawing is a mixed media work. It comprises of one customised clipboard with a collage of photographs and four frames containing photographs, each with a corresponding clipboard with captions for every photograph in the frame. The work is an interpretation of Koh's "artist-researcher" work on a computer desktop. The customised clipboard alludes to the computer clipboard where he has cut and pasted materials from his other folders, represented by the four frames of photographs. The clipboard below these frames is "file-info" for each of the images. Therefore, the work is a "print screen" or a "snapshot" of his work process. The photographs consist of Koh's photographs which were taken from the 1980s through to 2009 and are arranged in a grid. The photos in these frames, which included documentation of The Artists Village, places, interesting "things," and his personal life, concludes with an image of his father's death certificate, all organised into a form of narrative.

Also, Koh shared with me that he has maintained the practice of being physically present in all of his exhibitions. For the exhibition of this work, he was at the exhibition venue every day. Although his presence was not necessary for the work, it was his usual practice, and if anyone was interested in the content (photographs), he could elaborate more on its context and the story behind it.[28]

For this work, Koh has "sampled" the archive, as the photographs were assimilated into the artwork and sequenced towards some form of narrative. The customised clipboard showed the process of mixing and cutting up the archive. Through this, he showed what Bourriaud would call "postproduction" in art, where artists manipulate the original materials for the creation of their work.[29] Postproduction challenges the idea of originality and authorship, but Bourriaud argues that this was not a phenomenon

only in art. It can be traced to the field of music where DJs would sample and mix songs and from this create their own music. Hence, Koh through an archive sampling and mixing has made an artwork.[30]

Koh's work can be regarded as archival in art, which is often seen in many artists' work. An example of this would be in the work of Art & Language's Indexes series. With its first project, *Index 01 (1972)*,[31] the group was in its most self-reflexive period, and the work showed how the group functioned. This work was housed in filing cabinets that resembled library card catalogues, and contained within the cabinets were a series of propositions, drawn from the Art-Language Journal and other sources, together with wall diagrams showing how the propositions connected. The artwork (cabinet with the archive) was made for the exhibition. The work could be understood as a sculptural object, but it also had functionality and documentary qualities.[32]

The title of Koh's work referred to the exhibition title *Drawing as Form*, which referenced *The Drawing Show* (1989) organised by The Artists Village in Ulu Sembawang. The exhibition's main objective was to show different possibilities of "drawing," or the act of "drawing." The show highlighted drawings as a fundamental process of art-making. Koh's title *When Photographs Become Drawing* was a statement that affirmed his practice as an "artist-researcher." The work presented a "snapshot" of his work process and framed it as a "drawing." Since the premise of the exhibition suggested that drawing was a fundamental process in realising an artwork, Koh's work showed a moment in pre-production and suggested the eventuality of the artwork. This was also further reflected in the work as he used the photographs, i.e, content from his archive, as "raw materials" to create this work. The content of the photographs did not serve primarily as a narrative but supported the statement that it was "drawing." This showed a shift in Koh's practice and his methodology of art-making. Therefore, the "When" in the title proposes that, with this work, Koh shows a more defined and resolved position of an "artist-researcher" than in *Errata*.

Art critic Hal Foster Art has observed that art that invokes the archive often shows certain characteristics.[33] The archive in art often sees the retrieval of the archive as a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory. It often shows the artist seeking to make historical information, which has been lost or displaced, physically present and calling out to the audience to interpret the archive. In this regard, archival art is often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings, or incomplete projects in art and history and potentially offers points of departure again. The archive in art tends to have a utopian ambition to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia.

While this work showed Koh's resolve in art-making, I would suggest that his archive, although submerged as the artwork, was still present. This was seen with Koh's physical presence in the exhibition, which offered an entry point into the archive, an option he felt was necessary to provide a context to the content in the frames.[34] His presence helped create an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about the archive and enhanced the visibility of the archive. The cultural activist dimension of the work in the form of the archive was activated on demand with his presence. From these observations, it shows that Koh's cultural activist motivation was still present but packaged into a cultural object as an artwork. In this sense, the archive's utopian ambition to recoup failed visions in art was still there. Like *Index 01*, *When Photographs Become*

Drawing was exhibited as an artwork while being functional (as storage of the archive) and documentary (recording the archive).

In Singapore's cultural context, where artworks and exhibitions are privileged in art history, Koh's strategy of using the archive to create artworks while being able to invoke the archive through his artwork is a relevant strategy to make the archive more visible and heighten the chances of its survival.

Conclusion

As the Singapore government continues to develop the arts, we see an increase of exhibition spaces and exhibitions. However, there has not been enough emphasis on the development of the discipline of art criticism and art history. Hence, there remains a lack of knowledge to appreciate the arts. In this environment, it seems that the artist's role is reduced to merely produce artworks that can fill up the exhibition spaces and be consumed as "decoration."

Meanwhile, artists like Koh Nguang How, although recognised for his contributions to Singaporean art, have their cultural activism work side-lined in the pre-occupation with producing exhibitions. The sidelining of his motivations behind cultural activism result in his practice and artworks, which are both practical and potentially critical in a valuable way, being devalued.

Koh Nguang How's cultural activism motivated his forming of an archive that contains art-related materials that are rare or already lost to the public. I showed how he developed the strategy of "artist-researcher" to utilise the "archive" in his artworks. By interrogating his private art archive, Koh questions the state of the Singapore government's art archive and creates opportunities for others to learn about the contents of his activities. He has thus given his archive visibility and enabled it to remain relevant and to establish the important practice of researcher-artist.

In this essay, I have tried to show how, despite the cultural developments led by the Singapore government, artists have initiated their own cultural developments. These motivations led to what I term cultural activism, which I argue creates an added dimension in the art practices of Koh and others at some point in their artistic careers.

Often, their cultural activism is seen as separate from their artistic endeavours. This view is both limiting and downplays the significance of their work, regarding both the aesthetic value and the possible social contribution to cultural development in Singapore. Through highlighting their work, I hope I have provided a framework to understand their art practices and artworks by considering their cultural activism as an integral quality that is reflected in aesthetic considerations in their strategies of artistic production.

By discussing their work, I have shown that their work offers an important interpretation of Singapore's Renaissance, which may be subsumed within government-led art development. I argue that it should not be seen as contested visions of Singapore's Renaissance, but the policy makers should be reflexive and expand the support to these kind of practices. This will enable a more diverse vision of Singapore's Renaissance.

Notes

1 Chua, Beng-Huat, *Commnuitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 19; Tamney, Joseph B., *The Struggle over Singapore's Soul: Western Modernization and Asian Culture*, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1995, pp. 58-63.
2 MICA (Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts), *Renaissance City Plan Iii*, MICA, Singapore, 2008; MITA (Ministry of Information and the Arts), *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore*, Vol. 2006, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, Singapore, 2000.
3 Chong, Terence, "Bureaucratic Imaginations in the Global City: Arts and Culture in Singapore," in *Cultural Policies in East Asia: Dynamics between the State, Arts and Creative Industries*, Hye-Kyung Lee and Lorraine Lim, eds, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2014, pp. 17-34.
4 Speaker's Corner is fashioned after Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London. Although Singaporeans are required to submit the identity details to the Police stationed there, political expression is allowed here and no licence is required; non-Singaporeans are not allowed to speak there.
5 Chua, Beng-Huat, "Culture and the Arts: Intrusion in Political Space," in *Social Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore*, Kwen Fee Lian and Chee-Kiong Tong, eds., Leiden, Boston, 2008, pp. 225-45; Kong, Lily, "Cultural Policy in Singapore: Negotiating Economic and Socio-Cultural Agendas," *Geoforum* 31 (2000): 409-24.
6 About 80% of Singapore's population reside in high-rise HDB (Housing Development Board) flats located in housing estates and new towns. These flats are mostly owned by the residents under a home ownership scheme which allows Singaporeans to use their Central Provident Funds, a social security fund to purchase these homes (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Singapore 2010). Almost the whole of Koh's flat is currently occupied by his collection.
7 Koh, N.H, Personal Communication, October 22, 2010.
8 See exhibition *Art vs art: conflict & convergence,* 1995. The Substation, Singapore.
9 *Archive in Motion: 50 years documenta 1955–2005* was a travelling show presented by the Goethe Institute that took place at the National Museum of Singapore. The museum responded to documenta's archive by creating Picturing Singapore 1955–2005: An Archival Perspective, which brought to life the corresponding developments in Singapore's arts scene. Koh was commissioned as a researcher to produce a corresponding Singapore timeline (Tale of Two Histories 2007).
10 Koh, N.H, Personal Communication, October 22, 2010.
11 p-10 was an independent curatorial team based in Singapore from 2004–2008. Its focus was on the development of artwork and areas surrounding the practice of art. I was the co-founder of this curatorial collective and it was my first foray into curatorial practice. As part of p-10, I began to include curatorial work as part of my practice. The other members were Cheong Kah Kit, Lee SzeChin, Lim Kok Boon, and Jennifer Teo.
12 This version of *Errata was titled Errata at NUS (2005).* It was a collaboration with the University Scholars' Programme, National University of Singapore (NUS) and was initiated by three NUS students (Seng Yujin, Ong Zhenmin, and Wang Zineng) who visited the first exhibition in p-10's project space.
13 For a more detailed explanation of *Errata,* see the Errata catalogue where I wrote a curatorial essay and compiled the documentation.
14 Koeh Sia Yong was the last President of the Equator Art Society before the society de-registered.
15 This painting was shown at the first and second exhibitions.
16 Tan, Chong Kee, "The Canary and the Crow: Sintercom and the State Tolerability Index," in *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, Kenneth Paul Tan, ed., NUS Press, Singapore, 2007, pp. 159-84.

17 Storer, Russell, "Making Space: Historical Contexts of Contemporary Art in Singapore," in *Contemporary Art in Singapore*, Russell Storer, Eugene Tan, and Gunalan Nadarajan, eds., Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore, 2007, pp. 9-18.
18 Hong, Lysa, and Jianli Huang, *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Past*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2008; Tan, Jing Quee, and K.S. Jomo, eds. *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, Select, Singapore, 2002; Zahari, Said, *The Long Nightmare: My 17 Years as a Political Prisoner*, Utusan Publications, Kuala Lumpur, 2007.
19 During the 1960s, under Operation Cold Store, the Internal Security Department arrested a number of people suspected of being communists (nevets432 2006).
20 Wee, C. J, W.-L., *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2007.
21 Chua, Beng-Huat, *Commnuitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*.
22 Lee, Terence, "Towards a "New Equilibrium": The Economics and Politics of the Creative Industries in Singapore," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2007): 55-71; See, Martyn, "A Climate of Self-Censorship," *Asian Human Rights Defender* Vol. 5, No. 3 (December 2009): 34-39.
23 The talks were conducted in three venues: p-10's space, Central Library in NUS, and the Singapore History Museum where *Errata was exhibited.*
24 Kwok, Kian Chow, *Channels & Confluences : A History of Singapore Art*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, 1996; Yeo, Alicia Kay Ling, "Equator Art Society," National Library Board, http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_1253_2006-11-30.html.
25 Storer, Russell, "Making Space: Historical Contexts of Contemporary Art in Singapore."
26 Koh. N.H, Personal Communication, October 22, 2010.
27 *Drawing as Form took place from 12–28 August 2009*. For more on this show, see http://www.tav.sg/index.php?/project/drawing-as-form and a review by Mayo Martin http://blogs.todayonline.com/forartssake/2009/08/12/artists-draw-crowds.
28 Koh. N.H, Personal Communication, October 22, 2010.
29 Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman, Lukas & Sternberg, New York, 2002.
30 This use of the archive is different from those of *Errata where the archive retains its function as research and reading materials.*
31 This work is sometimes referred to as the "Documenta Index" after its first exhibition in *documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany.*
32 Gilbert, Chris, "Art & Language and the Institutional Form in Anglo-American Collectivism," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 2007, pp. 83-86.
33 Foster, Hal, "An Archival Impulse," *October* Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004): 3-22.
34 Koh 's later work, *Artists in the News (2011), presented at the Singapore Biennale 2011, showed his archive of Singapore newspapers from which he highlighted media coverage of contemporary Singaporean artists in different periods in time. In this work, his presence as an archivist is part of the artwork, while for When Photographs Become Drawing, Koh stated that his presence was not part of the artwork (Koh. N.H, Personal Communication October 22, 2010).*

Woon Tien Wei is an artist/curator based in Singapore. His work focuses on cultural policies, collectivity in art, social movements, community engagement, land contestation, urban legends and social movements. In his practice, he works with independent cultural and social space, Post-Museum. In addition to Post-Museum's events and projects, they also curate, research and collabo-

rate with a network of social actors and cultural workers. With Post-Museum, Woon worked on Bukit Brown Index (2014-), an ongoing project which indexes the land contestation case of Bukit Brown Cemetery. He lectures part-time at Lasalle College of the Arts in the Faculty of Fine Arts. Woon received his Doctorate in Creative Art in the Arts from Curtin University of Technology, Perth.

Post-Museum is an independent cultural and social space in Singapore which aims to encourage and support a thinking and pro-active community. It is an open platform for examining contemporary life, promoting the arts and connecting people. In addition to their events and projects, they also curate, research and collaborate with a network of social actors and cultural workers.

For Bukit Brown Index (2014-) is an ongoing project which indexes the case of Bukit Brown Cemetery. The struggle to conserve Bukit Brown is not read as a sentimental conservation but a struggle over Singapore's Soul. Part of a worldwide movement, part social experiment, Post-Musem's Really Really Free Market (2009-) form a temporary 'free' market zone based on alternative gift economy. The project creates a temporal physical manifestation of a micro-utopia where the fundamental economic structure is altered with a structured that value acts of 'giving, sharing and caring heart'.

Currently operating nomadically, they continue to organise and host various events and activities in different spaces.

The Israeli Center for Digital Art
Eyal Danon

In recent years the Israeli Center for Digital Art (CDA) has been undergoing a process of change that includes examining virtually every aspect of our work and building a new work program, central to which is an attempt to redefine the roles and spheres of responsibility of a public art center. This process commenced in 2010 when we began working in the Jessy Cohen neighborhood, and continued more intensively in 2012 when the CDA relocated to the neighborhood. The Jessy Cohen neighborhood is situated on the southwest boundary of Holon, which is located to the south of Tel Aviv. The neighborhood was built in the early 1950s with funds donated by American-Jewish philanthropists Max and Jessica Cohen in order to provide a public housing solution for new immigrants who came to Israel in its early years from Eastern Europe and the Arab states.
We at the CDA embarked on this process of change out of a profound sense of exhausted possibilities and of being at an impasse. This feeling that reality mandates different work methods was attended by feelings of dissatisfaction or doubts concerning the role and relevance of the art field in general to the society in which we live, and doubts that emerged in us, as people managing and operating a public art center, concerning the way we work and the methods we employ.

These feelings stemmed from the fact that the art field likes to imagine itself as a subversive-political space due to its very engagement with content of this nature, but its structure runs counter to the content that many institutions and individuals within it seek to advance. In practice, the art field is founded on hierarchies and distribution of power and authority that are frequently determined in accordance with ethnic origin and status. Art enjoys freedom and autonomy, but it is unclear by virtue of which right it does so, and the question is whether it is not in fact an accurate reflection of the existing order.

We came to the Jessy Cohen neighborhood with a limited toolbox that was not suited to the reality we discovered there. Our principal privilege, which is itself a direct product of the special status of art, is what is known as "artistic freedom." However, one of our main understandings during this process is that artistic freedom possesses no value when it is detached from the objectives it serves. Art should—ideally at least—be free and autonomous to serve the society in which it acts, rather than those engaging in it.

When we began working in the Jessy Cohen neighborhood we came armed with an arsenal of ideologies and beliefs concerning the role of art. We believed in the need to disengage art from life that has become enslaved to money and work, from art being turned into a commodity, from its terminology being co-opted to serve commercial needs, and from using its tools and modes of action in service of the neoliberal agenda. We believed that artistic freedom is the ability of art to be detached from utilitarian commercial and economic considerations, its ability to propose an unplanned and uncontrolled space and time, and its ability to be inefficient and impractical. That, in our view, is the public and political importance of art: it is a force with a potential for resisting market logic, a force that enables the creation of communities and new human, social, and community connections that act counter to this logic.

But in practice we realized this arsenal primarily in exhibitions. In other words, we engaged in mediating values and art, as well as artists' actions, for a mostly bourgeois audience that is extrinsic to the neighborhood in which we are located, and which remained a passive observer.

When we relocated to the neighborhood, we were compelled to ask ourselves if our regular and familiar practices and work methods and the CDA's artistic program indeed serve our worldview.

We began a process of self-reexamination whose aim was to understand how an art center seeking to work in this way should operate. What should be the role of an art center that seeks to create a possibility of place and time together with the community?

Much has been written on the artist's role in these contexts, and numerous exhibitions presenting products or documentation of such processes have been presented in recent years. However, it is only rarely that these discussions touch on fundamental questions concerning the role of an art institution in general and, as in our case, the role of an art center. The purpose of the move that we at the CDA have been advancing in recent years is to expand this discussion in order to understand what kind of art center can serve as a home for artists and the kind of processes mentioned above. How can an art center become a place of belonging both for the community in which it is located and for the art community?

We began in effect by building a new art center—one that endeavors to shatter existing conventions and boundaries in the field in order to be effective and essential in the community in which it is situated. An art center that attempts to liberate the culture and language from the economic logic that has taken it over, and endeavors to achieve this by forging genuine alliances with different individuals and institutions—not necessarily from the sphere of art.

A number of questions stood at the basis of this project: is the role of an art center, radical as it may be, to reinforce the existing power configurations in the field? Is our role to identify young talents that have yet to make a breakthrough? Perhaps to formulate curatorial directions so that in the future the larger bodies in the field—institutions and collectors—can enjoy the economic translation of the values we have identified? And the biggest question of all: whom are we serving? When we present contemporary art exhibitions of the best artists from Israel and around the world, and bring the Israeli art public to the Jessy Cohen neighborhood, are we advancing the neighborhood residents or constituting a catalyst for future gentrification processes?

It took us time to understand that even when the content of our activities is fundamentally sociopolitical—even when we promote projects and exhibitions engaging with current sociopolitical issues that are relevant to our neighboring communities and create a genuine connection with genuine communities—the very choice of conventional tools from the art field, from working with artists to mounting exhibitions and publishing catalogues, preserves the field's existing conservative divisions and boundaries. This means that appearances are at least as important as content. Consequently, so long as the art field, and the CDA within it, continues to speak in the "coded" language of contemporary art, irrespective of the topic of conversation, we are excluding anyone who does not speak the "language." That is to

say, the tools of art that are familiar to us create segregated spaces, not community ones.

This insight led us to challenge the point of departure that had always seemed self-evident to us: to be relevant to society and the community we must keep one foot firmly in the art field, and preserve our identification as an "art institution". This perception was undermined when we understood that our identification as an art center is precisely what prevents the community in the Jessy Cohen neighborhood from viewing us as part of the neighborhood. Put differently, the language of art on the one hand, and the aesthetics of clean, white art spaces on the other, are not neutral tools for the "correct" presentation of an artwork, but first and foremost a means for an effective screening of anyone who does not speak or understand the language. Such gatekeepers are possibly relevant for an art space somewhere else, but for us who inhabit a building that until just a moment ago served as the neighborhood school, they are tools that we must abandon.

All this led us to reformulate our role from a new understanding of the question: who are we here to serve? Who spends extensive time at the CDA every day? Who formulates the CDA's content with us? Who extends its range of possibilities and potential every day anew? The answer is that our neighbors, who maintain continuous, daily contact with us, and most of whom are not artists, are our principal partners in formulating the CDA's new role. Thus, the CDA is gradually shifting from being exclusively maintained by the people operating it and working in it, to being jointly maintained with the community in which it is situated. This does not mean that other communities are not invited to come through its doors, or that the art community is not part of it, but once we learned to recognize who our most basic partners are, there was no alternative but to reach new conclusions concerning the way we work and operate.

The CDA's new work program was built in accordance with this new point of departure, and is now founded on the perception that an art center is the contemporary community space, and is suitable for this purpose due to its flexible structure as a space in which trial and error are possible, and because it is a unique public place whose primary resources are time and space. But to this end we had to relinquish our pronounced appearance as an art center, as well as many of the artistic practices to which we adhered, and we especially had to stop being apprehensive about resembling institutions that are considered "dangerous" in an artistic context: a community center, a school, and so forth.

We wanted to recreate the CDA as an art center that has regular "residents," not only viewers. An art center that can be sufficiently flexible to change its designation from time to time: an art center that can be a school, a community center, a laboratory, a restaurant, and an exhibition space—all according to need. We wanted a center that no longer serves as a cover for preserving the traditional power relations in the art field, but a space that enables them to be shattered, and recognition that knowledge, experience, and ability are not the exclusive domain of those who have undergone transparent professionalization processes that are ostensibly detached from any ethnic, class, or political context. Alongside this flexibility, we strongly believed—and continue to believe—in the basic principles of this new art space: principles whose purpose is to ensure equal access to all, freedom of thought and opinion, and as far as possible, genuine, equal partnership.

The first project created under the new program at the CDA was "The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum," which was initiated by artist duo Effi & Amir together with Igal Ophir, Yaakov Erlich, Haviva Barkol, Pnina Barkol, Dvora Harel, Malka Cohen, Ruti Mizrahi, Tikva Sedes, Rachel Polet, Mimi Rosenberg, Ada Rahamim, and many more Jessy Cohen neighborhood residents.

The project's first phase comprises two main parts: the first is a timeline of the Jessy Cohen neighborhood describing the main events that took place in the neighborhood, as remembered by the residents, from the 1950s to the present. This part is displayed as a permanent exhibit on the ground floor of the CDA.

The second part proposes a spatial reference to the neighborhood residents' self-perception, central to which is a map of the Jessy Cohen neighborhood as it is perceived by its residents. In other words, it is not congruent with the neighborhood's official boundaries. This part presents various materials pertaining to specific areas in the neighborhood, and is the first in a series of planned temporary exhibition projects.

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum is the realization of our vision regarding the role of an art institution operating in a community or neighborhood. It allows the flexibility and uncertainty of art to become an advantage. By means of this project, the CDA is enabling a redefinition of the community's identity and history, and creating time for experimenting, for creativity, for pointless activity or, in short, for anything outside the rules of the consumer and market culture in which we live. With Effi & Amir's project, the CDA offered the community a possibility for leisure, imagination, and even boredom, all in order to enable it to reformulate itself, to get to know itself, to recreate its identity and belonging, and to make time for creativity. A central part of the possibility for the community to reformulate its identity is also associated with time and how time is translated into the community's history. In many immigrant neighborhoods, where there is a high rate of population turnover, there is no sense of community, and consequently there is no continuous community narrative. Consequently, they have no history but rather an experience of a fragmented, arbitrary present. In this context, art plays an important role since it facilitates practices of documentation, collection, and archiving alongside study and presentation of local knowledge and memory. This knowledge enables the community to reshape its memory, process existing knowledge, and tell its own story independently of national, political, and economic narratives that subjugate the community's narrative to their own logics and changing and fluctuating needs.

Alongside these artistic tools, which by means of the project became the tools of the Jessy Cohen neighborhood residents who participated in it, new connections were formed between the participants and the CDA, and in effect a group of residents assembled that is gradually becoming the project's curatorial team working alongside "professionals" such as the CDA's curators and artists Effi & Amir. This group of residents-curators meets every few weeks to discuss various topics associated with the professional program of the Complete Jessy Cohen Museum and the CDA. Thus, the group decided that the subject the museum would engage with in 2017 is the neighborhood school that closed down in 2012 and that now houses the CDA. The group was also involved in publishing a call for artists to propose new projects on this subject, and it is due to hold interviews with the artists and select those who will go on to realize their projects.

The group also participated in the roundtable discussions leading up to the CDA's Third Annual Conference that was held in January 2017.

Gradually, through various projects and actions, we are striving to open the artistic directing of the CDA to partners from the Jessy Cohen neighborhood who do not necessarily have a professional background in art. We believe this is a significant step on the way to realizing the various ideas in which we believe, and to reducing the gap between rhetoric and action. We believe that in the coming years the CDA will constitute a new model for a site-specific art center whose professional program is co-managed by residents and art professionals, and is relevant to many and varied communities and audiences.

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Ha'Tanaim Street, Jessy Cohen, Holon, photo: The Center for Digital Art

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum crew, photo: Effi & Amir

Gabay family at Ha'Avoda street, photo: Yehezkel Gabay

Gabay family during the Re-enactment Photos Project by Rona Yefman, Photo: Effi& Amir

Building Ron Cinema, Workshop instructed by Ktura Manor, photo: Effi & Amir

Holon's archive's crew visiting the exhibition, photo: The Center for Digital Art

The old neighborhood's Football team Event / photo: The Center for Digital Art

The old neighborhood's Football team Event / photo: The Center for Digital Art

What Does the Revolt of Sediments Look Like? Notes on the Archive

Sabih Ahmed

I

Memory and Geography

It's been almost two decades since Edward Said delivered a keynote lecture titled "Palestine: Memory, Invention and Space"[1] where he noted a burgeoning interest he perceived in two broad areas of the humanities and the social sciences—namely memory and geography. The paper, a meditation on geopolitics, was about how both memory and geography were being seen no longer as sources or contexts, but as continuous acts of invention for political ends. Said's paper elaborated how nations keep inventing their pasts and their notions of land as a way to legitimize newer regimes of power over history, society, and space. His observations seem ever more pertinent today when we are witnesses to how collective memory, especially around national claims and geographically defined identities in most parts of the world, is up for grabs, regardless of what history might tell us otherwise.

It is interesting that what Said so perceptively captured in his paper about the widespread prominence of memory and geography both as method and as motif coincided rather well with the widespread attention of the same in spaces of contemporary art in the decade that followed, that is in the 2000s. Two related, though not identical, subjects found a resurgence alongside memory and geography across the arts, namely that of the archive and cartography. Both archives and cartography became leitmotifs for a number of artists, curators, and institutions alike, and oftentimes served as methods (such as by way of "archiving" and "mapping" projects) particularly in contexts where colonial histories and post-colonial discourse were of importance. The cartographic reference, of course, also melded into the art world's reflections on nuances of cultural locations amidst the seemingly homogenizing globalized world. The examples here could be many: take any of the innumerable artworks that were made siting maps or proposing other imaginations of the archive. Take curations such as the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 where Bonami wanted viewers to explore the Biennale like a "global map," or Okwui Enwezor's *Archive Fever* in New York in 2008. Take the plethora of regional survey exhibitions representing South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China, among others, in various museums around the world where maps and archives were indeed recurring motifs.

It is no mere coincidence that there was such a widespread reference to archives and maps in the field of contemporary art. This could be attributed to how much memory, geography, the archive, and cartography became battlegrounds for knowledge and power in the rapidly transforming environment of digital media and the Internet. This was after all the time when Google Maps and Facebook had emerged around 2005, and then the financial crash in 2008, and innumerable instances that etched an irrevocable image of a connected world no matter how asymmetrical the flow of ideas, goods, information, and people might be.

However, as much as Said's analytical insight about memory and geography in 1998 might have seemed like a prognosis of a deepening and more pervasive form of control and surveillance,[2] perhaps we might well read the new maps and archives doing exactly the opposite. Perhaps we can read Said's paper as marking the end of an era of what archives and maps used to be under a colonial paradigm, and pointing towards a new era of the archival and cartographic imagination. While there has remained an understanding that memory and geography became even more effective as tools pliable for those in power, the turn of the millennia dispersed those tools in the most unprecedented manner in modern history. We saw ourselves arriving at a discursive threshold where both memory and geography would start assuming a commodity status, and at the same time bearing a sense of the commons so much so as to never be the same again.

The issue that comes to mind then is that, while we have this era that is best defined by globalization, globalization has most often been described in terms of a cartographic imagination. We have heard often of the local vis-à-vis the global; national vis-à-vis the transnational; the Global North vis-à-vis Global South, among other vectors of comparison. However, how would we gauge the ramifications of globalization over memory and the archive? What happens to the archive with globalization? Is it merely an expansion of the archive to become more inclusive (or exclusive) towards certain histories? Is it about the end of history? Or, perhaps a continuation of the colonizing apparatus, except now in version 2.0? Or could the archive have become something else altogether?

II

Accumulations and Sediments

A quick recap: we are all too familiar with how in the second half of 20th century, with various nations and republics claiming sovereignty from colonial rule, there was a widespread (re)building of state institutions in several parts of the world for decades on end. Indonesia, Philippines, India/Pakistan, Cambodia, and Vietnam to name some. This would translate into new infrastructural projects, new museums being established and existing ones being refurbished, archives getting declassified and opening out to publics. Traditions were being "revived," and new practices in pedagogy and art-making were being experimented with. The archive and the map served important functions that were paramount in laying down the footprints and etching out the contours around the identity of new states and their subjects. Within a couple of decades, we also know well that post-colonial studies and subaltern studies posed some of the most powerful critiques of the very same archives, leading towards entirely new propositions for what an archive means. Questions like how must the archive and history be rethought in cultures where the textual document does not prevail. Those critiques, revisions, and counter-archives, coupled with the spread of the Internet and digital media in the recent decades, eventually produced an enormous swell that seemed like a new resurgence of archives. Except this time, it was with much more expanded and flexible definitions than might have ever been encountered before. And with the proliferation of new mediums and devices for data capture and dissemination that followed, entirely new sensoria of information and its accessibility have been planted. It is common now to come across the view that the Internet itself is an archive of archives. Interestingly enough, these vast and deep deposits of old documents, of ongoing digitized information and newly generated data all co-exist today, and are often sedimented in and across age-old institutions, new-age servers, clouds, and personal hard drives. The archive as an idea has also sedimented into the most

common parlance today with how flexibly we use the term for any collection of data, objects, embodied or disembodied memory, and tangible and intangible items. Anything from a grand-uncle being referred to as an archive of stories, a community being regarded as an archive of the land it has inhabited, and a film being discussed as an archive of the city seems quite at home. And by no means do I write this out of criticism. All of this is only to say that these accumulations, deposits, and sedimentations are far from settled and inert. The tremors, seepages, and eruptions between them are all too palpable today as they find expression in joys and anxieties about knowledge itself. We overhear sides being taken on whether knowledge is better gained from published books or from online peer-to-peer platforms. We wonder what classifications are still operative when so many disciplines and categories seem to cross into each other and share concerns. Or, how can knowledge better disseminate via institutions in the age of World Wide Web. From the slow build-up of archives in pre-industrialized world to the gradual scaling and speeding up of infrastructure since the Industrial Revolution up to today's hyper-acceleration of information, the very infrastructures of knowledge and its dissemination are said to have undergone a change comparable to what had happened with Gutenberg press between 12th- and 13th-century Europe.

It is with some of these thoughts and questions that I began revisiting the history of 20th-century art practice. What would artists' archives from various parts of the world broadly tell us about the nature of the flows, deposits, and eruptions of knowledge and their archival forms of their time? One realizes that just as colonial and post-colonial states were building their institutions and archives, a number of artists were also preoccupied with forms of archiving, running parallel. Having visited, worked with, and digitized a few such artist archives with my colleagues at Asia Art Archive, it is fascinating to see the kinds of material and documents artists brought together and preserved over the last several decades. It is all the more fascinating to see how that material would get classified and processed by those artists. Collections would range from bureaucratic looking files and folders, to photographs organized by colors and shapes in them, to quirky time capsules. There is something ubiquitous in this obsessive retentional drive that so many modern artists possessed, even though the nature of materials would vary from place to place and context to context. Having come across a number of such collections in various parts of Asia, my contention has been that artists who emerged around the time of and after the second half of 20th century in various parts of the world almost foresaw the coming of the information age that we live in today. If you visit the personal archive of an artist who was active in the 1950s, '60s, '70s, it is likely that you would find an abundance of scrapbooks, ephemera, photo-documentation, postcards, and letters that they kept. At least we can say so for those who had the wherewithal to store them. These collections unequivocally chart out myriad itineraries of ideas and images that circulated in the world. They also follow very different classifications and tagging, some of which are beginning to make a lot more sense today than they might have before we got accustomed to search engines.

Given this, what if we momentarily shifted our gaze away from the catalogue raisonné of artworks to such private practices of artists that rarely made it into art history as a form in themselves? For a moment, what if we treat these artists' collections not as a site for providing evidence and clues about what went into the making of an artwork or about contexts in which the artist practiced? Instead, I would propose we see those archives as sites that have a potential to tell a different story of the flows, accumulations, and sedimentations of memory, history, and places. The question that these

collections would then ask us is, how can we see artist archives as a site for the complete re-imagination of history and of the archive itself?

It is in this light that the life and practice of late artist Ha Bik Chuen (1925–2009) becomes an interesting portal. Ha was well known as a painter, sculptor, and printmaker based in Hong Kong and active since the late 1950s. Alongside his art-making and exhibitions, Ha maintained a private practice where he photographed exhibitions, people, and spaces over several years and amassed published and unpublished material that circulated around him. Ha preserved these in the form of contact sheets, albums, boxes, and collage books, offering an insight into very specific flows and collisions of information and images that channeled past him in the analogue era of the colonial port-city of Hong Kong. His entire collection had been stored in his Hong Kong studio in To Kwa Wan since his passing in 2009, until its relocation to Fo Tan in 2016 as part of a project led by Asia Art Archive.[3] A glimpse of Ha's studio would remind anyone of Ilya Kabakov's story of the man who threw away nothing. It would also make one realize the very many things that were happening underneath the topsoil of what art history would make visible and the limits of an older knowledge system that would keep the archive underneath. Something of those sediments beneath seems to be surfacing today and the environment around changing with it.

III

Algorithms and Geology

In the year 2013, it was recorded that carbon dioxide passed the signature threshold of four hundred parts per million in the atmosphere for the first time since the Pliocene era about three to five million years ago. Although the gas is not visible to us, it is regarded to have set in motion an environmental change of catastrophic proportions. This change took place in the wake of another change of perhaps equally significant proportions, i.e., the coming of the Age of Big Data. There is little concealed about the fact that it is big data that now tells us the pulse of the planet as much as it plays a role in shaping everyday life for billions of people. In 2012, Google reported an average of 110 billion searches per month worldwide. By the end of 2014, an estimated three billion people around the world were online and had uploaded one trillion photographs in that year alone. In the words of Nicholas Mirzoeff, the global photography archive increased by some 25% in 2014.[4] With enough data processing and storage capacity already established, a new regime of real-time "computation" is in place along with predictive analysis both of planetary behavior as much as of human behavior.

Going back to memory and geography where this paper had started off, with big data and the current status of the Anthropocene, both memory and geography are increasingly being felt to release themselves from human control now. On the one hand is a fear in society of not being in control of the scale of data being generated around it, and on the other a growing realization that cities are submerging under rising waters. With machines becoming more and more autonomous, there is almost a panic that both nature and machines are equal threats to humanity now. This temperament stands in sharp contrast to the long prevailing ideals of Enlightenment and the firm belief in humanity's conquest and containment of nature for well over three centuries. Geological forces on the one hand and algorithms on the other are producing a condition today where the eyes that are seeing and the ears that are hearing are not just of human beings. Likewise, the maps being drawn and the memories recorded and accessed are no longer only by human beings either. Practically every field is being impacted by the rise of this stratum of big data and the simultaneous rise in tempera-

tures. Geology and machinic intelligence could not have been more closely intertwined. The archive's sediments could not be more firmly embedded in planetary ones.

These were among the few points of departure for me when working on an Infra-Curatorial project titled "Striated Light" in the 11th Shanghai Biennale. Titled "Why Not Ask Again?," the Biennale was curated by Raqs Media Collective and ran over a period of almost three months after its opening on November 9, 2016. The Biennale attempted a revisiting of some of the most basic questions about what it is to inhabit the contemporary moment when relationships between the human, nature, and machines are being realigned in ways that beckon a rethinking of all our concepts. The curatorial propositions that the Biennale made were also at the level of exploring new concepts and premises that bring different practices and knowledges together today, and this was done keeping in mind a complete avoidance of thematic categories in the exhibition. One of these premises in the Biennale was the "Infra-Curatorial Platform." Seven individuals from different fields and different parts of the world were invited to present ways in which they would stage the *infra*[5] structures of their practices and inquiries. And to explore this, a new imagination for curatorial thinking was being asked of each one, which would preoccupy itself less with (re)presenting developed works and ideas and more with what kind of networks come together between methods, forms and archives. Basically, what would the scaffoldings for new infra-structures, knowledges, and practices look like in the rapidly changing parameters of world-making? The proposals were invited to bring together the thinking process behind their own practices into an emergent force that curatorial practice could express.

In response to these propositions emerged the Infra-Curatorial project that Raqs invited me to bring around my own practice of archiving. "Striated Light"[6] redeployed Ha's personal archive to draw out over 3,000 digitized contact sheets as a way to explore the changing optic of the archive in the 21st century. The passage of light that ran through a hand-held camera, into the dark room, then locked onto the surface of contact prints, stored in dark boxes in a studio space in Hong Kong, re-illuminated some four decades after with scanners, enlarged on high tech computer monitors and reprinted onto new undulating surfaces 40 feet wide, resembling thumbnails on our personal computers, and re-circulating in further unpredictable environments and forms, is the journey of the archive as it comes into our age. Ours is the age of pulsating screens and virality of thoughts, where the substratum of the analogue beneath the digital erupts to form new striations that might not lend themselves as much to genealogies as to topographies and geological formations. Time stretches, scatters, and pixelates the archive rather than perhaps inscribing itself upon it. The familiar is likely to be rendered unfamiliar and uncanny, and we may find ourselves more at home with the unfamiliar that the archive throws up.

I am reminded of late Svetlana Boym's "Notes for an Off-Modern Manifesto" where she wrote:

> It turns our attention to the surfaces, rims and thresholds. From my ten years of travels I have accumulated hundreds of photographs of windows, doors, facades, back yards, fences, arches and sunsets in different cities all stored in plastic bags under my desk. I re-photograph the old snapshots with my digital camera and the sun of the other time and the other place cast new shadows upon their once glossy surfaces with stains of the lemon tea and fingerprints of indifferent friends. I try not to use the preprogrammed special effects of

> Photoshop; not because I believe in authenticity of craftsmanship, but because I equally distrust the conspiratorial belief in the universal simulation. I wish to learn from my own mistakes, let myself err. I carry the pictures into new physical environments, inhabit them again, occasionally deviating from the rules of light exposure and focus.

At the same time I look for the ready-mades in the outside world, "natural" collages and ambiguous double exposures. My most misleading images are often "straight photographs." Nobody takes them for what they are, for we are burdened with an afterimage of suspicion.[7]

In conclusion, coming back full circle to Said's essay, the burgeoning interest in memory and geography that it identified was one among several calls of an epistemic shift in the technologies and paradigms through which memory and geography functioned under colonialism. If the archive and maps were the technological base for the way we understood memory and geography in an older era, data and rising tides gush out in their stead like a torrent through the floodgates.

Notes

1 "Landscape Perspectives in Palestine," held in the Birzeit University in the West Bank in 1998, subsequently published two years later in the form of an essay titled "Invention, Memory, and Place."
2 One that was firmly established under the colonial apparatus and then becoming only more sophisticated in the course of the 20th century.
3 The Ha Bik Chuen archive came to light in 2013 when the Ha family invited Asia Art Archive to do a pilot project to map, assess, and selectively digitize the collection in stored in his studio. Led by Researcher Michelle Wong, the project has unfolded into various iterations of archival, artistic, and exhibitionary platforms since the pilot. Among the collection are over 100,000 photographs, 3,500 contact sheets, exhibition ephemera, and periodicals collected by Ha from 1960s onward. For more information, visit http://www.aaa-a.org/programs/excessive-enthusiasm-activating-the-ha-bik-chuen-archive/
4 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*, Pelican Books, London, 2015.
5 "Infra" as in that which lies beneath, such as infra-red light that remains invisible under normal light conditions.
6 Striated Light drew from Ha Bik Chuen's archive digitized by Asia Art Archive. The structure that became the armature and form for the project was designed in conversation with the 11th Shanghai Biennale architects Rupali Gupte and Prasad Shetty, with assistance in design from Aarushi Surana.
7 Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgic Technology: Notes for an Off-Modern Manifesto," in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2001. Also available on http://www.svetlanaboym.com/manifesto.htm

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Sources, Itineraries, and the Making of a Thicket

Raqs Media Collective

An uncannily well thought out spontaneity of a remarkable pass in a soccer game.

The curving trajectory of the eccentric orbit of a digital object in a visualization of its movement.

The discovery of a text by a far-away author in an alien language written at another time
as the key to the understanding of a reality close to home.

The well-timed spiral descent of an autumnal leaf from a branch in a tree.
The quickening of life inside the structure of a subterranean crystal.

I

It is said, that the destiny of soccer as a world sport changed in 1958, when crowds in Stockholm stood in their seats, mesmerized as they watched players with imperfect bodies from faraway Brazil introduce the spirit of "Ginga" into the state of play. Ginga is a kind of "trance-play," a form of becoming with the ball, using much of the body, not just the feet, to wobble with the ball, to make the ball dribble, dance, and dodge.

It changed soccer from being merely a competitive procedure that some men from Europe undertook as they conquered the world's arena into an ecstatic mode of liberating the playing field for different kinds of bodies and minds. Football was a nineteenth-century European import into Brazil, but the players of various descent in Brazil brought with them moves that sprang from a different history—from capoeira—a formerly prohibited dance and martial arts form that runaway slaves had evolved to defend themselves and to maintain bodies broken by slavery in a state of grace and dignity. The dance and defense of the fugitive slave was the source of "Ginga."

Playing football became a way of practicing a forbidden art, and of reclaiming a lived and yet lost body. It evolved into ways of staying with the ball, being intimate with it, dancing with it, using it as a form of communication in an equatorial afternoon, in the village commons, or in the fallow ground between the bleak tower blocks of an immigrant neighborhood. The fact that women and girls, immigrants, prisoners, and rebels play soccer more than they play any other game owes a great deal to the transformation of the game with Ginga. It brought a different way of seeing bodies, weak bodies, amputated bodies, twisted bodies, even lame, could dance and bring a different kind of play into being. The "state of play" finds itself in a back alley in a favela, or a churchyard, or a random patch of arid, grassless ground between sugarcane fields.

It gives us many hours of magic in YouTube feeds, and it also gave us Marta Vieira da Silva, who was born in the sugarcane country around Dois Riachos only seven years after a total ban on girls playing soccer in Brazil was lifted. Marta, who was beaten by the boys in her village for playing football, fought back with the source that she had

close at hand—capoeira. It gave her the Ginga she needed. In time, she became recognized as one of the greatest football players in the world.

II

In 2002, an installation (*Co-Ordinates of Everyday Life*) on the relationship between the commons of urban habitation in Delhi and legal measures to regulate space in the city was accompanied by a free software platform called "OPUS (Open Platform for Unlimited Signification)." Both of these marked one set of our entries into the arena of thinking about and with source.

OPUS, made with a single coder (Silvan Zurbruegg), worked towards a claim to the creation and sustenance of a potentially rich digital commons. Just as new migrants squatted empty space and created zones of habitation in Delhi, so too "OPUS" users could create, extend, and maintain a digital commons by uploading, downloading, sharing, and transforming content in different media. A "ball" of material could be "passed" and "wobbled" by different players in a never-ending session of digital Ginga.

Each act of transforming or tagging a *Source* file contributed to the creation of what the OPUS system, borrowing a term from philology, called *Rescensions*. *Rescensions* were non-rivalrous-iterations of clusters of signs, which were related to each other through the acknowledgement of ascent or descent from common sources. This software anticipated a design that embraced the potentially viral nature of the transmission of memes, facilitated by meta-tagging that mapped keyword matches. This allowed the system[1] to present, through drawn visualizations, the relationships between different objects. This used frequency distributions of words in the meta-tags, and thus creating a visual environment of the algorithmic aggregation of works. This anticipated social media proliferation that was to occur in half a decade after the launch of OPUS.

If anything, the operational protocols of OPUS demonstrated that a Source could never be viewed as mere resource. Sources do not simply lie inert like a seam of raw materials in the ground waiting to be mined and extracted. And now—more so—when we invoke *Sources*, it is with a further awareness of their already thickened life (with multiple protagonists having worked/lived through them), as well as of their potential efflorescence. A particular instance of a rescension does not preclude or exclude the existence of other instances—though it has to take into account that each time a source is pulled, it emerges from a chamber of resonating overtones. When a plurality of *Rescensions* derive themselves from more than one set of sources, the paths of their iterations collide and entangle with each other, creating thickets of meaning as they grow.

In time, even *Rescensions* become new *Sources*. When even one of these source-recensions miscegenate with another, they imbue *Source-ness* with multiplicity, producing invented and inventive fraternities and sororities of affiliation. The paths of different rescensions are inflected by their fealties and their magnetic attractions towards different sources and their emanations.

This leads to curving, eccentric orbits, as rescensions travel in the space between different acts of creation and transformation. The tracing of these curving paths leads to the marking of a whole new set of relationships between widely dispersed actions. These relationships are constantly on the move—one can speak of them having *Itineraries*. The source, when it unfurls a rescension, also reveals an itinerary. Itinerar-

ies circulate and transport memes, images, and ideas with great energy. An alertness and awareness grows that no particular source or rescension needs to dominate linked meanings, affect, or information as the *Itineraries* thicken.

And so let the thicket grow.

III

For the 11th Shanghai Biennale, we worked with two main Sources and anticipated curving paths and thicket of Itineraries.

Sources:
(A)
Jukti, Takko aar Gappo
Film, Bengali
Director: Ritwik Ghatak
1974

"Towards the end of Ritwik Ghatak's 1974 film *Jukti, Takko aar Gappo,* the protagonist, who is also an alcoholic intellectual, falls in with a band of fugitive peasant and student rebels. To their proposals, and counter-proposals, their reasons and arguments, arguments and counter-arguments, the protagonist could only offer his stories, his reminders, his incandescent confusions. His eccentric presence becomes the wild card antidote to the certainties held out by both the hunter and the hunted. Taking off from where Ghatak leapt into the void of the unknown in his film, we see a role for art as embodying the glowing embers of doubt, and freedom towards the unknown in a world of weakening certainties. The creative, the speculative, the imaginary, is—for us—the entity that has the potential to introduce disquieting and angular values, concepts and dispositions that transform the mechanics and orbits of the dyad of politics and economics."[2]

(B)
The Three-Body Problem
Novel, science fiction, Chinese
Writer: Cixin Liu
2006 / Translated into English 2014 by Ken Liu

"We are drawn to the enormous energy in discussions around Cixin Liu's visionary trilogy, *The Three Body Problem*. We think that it is no accident that an author who has a day job as an engineer in a power station in northern China should produce a novel (and a world) in which questions about ecology and survival should have a profound philosophical heft. In a post-script to his novel, Liu writes, "In this book, a man named 'humanity' confronts a disaster, and everything he demonstrates in the face of existence and annihilation has roots in the reality that I experienced [...] satellites, hunger, stats, kerosene lamps, the Milky Way, the Cultural Revolution's factional civil wars, light years, the flood in my village—these seemingly unconnected things melded together and formed the early part of my life, and also molded the science fiction that I write today." Liu continues, "I wrote about the worst of all possible universes in *Three-Body Problem* out of hope that we can strive for the best of all possible Earths." His account of an alien civilization originating in a "tri-solarian world" (which has its echoes in the Chinese eschatological traditions of the "three suns") challenging the basis of humanity's

future by way of a response to a call for help from a wounded planet is both imaginatively expansive as well as philosophically astute."[3]

Itineraries, we argued, were to be found in the exhibition through the Orbits we created to move with. We argued:

An orbit—the arc that loops into itself when an object obeys its attraction to another without crashing into it—is a dance actualized in space. Any two bodies will settle into a regular pattern of reciprocal attraction. Things get really interesting when a third body enters the picture. Now you have a whole new geometry of unpredictability—this is a three-body problem. Translate this into discourse, into thought, into the imagination. You could have argument and counter-argument changing their lock-stepped dance to the eccentric rhythm of a story. You could have a maneuver and a disputation change trajectory when complicated by a narrative.[4]

IV

"Every island assumes other islands," writes Édouard Glissant.

From him, we learn that archipelagic thought makes it possible to say that every kind of stance about being someone or something can change through exchange and contact with others, and that this does not necessarily lead to a loss of self.

To Glissant, the slave leaves a shore as a slave, but returns as something else—a free entity. She returns multiplied. The unity of the enslaving wills gives way to the multiplicity of the liberating will. The being who was once a slave is a rescension of the being who was not yet a slave.

In this way, the itinerary of the former slave changes the source from which the slave arose. That orbit—which produced some of the greatest poetry and music in the world—shows how the future transforms the past.

What do we learn from Jorge Luis Borges, when he surmises: "Every writer creates his own predecessor"?

We learn the importance of the joy (and challenges) of choosing our ancestors, of discovering our sources, of inventing fraternities and sororities, as we journey through life. Not all of us come from any one place, or time.

This means embodying a way of looking at our sources in a way that challenges how the world was carved up, either by historical imperatives or by political fiat. It means reversing the usual ways in which space, time, origin, and other fixed categories dictate affinities.

It means that the lessons of free software from Delhi may actually be best learned through looking at the Brazilian women's team football game.

It means that there are orbits waiting to be described between the habitation of urban land in one part of the world and the history of how former slaves liberated time and space in another part of the world by sustaining "railroads" and "routes" for fugitives.

A plurality of our sources, of seven billion people, could be discovered—some of these fictionally invented, and some activated as they lie hibernating, in wait. Just as the forest floor does not parcel out the benefits of its layers of compost according to the apoptosis of individual fallen autumnal leaves, so too, we recognize that the fertility of our time is not distributed in bins marked by date, territory, and theme.

We return to sources. To many sources. We find our way into and through subterranean crystal caves of structures of thought and practice with giant crystalline lattices that might contain the codes of lost and dormant forms of life. We find paths, itineraries, eschew themes and post-factum taxonomies. We find ways of gathering and being gathered that answer to the questions of a ball curved by Ginga. We render every move that would classify us by theme, or provenance, or telos inoperable, so that the sources may begin speaking.

We change the state of play.

Notes

1 A system is a set of interacting or interdependent component parts forming a complex or intricate whole. Every system is delineated by its spatial and temporal boundaries, surrounded and influenced by its environment, described by its structure and purpose and expressed in its functioning. (from Wikipedia entry on System, 12 May 2017)
2 From our *Notes towards a Conversation in Making of a Biennale,* November, 2015, private circulation with artists, curators, and other protagonists of the exhibition.
3 Ibid.
4 See, *Eleven Notes for the Eleventh Shanghai Biennale*, Raqs Media Collective, Blueprint, 11th Shanghai Biennale, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, 2016.

Raqs Media Collective (Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi & Shuddhabrata Sengupta) follows its self-declared imperative of 'kinetic contemplation' to produce a trajectory that is restless in its forms and methods, yet concise with the infra procedures that it invents. The collective makes contemporary art, edits books, curates exhibitions, and stages situations. It has collaborated with architects, computer programmers, writers, curators, and theatre directors, and has made films. It co-founded Sarai—the inter-disciplinary and incubatory space at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi—in 2001, where it initiated processes that have left deep impact on contemporary culture in India.

Exhibitions curated by Raqs include 'The Rest of Now' (Manifesta 7, Bolzano, 2008), Sarai Reader 09 (Gurugram, 2012-13), INSERT2014 (New Delhi, 2014) and 'Why Not Ask Again' (Shanghai Biennale 2016–2017). Their work has been exhibited at Documenta, the Venice, Sao Paulo, Manifesta, Istanbul, Shanghai, Sydney and Taipei Biennales. Their prospective, 'With an Untimely Calendar' was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, in 2014-2015. Other solo shows at museums include at the Isabella Gardner Museum (Boston 2012), CA2M (Madrid 2014), MUAC (Mexico City 2015), Tate Exchange (London 2016), Foundacion Proa (Buenos Aires 2015), Laumeier Sculpture Park (St Louis 2016), and the Whitworth Art Gallery (Manchester 2017).

Three Biennials in Asia (2016)
Shwetal A. Patel

In September 2016, I embarked on a month-long journey to Asia to survey three distinct large-scale group exhibitions in Gwangju (South Korea), Suzhou (China), and Yinchuan (China). These diverse cultural properties, all at differing stages of development, were a stark indication of the contrary approaches taken by organisers and curators in the field.

The Gwangju Biennale, one of Asia's oldest and most established biennials, was directed by Maria Lind and featured 101 artists and groups, with some participants working for more than a year on site-specific, community-based projects in the city. In Suzhou, Roger M. Buergel and Zhang Qing conceived a series of ongoing and overlapping exhibitions envisaged as an antidote, and riposte, to the growing biennialisation of the art world, bringing together over forty international artists from the US, Latin America, Germany, India, China, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. Following the growing trend of biennial creation in the region, the remote city of Yinchuan was launching its first edition of a recurring periodical event in a newly built museum of modern art surrounded by fallow land intended for commercial and residential real estate development. Exhibiting 73 artists from 33 countries, as well as six artists-in-residents who created site-specific work, an established template of biennial formulation was imagined by artist-curator Bose Krishnamachari for this first iteration.

The contrast between these three events was striking and alludes to both the popularity (and fatigue) in biennial staging in a region that has witnessed explosive growth of the format over the last two decades. The following reports offer a critical examination of these divergent events, alluding to future potentialities, and the inherent pitfalls, of this vastly popular genre of exhibition making and critical thinking.

11th Gwangju Biennale, Republic of Korea
2 September – 6 November 2016
Artistic Direction: Maria Lind
Curator: Binna Choi
Assistant Curators: Azar Mahmoudian, Margarida Mendes, Michelle Wong
Local Curatorial Associate: Mite-Ugro

Title: *The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)*
Amidst atmospheres of uncertainty and infrastructural precarity, the number and scale of biennials has seen an exponential increase over the last thirty years. The Gwangju Biennale—Asia's largest and longest running—is no exception to this phenomenon. It has in recent years mounted ever more expansive and ambitious exhibitions and public programmes, curated by many of the world's leading artistic protagonists. This year's instantiation, under the direction of Maria Lind, revels in and reflects upon these dual trends of expansion and uncertainty.

The title, The Eighth Climate: (What does art do?), presents a parallel paradoxical pairing of the epic with the banal. The Eighth Climate, a concept devised by 12th-century Persian theosopher Sohrevardi, is as expansive as it gets: it refers to an "inter-wordly" perceptive zone. Straddling the real and the mystical, it points to that which falls just beyond our ability to perceive or understand. To the state of the visionary. In pertaining to answer the comparatively well-trodden art historical qualm, "What does art do?", Lind continually returns to the visionary nature of those contemporary artworks, collectively displaced in the zone of the Biennale.

This brings us to the question, raised by Lind and others on the curatorial team (an all-female cast consisting of curator Binna Choi, assistant curators Azar Mahmoudian, Margarida Mendes, Michelle Wong in collaboration with local curatorial associate Mite-Ugro): given the curatorial emphasis placed upon the artworks' inherent uncontainability and generativity, and given that the biennale setting serves to amplify this through its own chaotic and unpredictable inter-relations, how is such an expansive project "embedded" within and "mediated" through the locale of Gwangju? What is drawn out by this specific context?

Lind's introduction to the catalogue (energetically designed by Metahaven) describes South Korea as "split between progressive tendencies and conservative forces." Within this context, and whilst anchoring the long-term research phase in the local context, Lind sees contemporary art as offering the potential to suggest

"otherwise". Setting this in motion, the first twenty-five artists were invited to make site visits to Gwangju in September 2015, almost immediately after Lind's tenure began. They undertook year-long commissions involving on-site research, taking into consideration local materials, traditions, histories, techniques, and skills. The emphasis placed on commissions—which constituted twenty-eight out of the total 250 artworks produced by 101 artists and groups—acted as a generative starting point. Further invitations, novel "strands", and a multiplication of "themes" began emerging.

This was also facilitated and encouraged through a series of regular Wol-rae-hol, or monthly gatherings, ongoing from January 2016. The "infra-school" higher education programme furthered the momentum build towards the opening week. The latter's emphasis on research and debate, in an effort to raise a new iteration of questions, reached its culmination in the opening week's far-reaching conference "To All the Contributing Factors."

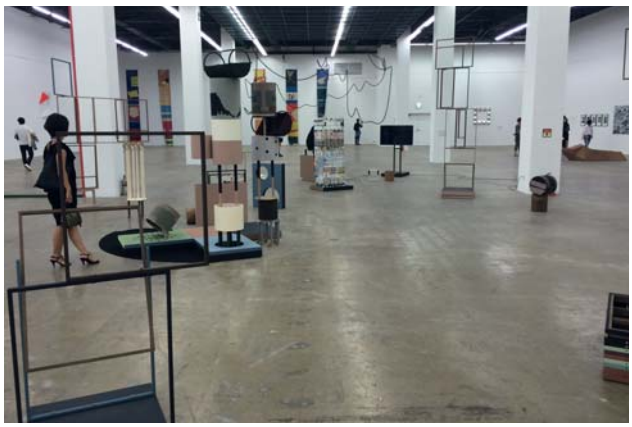
Nearly seventy representatives (from roughly 100 invited Biennale Fellows – small to mid-scale non-profit arts organizations from around the world) were brought together for the opening weekend Forum held on September 3 and 4. With the artworks now in place, the fellows were invited to relate their broader experiences of operating within this ecosystem to questions of "value, continuity and scale." These pertain to broader questions of translateability, implicit in the exhibition's title. As the 20th-century French philosopher Henri Corbin noted, we must hazard against a too-literal translation of the Persian na-koja-abad, which results in the English "land of no-where"—or in his eyes worse, "utopia."

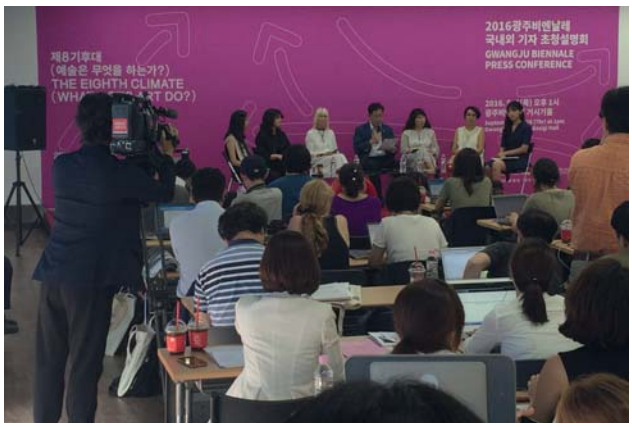
The spatial ambiguity of what the curators refer to throughout the catalogue and conferences as "placing art centre stage" is core to the broader economic and macro concerns explored throughout the conferences. The outward-looking and future-orientation drawn out by the Biennale team's curation emerges in such design quirks as the physical displacement of wall texts into the digital realm (accessible only via QR code on a smart phone app), a new pop-up website and app and several off-site projects and sites, most notably Fernando Garcia's community performance at the Hansaebong Agriculture & Eco Park on the outskirts of the city.

The initial selection of artists itself grew from an expansive search—incorporating visits to over forty cities through ten rounds of international and seven rounds of domestic research. This familiar framing was an attempt to calibrate the "global temperature" of art today. The implicit nod towards discourses and issues of climate change is combined here with a concern over the "climate change" facing the art world in the early 21st century. Gwangju itself—despite possessing perhaps the most well-endowed Foundation in Asia—is not immune to those "threats" to the existence of many smaller non-profit arts organisations. The Gwangju Biennale Foundation's President, Dr. Yangwoo Park—in the context of city's booming status as an art world centre (consider the launch of the colossal Asia Culture Centre in 2015)—explicitly points to the need for this year's Biennale to justify its continued relevance to society.

This concatenation of concerns of scale is formulated, again, during the forum, through a nuanced discussion of artistic "value." Some interesting comparisons were made between that which both these smaller, informal organisations and larger conglomerations of activity such as the Gwangju Biennale might strive to create. The dry economics term "deferred value" (developed by researcher Sarah Thelwall) was offered as a particularly apt parallel to the expansive curatorial theme. It refers to the generation of not-immediately-recognizable artistic value, itself something "in-between," or even liminal. That is, until its (frequent) later usurpation or appropriation by larger organisations, those more comfortably positioned within the global economic roundabout.

The decision to host this mega-forum of small and medium sized organisations is quite telling at this juncture in the Biennale's history. As perhaps the first time that many of these disparate organizations have met in one place, participants and delegates were able to catch a glimpse of the emerging "language" through which both institutional and artistic precarity and potentiality might be understood—including how this plays out in the context of Gwangju where such threats also make their presence felt. Whilst this drew directly on Lind's own research and writing in the area, she does not herself purport to be able to read or speak this "language." For the 11th edition of the Gwangju Biennale, Lind has consciously evaded the curation of any easily recognizable "spectacle." Instead, where the "spectacular" does arise, it is in the context of the rather





11th Gwangju Biennale, Republic of Korea, 2 September – 6 November 2016, Photo: the author, 2016

ambivalent contemporary nature of a mass artistic platforming.

Whether as a participant in the opening night's karaoke gathering, or akin to one of the unusually multiplicitous light-based features in the Biennale's dark room (in Gallery 2, perhaps the most memorable part of the exhibition), members of this growing international artistic community were provided with a space for contact and exchange, catching glimmers and incomplete or not entirely "translatable" glimpses of each others' practices, modes of survival (dance moves), and plans for the future.

More information available at the Metahaven-designed blog www.the8thclimate.org.

Suzhou Documents, Peoples Republic of China 21 August to 20 October 2016

Artistic Direction: Zhang Qing and Roger M. Buergel

Title: *Suzhou Documents: Histories of a Global Hub*

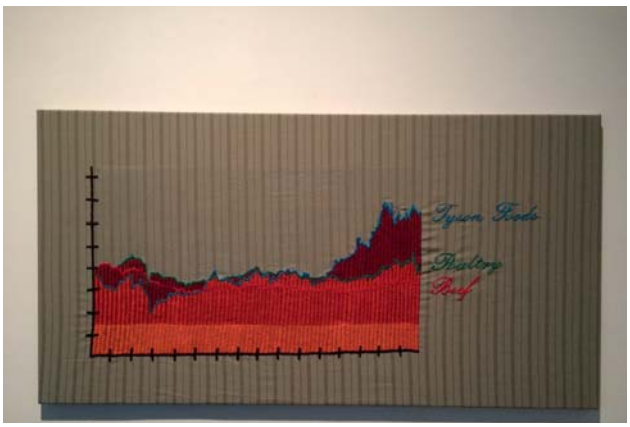
Less than an hour on a bullet train northwest of Shanghai, in one of the most densely populated parts of the planet, lies the birthplace of Wu culture, the ancient city of Suzhou. First inhabited over 2500 years ago, the city grew to become the economic and cultural capital of the Ming Dynasty (1400–1700) during the Middle Ages. By the 13th century, Suzhou had established itself as the centre of the silk trade, a starting point in the flourishing economic and cultural umbilical cord that connected the region with the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Despite this rich history, Suzhou's artistic status was overshadowed by Shanghai's mythological rise as a burgeoning global powerhouse. Indeed, both in China and further afield, many associate Suzhou's art scene with classical traditions: its Imperial-era gardens, temples, fine crafts, and the quaint canal system that criss-crosses the city. Against this developmental backdrop, the authorities in Suzhou backed plans for the creation of a new, periodical exhibition: Suzhou Documents.

The co-curators of the inaugural exhibition *Histories of a Global Hub*, Zhang Qing (Founding Director of the Shanghai Biennial and Curatorial Head of the National Palace Museum in Beijing) and Roger M. Buergel (Artistic Director of documenta 12 (2007) and Director of the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich), set out to eschew what they saw as the "largely exhausted" biennial format. Describing the latter as a "bouquet of arbitrary themes" with an emphasis on spectacle, they argue for the value of depth and sensitivity in bringing together the ancient and modern in a sustainable, yet rigorous manner.

Their proposed alternative takes the form of an overlapping, ongoing series of exhibitions: a future-oriented "institution in its own right," and a move away from the symptomatology of "biennialization." Buergel and colleagues, as stated in the introduction to Suzhou Documents, are "keenly aware of the limits imposed on conventional exhibition-making" by the drive to evade either the "confines of the museum" or simply becoming another "biennale lookalike." As they put it, Qing and Buergel hope to attend to the "widespread inability to look at art properly." They lament a "top-down flip-flopping" between art touted as "an appendage of the fashion and entertainment industries [and on the other hand] a therapy for alienated communities."

Perhaps inevitably, the result did not entirely escape the tried-and-tested biennial set-up. The first Suzhou Documents presented a large-scale exhibition (featuring the work of over forty artists), held peripatetically around the city at various historical and modern spaces. These included the famed Pu Garden, the popular Suzhou Silk Museum, and Twin-Pagoda. Other venues were the Yan Wenliang Memorial Museum and the Wu Zuoren Art Museum. The main body of the exhibition was concentrated in the impressive Suzhou Art Museum, believed to be the oldest art museum in China (established in 1927 by gifted painter and art educator Yan Wenliang).

A clear attempt was made to create an immersive and participatory exhibition, the objets d'art frequently rubbed shoulders with arrangements of everyday objects, historical artefacts, and archival ephemera, photographs, texts, paintings, and drawings. In a familiar intervention, Buergel and Qing placed contemporary furniture at various venues throughout the exhibition sites, recalling the display of antique Qing dynasty chairs, which artist Ai Weiwei collects, at *documenta 12* in 1997. The frequent display of historical works alongside the contemporary speaks to a curatorial remit of looking-back-to-look-forwards, something again seen in Buergel's *documenta 12* offering. Qing concurs: "We can't always look forwards [...] sometimes we need to look back." In the Chinese context, particularly in the decades following the Cultural Revolution, a rehashing of the past was discredited as a block to the onwards march towards Communist hegemony. Today,



Suzhou Documents, Peoples Republic of China, 21 August to 20 October 2016, Photo: the author, 2016

the recognized importance of "soft power" legitimizes the deft pairing of ancient and hyper-modern that constitutes the driving force of contemporary Chinese policy-making.

Some of the most striking parallels between ancient and modern artistic concerns were found in works redressing the familiar spectre of globalization, within and without (but here implicitly linked to) the Chinese context. A highlight (shown at the Suzhou Museum of Art) was John Akomfrah's *The Airport* (2016). This elegiac and at times surreal three-channel film installation weaves together cinematic, literary, and philosophical references in a work meditating upon 20th-century Greek history and its recent financial crisis. The potent relevance of such retroactive approaches to addressing concerns of the present in a Suzhouan context is not left to audience speculation. As the exhibition's introductory text reads: "Suzhou Documents will address Suzhou as a centuries-old but also futurist global hub, exploring through artistic and other speculative means a largely unwritten history of trans-cultural encounters between East and West in all their vagaries, conflicting timelines and unforeseeable beauties." Other works embraced this dualistic (inwards and outwards) exploratory drive. Of note were works by renowned Chinese artists Liu Ye, Xu Bing, Yang Fudong, and Yue Minjun, which were shown alongside international participants including Thomas Bayrle (Germany), Sheela Gowda (India), Maja Bajević (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Imogen Stidworthy (UK), Willem de Rooij (The Netherlands), and Haegue Yang (South Korea).

The early research phase undertaken by Qing and Buergel in conceptualizing the exhibition is revealing. They began by looking at the historical exhibition *1937: Suzhou Exhibition of Documents*, part of the *Cultural Objects from Wuzhong* exhibition (1937) launched by Keyuan Garden to showcase artworks collected or created by the city's key artistic protagonists. This landmark exhibition displayed the intellectual and material resources of Suzhou's artistic luminaries in a conceptual manner, and led to new arteries of thought for participants.

The 2016 instantiation (79 years later) is nonetheless referred to as the "first Suzhou Documenta," perhaps attesting to an aura of artistic rebirth. The local documents from the *Cultural Objects...* exhibition are offered apparently with this in mind. Buergel's introduction states that, "This reactivating Suzhou culture and history is the aim and mission of the exhibition, for this cutting-edge city, with its vision of the contemporary."

What of the implicit nod to Kassel's documenta? Buergel states the link is more than in the name, but also in this continual return to the identification of future possibilities in the past. The work, in fitting with this, is organized under the following key themes: "The Time of the Sea and the Empire"; "Modernity and Time in the Ming and the Qing Dynasties"; "Time and Traditions;" and "Time and the Mind: The Garden of the Imperial Court". Despite these expansive themes, Buergel places emphasis on scale and sensitivity. He hopes to have created with Suzhou Documents something "small and delicate, echoing the atmosphere of the city itself [...] not merely a big party for artists and social types, but a place to inspire all visitors." Whilst expressing clear reservations about large-scale contemporary exhibitions and their role in society, Qing and Buergel understandably desire a certain international appeal to emerge from the first iteration of this project, amongst those "who have grown understandably weary of biennales and art fairs with all the meretricious charm of a supermarket."

Attesting to the popularity of the term, and despite the stated (and emphasised) intention of the co-curators to move away from the biennial model, the Chinese mainstream and international art media hailed Suzhou Documents precisely as the creation of a new biennial, of which there are already several of in China today.

Herein lies a way forward for biennials and the ever-growing slew of new cities aspiring to join the over 200 list of mainly small, medium-sized cities around the world clamouring to position themselves culturally through the mechanisms of biennial-making. The flexibility offered by not calling oneself a biennial at the outset may offer organisers room to evolve and grow at their own pace, considering changing site specificities and evolving discourses. Qing notes that by bringing together a wide range of new perspectives in history and art, the Suzhou "documenta" marks the birth of the new discipline—"Suzhou Studies." However, as Buergel notes, "History is not a linear process. It is determined as much by good planning as by luck and chance and therefore tends to defeat the laws of simple chronology."

Looking forward, while Suzhou Documents will have to rely as much on its glorious past as its imagined future, that artists and researchers have been invited to

speculate on these outcomes is a good second coming indeed.

More information available at:
http://johannjacobs.com/en/event/90345-suzdocpreview.html.

1st Yinchuan Biennale, People's Republic of China
10 September – 18 December 2016
Artistic Direction: Bose Krishnamachari

Title: *For An Image, Faster Than Light*
The First Yinchuan Biennale titled *For an Image, Faster than Light* opened to the public on 10 September 2016 at the Yinchuan MOCA. Situated amongst the expansive green fields and wetlands that surround the burgeoning city of Yinchuan, this museum is the first contemporary art institution to appear in northwest China. It constitutes a hard-to-miss visual pinnacle of the "River Origins" artists' community and development project, which opened last year. The slick, shiny exterior of this sprawling 15,000-square-meter-complex was designed by Chinese firm We Architech Anonymous. Its positioning in the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region will provide an anchor for the planned developments of Huaxia-Hetu Art Town, a colossal 18.8-square-mile development including a school, a theme park, and an artist residency programme. This accelerated programme of development is not new to China, but the unusual regional and cultural context has triggered speculation as to its underlying motives. As applied to the Biennale, this delivers a perhaps more enlightening critique than the mass media's overwhelmingly singular focus on the last-minute removal of Ai Weiwei from the Biennale's program.

The museum is owned and operated by the Ningxia Minsheng Group (under the auspices of new public-private partnership policy "build-operate-transfer") who plans to invest US$5bn in the project over the coming decade. Corporate investment and master-planning has apparently embraced rather than bulldozed the rich tapestry of the region's cultural history. It is home today to many indigenous Muslim minorities, particularly the Hui, of whom there is a population of around ten million in greater China. Located along the ancient Silk Road, the area has a long history of cultural exchange with Asia and the Middle East. The city has already hosted the biennial China-Arab States Expo, which draws business and government representatives from sixty countries and is seen as a key driver of the region's future prosperity. It has long played a key role in intercultural exchange, before the arrival of this international arts institution.

How does the biennial then, a rather more "periodical celebration," come to play a role in the evolution of this complex cultural landscape? Beyond an effort in city branding, economic and social benefits are thought to accrue to the locales of such international art events over a longer period of time. This is often framed as placing the host city on the "global art map." Certainly, this implies cultural and commercial exchange—to which Yinchuan is no stranger—but it also implicates the creation of new audiences at home. The latter emerges within, yet also despite, larger-scale networks and its branding as a Sino-Arab cultural centre. As part of the Biennale, several cultural events were held that targeted the local audience, including a series of public education forums. A music festival also followed the opening week celebrations.

Within this urban planning and developmental context, prominent Indian artist and curator Bose Krishnamachari was invited to curate the inaugural Yinchuan Biennale at the museum. Krishnamachari began working on the project in December 2015, conducting exhaustive research around the world. Seventy-three artists from thirty-three countries were invited to participate in the main exhibition, and an opening weekend conference was organised by writer Manoj Nair. The symposium "The Gates of the Sun—Between the Mountains and Waters," held at the museum on September 10 and 11, gathered twenty-five artists, curators, critics, and scholars from around the world. The exhibition's own themes were discussed with a focus on cycles of activity: of creativity in contemporary art, the dynamic nature of society, and new interconnections emerging between "art worlds" and culture more broadly construed. The introductory text's elaboration of the theme similarly draws out questions of cycles as well as conflict, framing the title as an attempt to "reveal the myriad conflicts facing the world today, and to convey constructive possibilities and ideas through a concentration of global creativity […] to respond to the shifting and destructive issues we face in society, politics and the environment."

Krishnamachari's presentation of an international array of artists within the unique context of MOCA Yinchuan as a prime gateway of Chinese and Islamic cultural exchange does not shy away from broader international

1st Yinchuan Biennale, People's Republic of China, 10 September – 18 December 2016, Photo: the author, 2016

connections, taken to define the biennial-as-event. He notes, "Yinchuan is an important point on the Silk Road, which stretches from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Situated between the Yellow River and the Helan Mountains, it has experienced many cultural exchanges. It is a confluence of Chinese and Islamic culture, which can be seen in the architecture, food, people and traditional culture of the region. I hope that Yinchuan can become another major contemporary art center, alongside Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong." The unprecedented and highly impressive fête of international artists brought together and thoughtfully displayed in the museum and its environs attests to this ambitious drive. The long list of established artists includes: Anish Kapoor, Yoko Ono, Liam Gillick, Mary Ellen Carroll, Liu Wei, Cao Fei, Ivan Navarro, Santiago Sierra, Slavs and Tartars, Song Dong, Sudarshan Shetty, Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme, Jyoti Basu, Riyas Komu, Robert Montgomery, Khaled Sabsabi, Lisa Reihana, Valsan Koorma Kolleri, Yee I-Lann, and Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige. The exhibition also featured several young and emerging artists including Alaa Mahmoud Alqedra, Abigail Reynolds, Dia Mehta Bhupal, Kartik Sood, Farzana Ahmed Urmi, and Sushanta Kumar Maharana. Logistically, this was no small feat. The immense challenges of staging an inaugural biennial at a venue determinedly outside China's major coastal cities presented complications at all stages—from funding to installation, shipping, invitations, and promotions. Amongst the most embedded and poignant presentations at the Biennale were the six artists-in-residence—the first batch of artists to occupy the artists village—which included Valsan Koorma Kolleri, Mohammed Kazem, and Benitha Perciyal, amongst others.

The withdrawal of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was put down to "pressure from above," positioned outside the internal organisational challenges facing the Biennale. The ensuing global media attention points to the popularity of Weiwei outside mainland China, where he is often used as a cipher (or catch-all) for all that is perceived to be wrong with the Middle Kingdom. Although not officially participating, Weiwei's presence was very much felt, whilst being conspicuously absent from conversations between artists and delegates at the opening. As the artist later posted on his social media, he was surprised that participating artists had not boycotted the event in protest against his exclusion. This rather misses the more complex form of change—in both perception and role of art in society—which biennials work to potentiate. Certainly, the project is situated within the not-entirely-unproblematic local context of expedited political and urban development, yet its execution is a testament to the resolve and drive of all those involved. It is a symbol of the potential of art as a catalyst for change, within the constraints of political forces "from above." The real challenge now for the Yinchuan Biennale is to continue with the promising work started by Krishnamachari and the museum staff, including Suchen Hsieh, Artistic Director and Madam Liu, Director of MOCA Yinchuan.

As the organisers stated within the press release accompanying the launch, "Since it first opened its doors, MOCA Yinchuan has taken on the task of promoting the image of the city of Yinchuan, but more importantly, it has worked to spread contemporary art in the lives and hearts of the people. Every city needs museums to help cultivate the cultural character of its residents. Art can change and elevate a person's thinking, perceptions, emotions, awareness and worldview, and thus catalyze the development and rise of the entire city."

More information available at: http://u-in-u.com/yinchuan-biennale/2016/.

Text and Images: **Shwetal A. Patel**
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On the critical decades and the role of archives
Shwetal Patel in discussion with Shaheen Merali

Panchayat and more…

In 1988, Shaheen Merali and Allan de Souza co-founded the Panchayat Collection, after consultation with artists Bhajan Hunjan, Symrath Patti and Shanti Thomas. The Panchayat Collection consists of documentation and reference library material relating to cultural activities and activism predominantly in Britain, mainland Europe, North America and Southeast Asia between the 1980s and 2003. The Panchayat archive's collecting strategy focused on the growing interactions within a globalising artworld of Black and Asian artists, as well as documenting their commitment to the intersection between race, class, gender, policed sexualities, and (dis)ability. Dr Janice Cheddie and Shaheen Merali were keepers of the Panchayat Archive at the University of Westminster from 2002 -2015. In May 2015, the contents of the collection were donated to the Tate Library as part of its Special Collections.

London-based arts practitioner and researcher, Shwetal A. Patel, is a founding member of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India and currently a PhD scholar at the Winchester School of Art.

Patel interviewed Merali for the *International Times* to discuss the impact of the archive, its contemporary relevance, and what we can learn from it in our own time.

Shwetal Patel: I want to start by asking you about your own background and what led to the emergence of these activities at that time in the 1980s.

Shaheen Merali: I graduated with a degree in Fine Art (Sculpture) from the University of Wales, Newport and returned to London where I quickly realised that one had to be involved in some sort of relationship with education. However, at that time, education somehow felt limiting, and many of us sensed the importance of working within community education. In many ways, this was very stimulating, as we came into contact with other people who had similar ideas about working with communities and who were mainly operating through workshops in community settings. Many artists were involved in working in these settings in the outlying boroughs of London but also in more centrally located places including Paddington, Westminster, Brixton and Lambeth.

We managed to reconfigure ourselves as artists in settings that were mainly meant for youth culture, in terms of youth centres, for instance, or sometimes in centres for young offenders, interfacing with youth workers, as well as with other artists, alongside actors, dancers, writers and poets. In hindsight, one realises it was a really important way of responding to how we understood ourselves as artists and writers in relation to 'the community'. It came out of a necessity to allow forms of expression for artists and groups in creative ways other than hanging out in the street. We were functioning in a space that was 'off street' at a time of a high volume of stop and search activities by the police. It is hard to imagine that certain citizens could not always use the streets in those days, but had to find other places in which to congregate.

Thus, one found oneself working within youth and community centres. Such spaces assisted in re-imagining the theatre or the arts, in workshops that included experiments with photographic techniques and conceptual drawing classes including self-portraiture, all the while exploring notions of the self in a divisive society. On a number of occasions, text-based works resulted from those working within these visual and temporal explorations. In many ways, there were very different things going on. I remember instances in which the public gathered to view or partake in public forums, including plays by Tara Arts, talks and openings at the Black Art and Horizon Galleries or book launches at New Beacon Books—all equally doing important work. Different models emerged from this community-based work, providing a comprehensive configuration and expansion that accommodated

our perspectives in the early '80s and shaped us all in some ways. This configuration was later used by larger platforms, including Greater London Arts (GLA) and Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) who recognised that there was this crossover between the artistic community, community development and community education that provided a very particular focus to the notion of cultural identity. Whether it was to do with issues around policing, or housing, homelessness or even archiving certain types of emerging consciousness on policed sexuality and sexual developments, there was an emerging sense to provide a space for activism and conjoining activities to do with who we are. Larger and comprehensive grants were often offered and provided, as happened around Tower Hamlets and specifically around Spitalfields, responding to the needs of large groups of Bengali youth. Similarly in Lambeth, specifically in and around Brixton, artists and other community workers became involved in a number of initiatives for those from the Caribbean diaspora.

Gradually there began to emerge some very specific areas with highly developed ideas around offering a provision for Black and Asian communities. In a sense, the rudimentary stages of being in public were initially led by 'negotiated arrangements' via community settings that helped to intensify the greater multicultural presence, including artists in schools and, later, in community galleries. And, out of a number of these community initiatives, came this relationship with collecting materials and creating archives and conceptually developing ideas and opportunities. Embedded within the notion of the developing 'Black' community was the aim to liaise and collaborate and, even, to contest our abilities, the necessity for stabilising forums (including permanent workshops rather than 'events and festivals') and professional development as a means of influencing the public as well as public policy.

The concept of influencing the public arose from the success of various forums including exhibitions, conferences and even publications. We were very much bound in the 1980s to the recent past of the diaspora, of the long journeys that had been taken in the preceding thirty to forty years, whether they were from Asia, the Caribbean, or from the coastal landscape of Africa, and we wanted to counter the prevailing narratives, which seemed to remain in the shadows, by throwing a certain light on the realties of that period.

SP: I was curious as to the naming of the collection and the larger purpose of building and collecting the archive. How did these emerge?

SM: Panchayat has a specific meaning: a group of five persons organised, (historically as an unofficial council for an Indian village), to act as an influential body towards self-governance. Under the founding members' initial guidance and the work undertaken by Allan de Souza and myself, the terms of its initial configuration expanded to accommodate a widened international perspective that we felt was lacking at the time.

The collection was characteristic of its time, representing contemporary artists who produced issue-based work, with a particular focus on cultural identity. As with all archives, the collection is fragmentary and reflective of the conditions of self-funded collecting.

The collection addressed the interdependent relationships of cultural conditions, predominantly in the so-called critical decade of the 1980s, which witnessed artists embracing the new technologies. Video art, copy art and digital media were being used to explore, through a range of aesthetic devices, the political and social formations of identities, imagination and artistic production and the policing of sexuality, the emerging migration and refugee crisis of the early 1990s.

SP: What does the collection include and how does it reflect the art and politics of that era?

SM: Panchayat's collection includes a library of catalogues, fiction and non-fiction books, independent publications including fanzines and copy art, an expanded form of leaflets, as well as reports and journals. In the late nineties, the collection built up a slide library of over a hundred artists' works including artists' files, which collectively provided a broad overview of cultural activities and activism, predominantly in Britain and North America, together with several countries in Europe and Asia. A certain emphasis on how it was catalogued suggested certain tendencies, including a particular orientation in making, representing or in the process of becoming. Strategic exhibitions and conferences were seen at the time as inevitable for development and an effective way to sustain, broaden and deepen a practice aimed at the broad challenges to modern life in and around the cosmopolitan centres of the UK.

Panchayat primarily remained a way of further examining issues and a depository of information from contested arenas, one which is often a subject deemed as either specialist or neglected or relegated, due to its origins in a specific agenda. As the American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson,stated, 'We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately'. In a mediated manner, Panchayat's activities can be seen as interventionary, or coming from an intermediary agent or means, by indirect mediation, indirectly.

SP: How did the collective form? Were you part of an informal network at that time in London?

SM: It partly happened as a result of the public forums that we were addressing, and along the way there were a myriad of minor adjustments to whom we were portraying through visual tropes, including exhibitions, at a time when becoming part of the public became more and more important for the urban audience. Panchayat was one of these observation posts for the influences unearthed, not only in exhibition-making but also what was being fashioned from both the effects visible in the generational perspective as well as from the evolving radical one. At that time, one's involvement in Rastafarianism and the Punk movement were expressions of historical pain and radicality that involved black history, populist political expression and encountering 'colonial' traits. Panchayat as a collection was influenced by the fragmentary presence of information accompanying these trials and experiments with the formations of collective notions of Black power in midst of mainstream power structures. The collection provided for and enabled many artists from diverse backgrounds and concerns to communicate the historic changes in the local and international environment under the edifice of Black Art or issue-based arts or even New Internationalism.

In the Asian community, the unspoken violence in relation to domestic violence and the challenging violence in the UK's streets included racist attacks that the communities faced on a daily basis, both from the indigenous British and the very monocultural police force. Organisations including Southall Black Sisters, the Southall Monitoring Groups or the Newham 8 Defence Campaign provided the guiding forums enhancing the place of the artists within activism. Working together on certain issues for publications and exhibitions, or even addressing the curriculum, activism was both a route to learn collaboration strategically and a way to make others cognisant of political issues that were starting to dominate our perspective of what was happening all around Britain and Europe.

All this colonial atrophy was a time of particular focus on evidence, of lived realities, of violence and sociological challenges facing us, and the hopes to resolve our aesthetic in that which came to be known as Black Art to some extent. That aesthetic, the notations built on notions of surviving and portraying the contemporary heritage as a place where we lacked power, in desperation we found ourselves recording Britain in the late twentieth century. In a sense, coming from different backgrounds, we came together thinking about how we could represent ourselves and develop a postcolonial dialogue.

The five of us, who met at Slade School of Arts, in its canteen, formed a Panchayat; of thought about the potential, of what would happen if we started collecting this material, rather than allowing this material to drift by. A lot of the materials were ephemeral, there was not much money for printing catalogues or monographs, and only sometimes were there enough resources to print a postcard for an exhibition or a leaflet. Rapidly, we realised that there was a necessity to create a process, to collect, to include, and that fleeting moment held within it a grander rethinking. Panchayat was an experiment as to what a collection could be and what an archive could do, and what might emerge as a counternarrative. These documented small exhibitions and experiments were part of our legacy about the doubts we had about living in Britain and Europe at that time. So it felt very important to make sure that these leaflets, postcards and photocopies—because photocopying was just about coming into its place at that time—were preserved. We had to produce images in such a way that they did something, as what we wanted to do was to create a sense of multi-locality—to show that what was happening in a certain part of London was also happening not only elsewhere in the city but also perhaps in other cities like Birmingham and other parts of the country and continental Europe. Prior to the Internet, connecting Birmingham and London was very difficult. These forums of multiculturality remained separated, and the means to produce a sense of collectivity remained challenging. Panchayat, alongside African and Asian Visual Arts Archive (aavaa); South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive (SALIDAA); autograph and the Institute of

International Visual Arts (Iniva) were very much about trying to create a certain space that could deliver a sense of what was going on in Britain and could also provide a clearer portrayal of what was going on for the forthcoming New International.

At that time, the notion of the international was very much about what was going on in the English-speaking world, and, in particular, the English post-colonial world. Our references and our transferring of knowledge was about reflecting alongside the chasm of North American civil rights activities and those in the countries from which we originated.

SP: I am interested in how this idea of the critical decade transpired and the emergence in the globalised field of cultural activities, as well as the ability of artists to work in Europe and internationally and the curator's place in the arts as revealed in its expanded definition of the contemporary at that time.

SM: Well, we had some very interesting key thinkers around, including Kobena Mercer, Maud Saulter and Sunil Gupta, who were very much involved in looking at photographic experiences of the gay and lesbian community and other issues of representation.

Very interesting ideas were explored by sociologists including Ulrich Beck and John Tagg, who invested their thinking in suggesting the idea of carrying the burden of representation. Much of what was going on was to do with the recording of power, or the lack of power, or the transmission of power and how we could, to a certain extent, produce a greater picture of our concerns within racial vectors, as well as beyond race—an amalgamation of different concerns if you like.

The emergence of hyphenated identities was both an interesting and important device to break up the monopoly of experience and nationalism. The African-American, Afro-Caribbean, the Black-British, the British-Asian, the gay-artist, the feminist-author, all these were hyphenated identities through which people started discerning various realities. Exhibitions that had domains of segregated ideas of race started to explore relationships beyond the material in spaces that proposed concerns around gender, sexuality or disability. Exhibitions postulated complex questions by gay and lesbian artists, black British artists, or artists with disabilities from various communities with a research-based criticality, related to the power structures that impacted their particularities and individualities. A discursive formation of both art and politics was formed from lived experiences that introduced multiplicity, and muliculturality in a decade—a critical decade of concerns—from what had been on the sidelines of disjunctions for a very long time.

The collecting policy, as well as the manner in which Panchayat disseminated its material and contextual histories in the late eighties and the early nineties, was based to a large extent on its effective relationship to its 'vernacular realism" (as Mercer calls it)—one that highlighted the expressive qualities of an 'artist's relationship to reality as referred to in their depictions'.

Interdependent relationships built 'spectral dances' between contexts, across communities and fragile affiliations. One realises, in hindsight, that there never was an artistic consensus as 'to what made such an identity distinctive'. In the same way, Kobena Mercer has suggested the representation of African American cultural identity is 'an "amalgamation" of disparate elements'.

Kobena Mercer's concept of vernacular realism, as the constant reference of artists to their realities, is easily observable in the photographic work of Samena Rana, whose physical disability impeded the process of 'taking photographs', whilst her aesthetic decisions influenced her work and perspective. Due to her (dis) ability, she held her camera in a certain way and shot images from the position of her wheelchair. She often shot images of objects she found beautiful from above and in this way a vernacularism developed through the manner in which people looked at their specific conditions.

The work of various artists seemed to have a critical distance (here distance is the measure that allowed the proposing of complex innate concerns) or from an approximation of their condition. One had to start thinking in 'new' relationships performed within an amalgamation of concerns. The term 'Black' started to seem prohibitive and monocultural in this hyphenated landscape of acknowledging political realities that held complex concepts together. 'Black' in a strange way, by the late '90s, remained about race, whilst the New International brought about a globalisation of interdependent senses of historical realities or relationships and structured closer contexts and

affiliations beyond British colonialism. The scepticism at the heart of the Black Art movement's work was always based in British coloniality, and the acrimony of its images arose from colonial violence. The New Internationalism was in actuality seen as a way of re-affiliating and making sure that those affiliations remained complex and more broadly drawn. As the cosmopolitan widened in grasping its citizen base beyond the commonwealth, its cities approached a broader range of concerns, so there was a shift from the '80s to the late '90s where it became very much about how do we understand the progressive ideas about globalisation within the European Union.

SP: At that time in the 1980s and 1990s, theorists and practitioners such as Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj were teaching in institutions such as Goldsmiths' College and were bringing post-colonial discourses into British art schools. How much of an impact did that have at the time?

SM: We had access to many people who were embedded in the education system at the time, and often at the postgraduate level, where the process of art making was prioritised as, in a strange way, the 'thinking' involved in making art, which was seen as a particularly postgraduate preoccupation. This meant people were involved in cultural theory and philosophy, and access to these created a bridging mechanism and an awareness of self-representation through academic registers. I think we tend to take that for granted now to a large extent and do not esteem it so highly. Today, the Internet has become a greater mirror than any person involved in an academic capacity. At one time, we felt the necessity to listen to Jean Fisher, Sarat Maharaj and Homi K. Bhabha. Now, possibly, we only need to find a quote from any of those figures to insert into an essay to think that we have an understanding. Yet, I believe that hearing and quoting are two very different ways to understand academic positions.

SP: Panchayat's activities in this era seem to have taken place on the cusp of profound changes in the arts, artists and the art world; global and globalised arts, the enhancement and development in the making and display of the white cube, the increasing capacity of the commercial market, the art fair and residencies. You also took a group of artists to the 1989 edition of the Havana Biennale, which was seminal in developing new South-South relations and discourses. Can you tell us what was going on at that time?

SM: In Panchayat, it was very much about coming to terms with this kinship, and love for this kinship; it was very basic in some ways. Our curatorial policy was based on the notion of what we found akin to ourselves, where was the rupture, where was the rumour to challenge the hegemony, where was the shortfall? What should we be observing in terms of what should be produced, what and where is the struggle? So these were very basic ways of understanding kinship, and this moved some energy from the 'local', therefore the community, to a notion of the 'International', the kinship, the process of broadening into the international perspective. On reflection, it was a very strategic long-term aim, because globalisation was coming in a way felt in one's own practice. So, for the first time, the Arts Council of England offered people the opportunity to travel to Europe and, also, offered the opportunity for research through partnership with other European organisations. This was not possible in the '80s, only starting in the early 1990s. Thus, the spheres of development really broadened for many practitioners, whilst people of colour wanted to make those links even further afield; with the Caribbean, South Asia and other artist groups in 'the elsewhere' beyond the commonwealth. Thus, the value of what were the counter-hegemonic spaces and discourse was also something we wanted to try and work out with other spaces across the world. The 1989 Havana Biennale was the first time I managed to work with a group of people who met us and wanted to develop some sort of working relationship, without just looking at Europe but looking at South-South equations. Although it was seen as transnational, it was really built on kinship. It was also about developing strength through a network that advanced a permeation of the historical past in our present realities.

SP: It feels important to revisit archives such as Panchayat and others at this point in Britain's history. Also, artists such as Keith Piper and others are now being given larger platforms in museums such as the Bluecoat in Liverpool and INIVA in London, though it seems that the political context of that era is also important to understand at this time?

SM: The premise of Panchayat was that there were many sites of contestation and many experiments that were being carried out with limited resources, but the congruity of what artists were making and saying and the challenges that they were depicting and the political challenges that they were negotiating were

very important emerging paradigms for a new type of aesthetic and new sense of the self. It was really a time of substance and not a time for style.

Keith Piper's *Unearthing of the Bankers Bones* as well as his new work, *Pulp Fiction*, are works similar to those I commissioned when I curated the exhibition, *Black Atlantic*, at the House of World Cultures in Berlin in 2007. The series of digital works for *Black Atlantic* examined the relationship of the symbolic monetary and its historical relationship between race and the advent of an enforced diaspora. Piper, in many ways, has been involved in the active deconstruction and rethinking through visual tropes, the management of sense and safety of the self. The never-ending relationship between power and money, the access and control of the body and the symbolic control of race and the knowledge system are key and central to his works. His research around and about transatlantic slavery, often inversely juxtapositioned within interactive digital environments, is important work in the history of art. Piper manages to explore histories of the 17th and 18th centuries and the altruism that defines our futures. What remains interesting about working with Piper is that he allows us all to look at issues and opportunities with a difficult historical past still present, waiting to be re-engaged through multiplicity and from multiple sources, and then, in a sense, his artistic inventions create new ways of looking at them and new relationships between structures of power as new records of perception. Keith Piper has been doing this work in many different ways, through teaching, through writing and making artworks and video works for the last four decades. In his art, we find the amalgamation of ideas, theories and research, which allows various environments from these decades to pose further new questions. His fertile, natural ability within the art world and through writing and education, through his lived history and the work of the '80s and '90s, continues and has not lost its importance.

Many references have been brought to bear through artists' work, not only Keith Piper but a myriad of artists from that era, including Fred Wilson, Jimmie Durham, Gavin Jantjes, Rashid Araeen and María Magdalena Campos-Pons, who have forced into the open the illusion that had been controlling us. They shifted agendas and, therefore, this critical decade remains important now within the global arts. It is important that we continue to exist within various aspirations that vie for control of our destinies and intelligence. In this globalisation of the arts, we continue to work and live through nuanced forms of barbarism and specialisations, and these forms of barbarism have constructed illusions, which need re-addressing.

The deconstructive possibilities of the archive provide opportunities to work with artists and institutions on exhibitions, performances, publications, and even to set up a studio. As C.L.R. James observed of the post-war era and the late '70s and '80s, 'No age has been so conscious of the permeation of the historical past in the actual present as our own.'

I remain a firm believer in the need to create a parallel axis of knowledge, generating new archives and generating contesting ideas of globalisations, multiplicity, multi-locality and the imaginary. All of this has to be a continuous process. It is important and interesting to create further opportunities for liaison, collaboration and discussion and to find kinship. We have to continue to operate as artists, curators and archivists—as people who are willing to be collecting rather than remaining within the narratives, which are applied to us, but to create the counternarratives that challenge us.

Furthermore, I would encourage this *sorry* contemporary to think about these issues and further our understanding stemming from the archival possibilities of the vectors of production and victories of practices. The search for meaning is to be found in continually inventing aesthetics unhinged and unbound by economics but aligned with the urgency of ecological harmonies.

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Cutting and Sharing the "Global Pie": Why History Matters to Discussions of Contemporary "Global Art"

Claire Farago

My contribution to this issue takes exception to those power brokers of the art world who continue to ignore their own privileged position in the prolonged humanitarian and ecological crisis that Gerardo Mosquera recognized 15 years ago when he coined the global pie metaphor.[1] Initially, my straw man was going to be Hans Belting's widely cited views on global art, specifically stemming from the exhibition catalogue, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (2013). Without acknowledging the strong backlash to the exhibition's premises by postcolonial writers and Australian museum curators, Belting announced that the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* held in Paris in 1989 banished [what Belting considered the Eurocentric] concept of world art because paintings by Australian bushmen were shown in the same gallery with bona fide avant-garde artists. Hence, global art can be made anywhere by anyone, because the "dualism of art and artifact was put aside when contemporary art production in a professional sense had become general practice and was no longer the West's prerogative."[2] How is the German art historian Belting in a position to declare that a single exhibition staged at the historical center of European modern art successfully eradicated the effects of centuries of European cultural chauvinism? The "prevalence of Western canons in art history,"[3] writes Ruth Simbao, historian of African Art at Rhodes University, South Africa, cannot simply come to a close just because "authors steeped in this privileged art world announce its supposed demise, implying that they are willing and perhaps key agents of this apparent change."[4]

Neglect of the local is Simbao's main criticism of Belting's blind arrogance. There is indeed an urgent need to study the many kinds of entanglements that emerge in local settings, and to study them comparatively. A transcultural framework of analysis is suited to this task—employing an analytical model that, as leading voice Monica Juneja defines it, does not take "historical units and boundaries as given, but rather constitutes them as a subject of investigation."[5] The view of culture as something fixed and homogeneous, Juneja avers, is the product of "cultural categories drawn up by the universal histories of the nineteenth century."[6] Yes, unfortunately, these categories are still with us both in daily life and in the Academy. There is much for art historians to revise.

Beyond the academy and aside from the epistemological issue of *where* to make the cut between the past and a present that is constantly sliding into the past, there is the considerable problem of imagining what and how history should be brought to bear on the subject of global art. Although much of the writing is, like Belting's project, entirely presentist in approach, thus avoiding the problems of narrating history altogether, there have been some calls to incorporate history in accounts of global contemporary art. James Elkins, one of the most widely published organizers of this discourse, in his introduction to *Art and Globalization* of 2010, laments that international art is conceptualized in the absence of serious dialogue about globalization as it

has been theorized in other disciplines such as political theory. And he regards as "amnesiac" the discipline's current neglect of "'premodern' forms of regionalism and globalism in art history."[7] Herein lies the problem: for Juneja and many others, "universalism" is the heritage of Enlightenment metaphysics that demands scrutiny and reconceptualization, and their views and actions *are* informed by political theory; while for Elkins, Thomas Kaufmann, and others who likewise wish to integrate past and present in our accounts of global art, those same categories and goals still appear to be self-evident. Bluntly stated, they misrecognize their own ignorance for that of others.

The immediate origins of our longstanding categories about individual and collective cultural identity are in nineteenth-century adaptations of comparative anatomy and geology indebted to theories of biological evolution even before Darwin. That complicated subject has also received attention of late and deserves more. Matthew Rampley, in a superb study published in 2017, entitled *The Seductions of Darwin: Art, Evolution, Neuroscience, examines the crudeness of the basic claim that the study of brain behavior can explain complex questions of artistic intention and significance.*[8]

If geological and geographic approaches of the past provide no epistemological or ethical foothold for a contemporary geography of art or any other kind of art history for that matter, then why turn to that discredited past now? Certainly not to celebrate the longevity of universalist art history practiced by white male Europeans of a certain class and stature. Rather, to seek the sources of lingering assumptions of geographical determinism and racial or ethnic essentialism in our own current accounts, in order to weed them out, expunge them. It is perplexing that Elkins, Kaufmann, and many others who have recently criticized the presentism of global contemporary art history do not situate their own subject positions clearly in relation to past historical narratives, especially since there have been strident critiques of universalism among contemporary art historians and artists who take a de-colonial approach to studying the past.

If the discipline itself—if the very category "art"—is the product of history, then we all share the ethical responsibility as producers of knowledge to understand how our knowledge shapes the institution. By necessity, this has to be a collective endeavor. No one has the expertise to go it alone. In 1992, Gerardo Mosquera called out the "myth of universal value in art," not only because art is linked to specific historical and cultural situations, but also because art (and all material things in fact) possess "polysemic ambiguity, open to diverse readings."[9] In 2017, the indictment of monocultural approaches articulated by Mosquera and others has still not been adequately addressed. Most debates on global art history still rely on the premises of the division between West and non-West, writes Esra Akcan in her contribution to the 2014 collection entitled *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn, despite the aspiration for an inclusive discipline.*[10] What, asks the co-editor of the same volume, the outcome of a workshop and conference held at the Clark Art Institute in 2011, would art history look like if the unfinished project of postcolonial theory were readmitted?[11]

And that's not the half of it. Postcolonial and transcultural approaches—of course in many places outside certain elite institutions in the Northeast US, such approaches are well-accepted—admit history through the front door, calling attention at the local level to the uneven playing field, speaking back to the empire, asking difficult, previously unasked questions of the historical records that survive. It is exactly for this reason that historical understanding belongs in discussions of contemporary global

art. Yet most contemporary art historians, artists, and critics, even among those who advocate for the inclusion of historical material, seem to limit the time frame worth considering to the nineteenth century. However, processes of globalization newly identified by transcultural approaches are not unique attributes of modernity. They began long before the nineteenth century. Existing historical accounts are problematic if they use the same epistemological categories and teleological narratives that the emerging study of global art is trying to eliminate. Since they mostly do, collective research is necessitated by the depth and breadth of material to be covered.

Writing in 2003, Mosquera did not mention climate change directly, but he similarly advocated developing a "multidirectional web of interactions" to encourage "true globalization," defined as "a generalized participation."[12] Mosquera identified the main issue as agency, who has it, who doesn't. With Cassandra-like foresight, he asked what the implications are of "massive diasporas, changes in power structures, violence, terrorism, global communications and zones of silence, for art and culture?"[13] Agency, to quote Mosquera again, "includes the right of artists, curators and writers who have been excluded from and/or disadvantaged by dominant systems to have a say in announcing when their disadvantage has ended, if indeed it has."[14]

The primary form of collaborative, participatory activism that matters now consists of the entire planetary network cooperating to save our shared home from premature and senseless destruction in the late capitalist era of the Anthropocene. Artists have taken the lead in working at the intersections of art, environmental activism, and political ecology, writes T. J. Demos in an important book about their efforts published in 2016, entitled *Decolonizing Nature*.[15] Demos is one of a growing number of contemporary art historians who have turned their attention to climate justice. In this arena, acting collaboratively with scientists is essential to cover the bases of expertise. What about the field of art history more generally? We can't all write about climate change, but we share stakes in similar kinds of issues, as made abundantly clear in the growing body of literature on what English professor and climate change activist Rob Nixon calls "the environmentalism of the poor."[16] As a historian studying objects and texts of the past, the work that I produce is re-writing the history of the past in the present. This re-written history deserves to be at the party if we are ever going to divide that global pie equitably. To do otherwise is to exclude the historian as yet another voiceless, marginalized, dispossessed subject. I leave you with a statement by Hayden White regarding the historian's motivation for rewriting what he calls the "practical past":

Recall that for [J. L.] Austin a speech act is "illocutionary": that is, an action in which, in saying something, one not only *says* something but also *does* something, that is to say, changes a relationship either of the speaker to the world, of one part of the world to another, or of the world to the speaker. And if this is right—as many of Austin's commentators seem to think that it is right—then we might begin to think about discourses, of which "historiography" would be one, as speech acts which, in saying something about the world, seek to change the world, the way one might relate to it, or the way things related to one another in the world.[17]

The following paper takes its title from a session entitled "How to Cut and Share the Global Pie: Transcultural Approaches to Collaboration, Participation, and Activism," co-organized by Franziska Koch and Birgit Hopfener, ASAP9: Arts of the Present, October 26-28, 2017, Oakland, California, where it was originally presented. My warm

thanks to the organizers for the invitation and to all who participated in the lively discussion, and especially to fellow participant Dorothee Richter for inviting me to contribute this slightly revised version of my paper to the present issue of *OnCurating*.

Notes

1 Gerardo Mosquera, "From," in *Créolité and Creolization: documenta11_Platform 3*, Okwui Enwezor et al., eds., Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany, 2003, pp. 145-148, citing p. 145.
2 Hans Belting, "From World Art to Global Art: View on a New Panorama," in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds,* Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel eds., The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 178-185, citing pp. 181-182.
3 Ibid., p. 18.
4 Ruth Simbao, "What "Global Art" and Current (Re)turns Fail to See: A Modest Counter-Narrative to 'Not-Another-Biennial," *Image & Text* 25 (2015): 261-286, citing p. 263.
5 Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," in *Transcultural Modernisms: Model House Research Group*, Moira Hille et al., eds., Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2013, pp. 22-33, citing Juneja, p. 28.
6 Juneja and Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," citing Juneja, p. 29.
7 James Elkins, "First Introduction," in *Art and Globalization*, James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim eds., Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2010, pp. 1-4, citing p. 3. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann was a member of the 2007 seminar that Elkins's volume commemorates. Elkins alludes to Kaufmann's book, *Towards a Geography of Art*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, IL, 2008.
8 Matthew Rampley, *The Seductions of Darwin: Art, Evolution, Neuroscience,* Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2017, see especially pp. 99-105 for a critique of the "crude materialist theory of mind" that underlies the claims of neuroscience. Rampley writes that neuroscientific approaches commit "a basic category error, by conflating the observed correlation between neural activity and subjective experience with the idea of a causal relation" (p. 100). Rampley identifies a "central axiom" of neuroscientific approaches to the arts that is shared with evolutionary theory and is deeply suspect, namely the idea that art is "a sequence of private events taking place within the mind/brain of an individual" (p. 101).
9 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism," *Third Text*, 1992; reprinted in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung eds., Blackwell, Oxford, 2005, pp. 218-225, citing p. 222.
10 Esra Akcan, "Channels and Items of Translation," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, Jill H. Casid and Aruna d'Souza eds., Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, and Yale University Press, New Haven, 2014, p. 146.
11 Arunja d'Souza, "Introduction," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, p. xvii.
12 Mosquera, "From," p. 145.
13 Mosquera, "From," p. 148.
14 Mosquera, "From," p. 146.
15 T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2016, p. 1.
16 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2011. As other writers on climate change and its collateral effects have stressed, all life on earth is already deeply compromised. Among the most powerful and well-documented studies addressed to a general intellectual audience is Carl Safina, Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel, Picador, New York, 2016.
17 Hayden White, *The Practical Past,* Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL,

2010, p. 34. I am currently working on a new book that will address the issue of the art historian's responsibilities and opportunities to rethink the past for the sake of the future. I have published brief synopsis of the project under the same title in Global and World Art in the Practice of the University Museum, Jane Chin Davidson and Sandra Esslinger eds., Routledge, London-New York, 2018, pp. 115–130.

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Learning from Dhaka
Dorothee Richter

1. Seeing

The phrase 'I know that I know nothing' came to my mind when we all met in Dhaka for the Critical Writing Ensembles.[1] I understood that I had a lot to learn from this wonderful, colourful, crowded city. On my way to the hotel, I saw a lot of people on the streets, all sorts of cars, rickshaws, businesses. I saw exquisite displays of fruit in pyramid forms. I saw illuminated shops filled with sparkling lamps and lights. I saw graciously written letters, which I could not decipher, contrasted with well-known advertisements. Nice people stared at me. A small young woman who was in charge of cleaning the bathroom of the exhibition spaces wanted to take a photo with me. I felt like a white elephant.

I saw interesting exhibitions in the city, met old friends, and made new ones. As colleagues, we talked a lot about what decolonisation in the arts, in art history, and in curating might be. We saw all sorts of existing power relations, old ones and new ones, local ones and depressingly global ones. I read in the local newspaper about a person who had died of injuries caused by a fire because he had used a small ceresin oven to cook and sell something, but had been ordered by a policeman to go away;[2] the policeman had kicked the oven, which had caused the ceresin to explode over the man and he later died in hospital. I also heard about the death of a professor, living openly as a homosexual. I was quite insecure about how to write about a society I do not know—describing just one's impressions can be totally misleading. As Ananya Roy argues, it is necessary to change and transform the ways in which the cities of the Global South are studied and represented. She describes how the film Slumdog Millionaire created a new narrative of a touristic vision of slums, a frozen essentialist image. 'Slumdog Millionaire can be read as poverty pornography. It can also be read as a metonym, a way of designating the megacity that is Mumbai.'[3] She contrasts this narration with another perspective, following the notion of the subaltern by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Roy projects a specific kind of agency, which is not connected to a specific identity but to the subaltern as a kind of political (and economic) agency: 'In my earlier work, I have argued that the study of the twenty-first-century metropolis requires new geographies of theory. Subaltern urbanism is indeed one such approach. It is a vital and even radical challenge to apocalyptic and dystopian narratives of the megacity. However, subaltern urbanism tends to remain bound to the study of spaces of poverty, of essential forms of popular agency, of the habitus of the dispossessed, of the entrepreneurialism of self-organizing economies. I am interested in a set of theoretical projects that disrupt subaltern urbanism and thus break with ontological and topological understandings of subalternity.'[4] To this analysis I want to relate a strong argument, which was delivered by Johan Hartle at a symposium that we organised during Manifesta (and which we used to criticise the naïve notion of work proposed by Manifesta):[5] to start from empirical effects means to legitimate social conditions implicitly, and this could be described as a theoretical notion of fetishism, Hartle established.[6] He also quotes Bertolt Brecht, who problematised a photographic depiction of social situations at a Krupp Werke factory. To translate it roughly, Brecht explains that a photograph does not say anything about the instituted factory. The reification of human relations does not show in this way; it is held back by the factory.

The production of 'truth' needs something that is to be built up, something artificial, to show the social relations.

At the Dhaka Art summit, I saw a video on the living conditions of a neighbourhood that had been relocalised to another site near the Airport of Chittagong. Small naked children were carrying car tyres, not for fun, but to sell them. I saw the exhibition of thirteen artists from Bangladesh, curated by Daniel Baumann. One of them, Rasel Chowdhury, had been awarded the 'Samdani Art Award'. 'His body of work deals with unplanned desperate urbanization, the dying River Buriganga, the lost city of Sonargaon, the Mega City of Dhaka, and newly transformed spaces around Bangladesh railroads to explore the change of the environment, unplanned urban structures and new form of landscapes.'[7] I saw us—curators, theoreticians and professors from the US and Europe—the usual suspects at major art events, walking through the overcrowded streets of Dhaka. I saw children sorting rubbish in the streets. I became acutely aware that we are globally connected in economic ways more deeply than I could ever have imagined, and how dependent the economy of the West is on this exploitative relation.

In the midst of the bunch of writers, artists and curators, I remembered the feeling Lacan describes when he recognises himself as 'being seen' by a box of sardines on a fishing trip. He then suddenly realises that he, when seen from the outside, is somehow weird in the picture, out of place, being a young bourgeois student in the midst of the fishermen on a boat. The gaze captured him. He encountered being a split subject, a subject that is not situated in the central point of a central perspective; instead, he recognises that he is being registered from the outside.[8] This moment of seeing myself in a picture, in a context that I hardly understood, stayed with me. I remember the argument made by Andrea Fraser claiming that the art market is strongest in countries with the biggest gap in income between the super rich and the very poor. (She explores this using the GIINI Index, Income Disparity since World War II in many different countries.[9]) I wondered what kind of art a society needs, when struggling to provide basic services to its community, unpolluted air and water, a challenge faced by so many countries around the world within and beyond the Western hemisphere. I wondered what decolonising art might mean. In what way should art institutions be revisited, reorganised? In which ways could cultural production in different media and with other protocols be developed and shown (and would showing be the format)? How could a chain of equivalence be realised, between art and politics, art and social issues?[10] Shukla Sawant asked during a bus tour (stuck in traffic for two hours to go seven kilometres), what would a concept of modernity mean in an Indian context if one took into consideration the Indian tradition of Mandalas as an already existing version of abstraction—instead of positioning Western art as the great revelation? I wonder what a show of contemporary art will do in Bangladesh's society of today.

When I was back home, Shukla wrote to me that the University where she works (1,700 km and a 2.5-hour flight away from Dhaka, in Delhi, India) is in turmoil: 'JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi] is going through a major crisis, and we have been on protest regarding police action against our students and arrest of the student union leader for organising an event that was deemed "seditious" by the government. You may have heard of it by now.'[11] But (a nine-hour flight away from Delhi and twelve-hour flight away from Dhaka) I hadn't heard about it; the information I got, if at all, is vague, so again, I know nothing.

When reading my text, the curatorial assistant of CWE Ruxmini Choudhury disliked that I had mainly pointed out problems and wrote: 'In the USA, every six months we

Impressions from Dhaka, Bangladesh: street views, exhibition views of Dhaka Art Summit 2016, Critical Writing Ensemble, Photo: the author and Ronald Kolb, 2016

hear the news of gun-shooting in schools, we hear of police killing black youth. Just yesterday, I read in an article that Germany has proposed to ban the burka. I read in the news about how a woman was stripped out of her burkini by the French police [...] A few months ago, an Orlando shooter killed 49 people in a gay nightclub. So why highlight the killing of one gay activist? Is it because we are a third world country?' I understand your concern, but I am writing against right-wing attitudes and politics in other parts of the world as well; we should write against suppression and violence based on so-called 'race' issues, on gender-related exclusions and systems wherever we detect them.[12] I confess, to see and write in Dhaka, means to put humbly some pieces of a puzzle together, to guess about relations and dependencies. Especially as there is today, moreover, as Hartle has described, a more general crisis of work and the representation and visualisation of work, and therefore of surplus value. Immaterial labour—this important contemporary form of production/consumption worldwide—hides the processes of its formation, it hides the social relations in which it is produced.[13] I am well aware that all glimpses and impressions that I tried to sketch are embedded in a social hierarchy, in global and local social dependencies, and it means and produces great differences in access and power. As, by the way, it does in Zurich, were the sex workers and Sans Papiers, the artists and cultural producers (whom we interviewed for issue 30 of OnCurating.org) have decidedly different access, especially in comparison to the white-collar workers in the financial district (even if all of them might be denied the right to vote because they most likely do not have a Swiss passport). Talking in Zurich, while working on the critical issue of OnCurating.org, we argued: 'To this day, changes in working processes and migration movements are usually regarded as mutually isolated "problems". However, we see the connection between them as a geopolitical reality rooted in political and economic power structures, aspirations to hegemony and the battle for resources, a reality that already began to take shape in the harbingers of neoliberalism. Whereas in the eighteenth century the impoverished working class still found itself directly confronted with a wealthy upper class, today these lines of conflict traverse the globe horizontally.'[14] In this issue we undertook to enfold notions of 'work' and to explore modes of counter-hegemonic actions and cultural production.

But as Ananya Roy argues, in the social fabric of megacities like Dhaka, the social fabric of the city could also imply spaces of subaltern urbanism, whose strategies of resistance are not yet defined and would elude simple definitions. As I understand her, spaces of subaltern urbanism would mean developing a utopian horizon.

2. Writing

Coming to Dhaka as the publisher of OnCurating.org, an independent international journal (both on the web and in print) that focuses on questions surrounding curatorial practice and theory, I was grateful for the opportunity to rethink the options of writing in relation to the arts. I was also quite overwhelmed by new approaches to art writing, which were presented by my younger colleagues such as Quinn Latimer, Nida Ghouse and Rosalyn D´Mello. When context, personal histories, the traces of memory and cultural inscriptions become a new format for making the personal political, I am all for it. The persistent questions were: What constitutes memory? What constitutes urgency and longing? And what constitutes writing about art?

My colleague Helmut Draxler inscribed half ironic slogans on the walls of the exhibition he had curated at Generali Foundation in Vienna that reviewed exhibition history both from a personal perspective and from an engaged political understanding of

exhibiting as a formulation in a space of representation. He proposed: 'Always historicise, always contextualise and always localise'.[15] I felt quite uneasy with Daniel Baumann's claim that theoretical approaches to art should be avoided, as he stated in a poster at the beginning of the exhibition: 'To my surprise, there was no advancing of pretentious discourse of the kind one often meets in similar situations in Europe or North America. No talks about the post-Fordist situation, the need for deconstruction, the era of post-Internet or that thing called anthropocene—just to name a few.'[16] But, I would like to ask, who needs a deconstruction of a certain situation and who doesn't? And there is no way to deal with theory properly; there is an embarking into theory and a lifelong obligation to go on reading and discussing, to re-read, to change attitudes, to build up new conglomerates of theory and practice, and to start again. Embarking into theory means that you will never know enough, that you will always remain in the humble situation of a scholar. Dealing with theory means that you will never be satisfied with your practice in any medium whatsoever, an uncanny position with which one constantly has to deal. And in the context of writing about art, I would like to emphasise certain points of departure, relating to issues that other speakers brought up.

I will do this by quickly, and I guess unduly, condensing and describing which thoughts resonated with me in the last few days. First of all, in writing about unseen exhibitions, Filipa Ramos pointed out a problem that we all—especially researchers and writers on complex arts pieces—have nowadays. It is difficult to define what constructs the memory of an actual artwork or an art exhibition. As a Fluxus researcher, I understand this problem. And since the 1960s, this has been the case for most installations and art projects: the projects, the events, the actual encounters are long gone; some relics and some photographs might exist, many artists' descriptions exist, some ephemera exist, posters, invitation cards and a variety of leftovers or scores or weird musical instruments exist, and so on.

I would like to argue that it is certainly not a specific object or project, or installation or exhibition; often it is precisely the whole discourse existing in a variety of written, spoken, photographic, object-based media, and their institutionalised relations. This whole media complex is what Roland Barthes described in 'Myth Today'.[17] The sign systems are connected, and they create meaning through their special constellation. This meaning production is never objective or transhistorical: it operates in a historical moment and environment in a specific way.

And again: this production of meaning is most definitely connected to the context into which it is placed. A smashed piano would mean something in 1962 in Germany and something different in 2016 in the same place; any historical and political issue would change the meaning of an artwork or an exhibition. The exhibition and the artwork consist of materiality and of what is considered to be true or false, right or wrong, good art or bad art; it is constituted and consecrated through discourse. It can be understood by means of what Foucault called a discursive formation, with its material and verbal sides and its institutions. This discursive formation that we could call art has its very real effects. The real effects are that some cultural utterances are positioned as 'art', while others are not. Some might enter the art market, others are seen to be just 'cultural artefacts', just hairstyles, just LP covers, or displays in shops.[18] And from a historical position, we can simply trace and guess what it might feel like to have an encounter somewhere else and at another time; this must be explored and unfolded. As mentioned before: what does it mean to read Indian modernity through a tantric tradition?

What does an actual encounter mean in the here and now anyway? 'Is it now?' is a consistent, ongoing question: is it now that we experience, here, now? Together? I remember the famous image that Freud put forward for the cultural and social traces that are inscribed into our minds subconsciously: he proposed thinking of a Wunderblock, a 'Mystic Writing Pad', with a sheet of paper and a wax layer, which can be rewritten again and again, but keeps traces of former inscriptions.[19] Analogously, we also keep traces of former acts, and these are part of what we encounter in the now.

Is it now? This contains a whole bundle of layers of assumptions about gender, truth, society and so on (on what art and beauty are). This is an even more urgent question in the digital age, where the boundaries between original and copy are non-existent on the one hand, and on the other the constant overflow of not necessarily critical images creates worldwide traces in our minds and changes our perceptions. Distances are collapsing; we meet these days in Dhaka, and in March in Hong Kong, in June in Basel; in-between we exchange emails or Skype. The North Sea might be at our doorstep, as Peter Weibel put it, but the poverty, the wars and the suffering are all banned into a shiny image on a monitor. Who is able to move and who has to stay is still absolutely related to race, class and gender.

But let's get back to art and critical writing about art—which could perhaps happen in digital space, but should be played back in order to discuss it locally: art is produced in a complex way through consecration processes, through institutions such as Kunsthallen, venues for contemporary art, art academies, art criticism and through verbal and visual discourses and artefacts. The basic concept of contemporary art is formulated historically through a Western context.

It is definitely no longer any 'thing as such' (and never was by the way) and the 'thing ' has no agency of its own; here the simplified understanding of the actor network theory of Bruno Latour is dramatically misleading: 'a thing' has agency, but only as a sign in the abovementioned constellation that produces meaning. Any sign is constructed through a visual and an acoustic interrelation, which forms an entity; you cannot think 'arbre' or 'tree' or 'Baum' without projecting an image. A sign will produce meaning in a context, which means in a historical, cultural and social constellation. I would therefore also reject the embedded notion of a communality of matter and human entities developed by Jean-Luc Nancy, especially since we had the opportunity to ask Nancy during a symposium about power relations in the notion of 'being-with'.[20] He is just not as interested in this part, he told us.

Anyway, to conceive art as a discursive formation, as developed above, I deeply disagree with anybody who claims a universal validity for the arts: 'Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate',[21] as Edward Said has put it.

It is this, what Hamid Dabashi expresses vigorously with his outcry "Fuck You Žižek!"[22] He strongly argues against the pretention of an interpretative philosophical supremacy that is often displayed by Western intellectuals. In this case by Žižek, who triggered this debate by his own aggressive wording on a text by Walter Mignolo, who analysed conditions and possibilities of decolonization. The accusation Dabashi formulates aims against the arrogant neglecting of theoreticians on postcolonial questions who actually come from a postcolonial background and whose reference point might not be exclusively dedicated to the history of Western philosophy. The critique he utters

resonates in me from another, feminist perspective, the typical Žižek presentation of a self-centred meta-philosopher and his aggressive conviction of being in the right is problematic; strangely enough, Dabshi answers in a similar tone and vigour, even if his claim is substantial. Still interested in the notion and possibilities of decolonization, I turn to Walter Mignolo. Most important in his view is decoloniality's point of origin in the Third World, which connects to 'immigrant consciousness' in Western Europe and the US today. 'Immigrant consciousness' is located in the routes of dispersion of decolonial and border thinking.'[23] He goes on: 'Points of origination and routes of dispersion are key concepts to trace geo-politics of knowing/sensing/believing as well as body-politics of knowing/sensing/understanding. When Frantz Fanon closes his exploration in Black Skin/White Masks (1952) with a prayer: Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions!' And a woman who questions—I take the liberty to add. In this sentence, says Mignolo, Frantz Fanon expressed the basic categories of border epistemology:

> The biographical sensing of the Black body in the Third World, anchoring a politics of knowledge that is both ingrained in the body and in local histories. That is, thinking geo- and body-politically. Now if the point of origination of border thinking/sensing and doing is the Third World, and its routes of dispersion travelled through migrants from the Third to the First World, then border thinking created the conditions to link border epistemology with immigrant consciousness and, consequently, delink from territorial and imperial epistemology grounded on theological (Renaissance) and egological (Enlightenment) politics of knowledge.[24]

The migration he mentions might mean more and complex forms of going back and forth between countries and continents, forced, out of free will, in pursue of work or studies. He describes the situation of the immigrant, and I believe that his proposal for a new understanding of a migrant position might also imply a proposal for how to transfer the idea of decolonizing art (institutions):

> Languages that were not apt for rational thinking (either theological or secular) were considered languages that revealed the inferiority of the human beings speaking them. What could a person that was not born speaking one of the privileged languages and that was not educated in privileged institutions do? Either he or she accepts his or her inferiority or makes an effort to demonstrate that he or she was a human being equal to those who placed him or her as second class. That is, two of the choices are to accept the humiliation of being inferior to those who decided that you are inferior or to assimilate. And to assimilate means that you accepted your inferiority and resigned to playing the game that is not yours, but that has been imposed upon you—or the third option is border thinking and border epistemology.
>
> How does it work? Suppose that you belong to the category of the anthropos—the anthropos stands for the concept of the "other" in most contemporary debates about alterity—the "other," however, doesn't exist ontologically. It is a discursive invention. Who invented "the other" if not the same in the process of constructing the same? Such an invention is the outcome of an enunciation. The enunciation doesn't name an existing entity, but invents it. The enunciation needs an enunciator (agent), an institution (not everyone can invent the anthropos), but to impose the anthropos as "the other" in the collective imaginary, it is necessary to be in a position of managing the discourse (verbal,

> visual, audial) by which you name and describe an entity (the anthropos or "the other") and succeed in making believe that it exists.[25]

So the solution would be to become aware of the discursive system, the agent, the institution, the power to manage discourse, to understand the constructedness of it. 'So once you realize that your inferiority is a fiction created to dominate you, and you do not want to either assimilate or accept in resignation the bad luck of having been born equal to all human beings, but having lost your equality shortly after being born, because of the place you were born, then you delink. Delinking means that you do not accept the options that are available to you.'[26]

Analogous to this, I think that art is a discourse—material, ideological, institutionalised, verbalised, disputable—and one does not alter this by ignoring it. 'There is nothing outside the text',[27] as Derrida once put it so overwhelmingly precisely. Some try to ignore the persistent what, why and for whom questions, but the only outcome of ignoring the discursive production of an artwork and of exhibitions is that one does not have access to a broader understanding of what one is doing as an artist or a curator or an author, a filmmaker or an art critic. It means to ignore the possibility of delinking.

Just to mention it briefly, there are nevertheless some means of resistance. 'So capital is in fact borderless; that's the problem. On the other hand capital has to keep borders alive in order for this kind of cross-border trade to happen. So therefore the idea of borderlessness has a performative contradiction within it which has to be kept alive',[28] to quote how Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has formulated this repeatedly performed and acted pressure.

A conclusion of my above-formulated assumptions would be that art critique is part of a constant reformulating, rereading and reinterpreting of an artwork; it changes the understanding and meaning, it is part of constituting an artwork, together with institutional settings.

I would totally agree with my younger colleagues that there can be something hidden in an artwork, something that hits you, that strikes and penetrates, that blows your mind, something that shakes your understanding of your own subjectivity. This moment of destabilisation, which is beyond the aesthetic, which is described so artfully by my younger colleagues, is the quality of being untamed, of disturbing institutions and conventions—with art, with writing. This is something beyond the register of the symbolic, to use Lacan's notion; it is the touch of the Real, but only if it again plays back into the symbolic register can it become political. Then it can be understood that pollution is due to structural power, as Nabil Ahmed argued, when it is possible to join forces with political agendas, when we form chains of equivalence with other societal groups.

So, for me, it is essential to come back again and again in a 'compulsion to repeat' (Wiederholungszwang) to discuss these issues within temporary and local groups and on international platforms, and to play back what is now: what is the political and the social, which interpellations does an artwork or an exhibition produce, which effects does it produce, what does criticality mean in the given moment? And to learn something from a place—whether from Warsaw, from Athens, or from Dhaka—means one has to learn about the way the money circulates, what this means for art and art production, which layers of culture exist, and what could be a critical type of cultural

production. It would mean being curious about what is happening, and how the local production of goods and commodities of all sorts are related to the international market.

In what way is cultural production understood in a context? Is art or cultural production just a commodity, or does it open up new ways of living or thinking, of being a subject or defining community? Which power structure does art production help to establish or de-establish, and which parts of society are uncovered, which transactions and flows of money, which power relations? Learning from Dhaka means discussing hegemonic takeovers in art and culture, it means discussing where Dhaka 'Swiss' Design comes from, as mentioned by Sharmini Pereira, and who earns the surplus. Culture is something that happens alongside infrastructures and monetary flows, as comment, as affirmation, or as opposition. These pathways of discussion and understanding did open up, especially in the critical writing summit, which was central to understanding the context and in questioning paradigms and protocols.

I would like to close with a quotation from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

What people call transculture is culture as it happens. Culture alive is its own counter-example. Transculturation is not something special and different. It is a moment in a taxonomy of the normality of what is called culture. To assign oneself the special task of cultural translation or plotting cultural translation has therefore to be put within a political context.[29]

This text was published in a shorter version in "Learning from Dhaka" in *Critical Writing Ensembles* (Katya Garcia-Anton with Antonio Cataldo, eds.), Mousse Publishing: Milan, 2016, pp.234–247.

Notes

1 I am grateful for the discussions I was able to have with Rohit Jain, Nkule Mabaso, Adaobi Udobi, Mike Sperlinger, Nabil Ahmed and Katya Garcia Anton for this text.

2 To add some more information about LGBT rights in Bangladesh as provided by Wikipedia, not many rights are instituted, but in Bangladesh—and this contradicts a strict ordering of binary sexuality in a Western sense, a third sex is officially acknowledged. So, as a preliminary conclusion, it is obvious that the dispositive of sexuality has different layers, which are not congruent with a Western binary ordering; quote from Wikipedia: "In Bangladesh same-sex sexual or romantic activities are not respected, with LGBT people facing discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, and unique legal and social challenges. Same-sex sexual activity, whether in public or private, is illegal and punishable with fines and up to life imprisonment. Consequently, Bangladesh does not recognize a marriage, civil union or domestic partnership between adults of the same sex.[...] In January 2014, Bangladesh's first LGBT magazine was published. The magazine's name is Roopbaan, a Bengali folk character who represents the power of love."[15] At the magazine's launch, British High Commissioner Robert Gibson and Barrister Sara Hossain were present to hear the speakers. The magazine is being printed in Bangla and is accepting submissions from volunteers. The editor said the main goal of the magazine is to promote love.
Beginning in 2014, every year at the beginning of the Bengali New Year on 14 April, a Pride event called Rainbow Rally was organised in Dhaka. After threats, the 2016 event had to be cancelled. On 25 April 2016, Xulhaz Mannan, one of the founders of Roopbaan and organiser of the Rainbow Rally, was killed in his apartment together with a

friend.[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Bangladesh, accessed 23 Sept. 2016.

3 Ananya Roy, "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism," International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 35.2, March 2011, pp. 223-38. I am grateful to Rohit Jain for having made me aware of this article.
4 Ibid.
5 See Tanja Trampe, Dorothee Richter, Eleonora Stassi, "Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics," *OnCurating.org,* No. 30, June 2016.
6 Johan Hartle, "Arbeit denken, zeigen, abschaffen, Fragen an die Manifesta 11 in Zurich," talk delivered at the Symposium, Work, Migration, Personal Geopolitics, Zurich University of the Arts, September 8, 2016.
7 See Afsana Khannom Asha. 2016. "Dhaka Art Summit 2016 ends today, in the independent Dhakalive." The Independent. 8 February 2016. Accessed 21 February 2016. http://www.theindependentbd.com/arcprint/details/33227/2016-02-08.
8 Jacques Lacan, T*he Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., Penguin, New York, 1994.
9 Andrea Fraser, "L'1 %, c'est moi," in *Texte zur Kunst* No. 83, "The Collectors," Sept. 2011, p. 119.
10 'Chains of equivalence' is a notion put forward by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau; it means to formulate solidarity for a specific cause. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, Verso, New York, 1985.
11 Shukla Sawant in an email to Dorothee Richter, February 2016.
12 See for example: Elke Krasny, Lara Perry, Dorothee Richter (eds.), "Curating in Feminist Thought," OnCurating.org, No. 29, May 2016.
13 Johan Hartle, "Arbeit denken, zeigen, abschaffen, Fragen an die Manifesta 11 in Zurich."
14 See Tanja Trampe, Dorothee Richter, Eleonora Stassi, "Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics," *OnCurating.org* No. 30, June 2016.
15 Exhibition, The Content of Form. The Collection represented by Helmut Draxler, Generali Foundation, Vienna; 17 May – 25 August 2013.
16 Daniel Baumann, introduction poster at Dhaka Art Summit, exhibition of Samdani Art Award, February 2016.
17 Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1972, pp. 109–64.
18 This is why the exhibition by Okwui Enwezor, The Short Century, had such a revolutionary impact; it proposes very different kinds of cultural production—it does not only expand the notion of cultural production, it also puts into question the difference between so-called high and low art, everyday objects and painting, for example. See *The Short Century. Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994*.
19 Sigmund Freud, "Ueber den Wunderblock, A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'" (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Volume XIX, ed. and trans. James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London, 1961.
20 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000.
21 Edward Said. 2003. "Blind Imperial Arrogance: Vile Stereotyping of Arabs by the US ensures years of turmoil." Los Angeles Times. July 20.
22 Rohit Jain brought this interesting text to my attention. Hamid Dabashi, "Fuck you Žižek!," in Can Non-Europeans Think, 2016, see https://www.zedbooks.net/blog/posts/fuck-you-zizek/. ZED is a platform for marginalized voices across the globe.

23 Walter Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience," eipcp.net, Sept. 2011, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/mignolo/en.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p.158.
28 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Borderless World," University of Arizona, 19 January 2012, accessed 11 March 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3LYRYR_-XA.
29 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "More Thoughts on Cultural Translation," eipcp.net, April 2008, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/spivak/en.

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Decolonisation and the Scopic Regime

Nkule Mabaso

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. .
Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, p. 36

Sparked around the issue of academic and financial exclusion of black students, and continued existence of colonial and apartheid memorial, statues and other representational symbols and signia at the University of Cape Town, the protest and eventual removal of the Rhodes statue was symbolic for the impending and inevitable fall of white supremacy and white privilege at the university, and by implication in the wider society in South Africa.

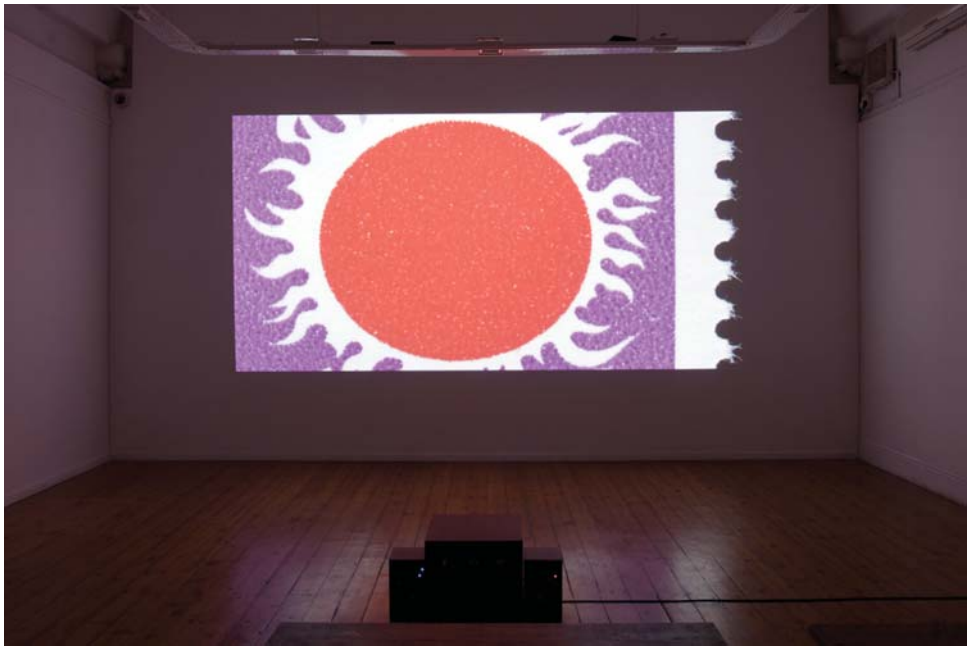
The debates and urgencies that encompassed and capitulated the height if this period have been organised under the umbrella term of "decolonisation" as a stand in term for addressing dissatisfaction with processes and systems that are under-transformed post-apartheid. This use of the term follows on the trend, noted with growing apprehension by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012: 2), of the "ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives"[1].

Given that the initial protest were against 'art and heritage objects' in the university art collection, beside the Cecil Rhodes statue, many of which were artworks produced by alumni and students of the Michaelis School of Art. There was an assumption and hopes that the 'moment' would forced an 'accelerated reflection' on not only the university, but the art school, its programs and orientation. And optimistically perhaps, the 'moment' would generate specific forms of scepticism and epistemic attitudes out of which critical questions could arise and the limitations of the schools biased epistemic interests and attendant blind spots could be deliberated.

Decolonisation and the Scopic Regime[2] was an attempt to critically engage an art school in the midst of an embattled university context, and garner some perspective, both in terms of what it means to heed the call to decolonise and how do we recognise it when its happening. The project functioned somewhere between the limits and potential of employing the term 'decolonisation' and actually engaging with decolonial methodologies and theory in the face of "institutional arrangements, where historically marginalised groups have been expected in ordered to be accepted, to assimilate into the discomforting institutional cultures"[3]. Serving as an investigation of the processes through which to address and scrutinize our cultural and academic institutions and how they continue to function, the multi-pronged project was a short atlas of the plurality of creative resistance tactics, direct action, counter-information, and biological resistance to the academy, its syllabii and firewalls.

Installatio view. Exhibition *Histories and Afrofictions*. 2017. Michaelis Galleries. Photography, Carlos Marzia Studio

Installation view. *Looking After Freedom*. 2017. Michaelis Galleries. Photography, Carlos Marzia Studio



Installatio view. Exhibition *Histories and Afrofictions*. 2017. Michaelis Galleries. Photography, Carlos Marzia Studio

Looking After Freedom

Curated with Dr. Rael Salley

Through the work of 10 South African artists the premise of the exhibition condensed into speculative proposition the supposition that there are recent works of Africana contemporary that art make *Looking After Freedom* possible. Ways of looking after freedom must be constructed rather than discovered and vivid imagination may be a start to disentangled, decolonized, and emancipated looking. Looking after freedom *is* on going and unfinished attempts to establish new histories, logics, and points of view. *"Looking after freedom"* as activity escapes the grasp of art criticism and art history—it means caring enough to invent more humanly workable visual, material, and conceptual resources. The artworks become a present delivered to a future.
"Looking after freedom" is also the title of Dr. Salley's upcoming book on contemporary South African Art.

Exhibition Histories and Afrofictions

Curated with Dr. Lucy Steeds

The and was a filmic exhibition that invited reflection on how different public contexts have shaped, or sought to shape, notions of 'African art' historically and around the world. They further give pause to consider what cultural practice in the present and future might learn from these histories, or how we might challenge them. Particular artistic, cultural, anthropological, documentary and museological practices are brought to the fore – with colonialism, decolonization, postcolonialism and globalization as a neo-colonising force.

3rd Space Symposium

Convened with Ass. Prof. Jay Pather

The symposium explored ideas around the role of the creative arts in provoking change, the imperative to decolonize the university, and the dialectic between the settled nature of academic curricula and the spontaneity of transformation. Thematically the symposium was concerned with artistic and creative research and how this comes to be represented in museums, art schools and art institutions around the world. Ideas pertaining to history and heritage, language, hybridity, creative economies and curricula are explored and the Symposium facilitates a critical platform for probing the potential of the university curriculum to respond to the fluidity of transformation.

These multiple attempts/ approaches and the varying modes, with multiple collaborators, all of whom I am very appreciative off, were an effort to surmount blind spots, and critically revise received theories and ideas and search for possibilities generated towards the ends of epistemic justice. What was very clear was in order for the alternative epistemic framework to be useful and to work varyingly; it has to operate differently than it was being interpreted in the university, in the concrete ways in which its knowledge is produced and who produces it. In that sense, decolonizing knowledge necessitates "shifting the geography of reason" vis a vis Lewis Gordon, which means opening reason beyond provincial horizons, as well as producing knowledge beyond strict disciplinary impositions.

Prof. Hlonipha Mokoena. 2017. 3rd Space symposuim

The resurging call in South Africa presently highlights that decolonization as a political, epistemological and economic liberatory project has remained an unfinished business, giving way to coloniality. Envoking Audre Lorde, in that the master tools will never dismantle the masters house and the idea that they could is what produces a seemingly ineascapable coloniality. The call to decolonise the university is a clarion cry for universities in an African context to do away with coloniality and be more relevant to their geographic situation instead of being apolitical, a-contextual, outward facing, and structurally racist monoliths at the edge of society. This of course is complicated in a neoliberal capitalist environment and with the current orientation of the univeristy, where in order to be internationally relevant the cost of participation is its adherence to the questions, concepts, and standards of a singular region of the world, a region that has been characterized by both imperialism/colonizing and ignoring other regions.

Since the decolonial discourse cannot be restricted to binary power relations, its scopic regime must not only expand, but decipher the epistemological and methodological grounds of coloniality, as well as its embedment within the modernity project and its mutating abilities. Facing these mutations and complexities of undertaking a 'decolonized production process', if it be currently possible at all, will progressively happen by introspection, and participation in the processes of "addressing" artists and traditions that previously may not have been "adequately" addressed, or whose production has been given skewed readings, through strategies that take ownership of systems of knowledge production through visual art practices, and systems of diffusion and commercialisation.

Notes

1 Eve Tuck, K. Wyne Yang. 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society Vol.1, No.1, 2012, pp.1-40
2 Documentation of the project will be avail on www.decolonisingartinstitutions.co.za
3 Badat, S. 2016. Deciphering the Meanings, and Explaining the South African Higher Education Student Protests of 2015–16.

Nkule Mabaso, b. 1988, graduated with a Fine Arts degree from the University of Cape Town (2011) and received a Masters in Curating at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK, Zürich (2014). She has worked as Assistant Editor of the journal OnCurating.org and founded the Newcastle Creative Network in Kwazulu Natal. As an artist, she has shown work in Denmark, Switzerland, South Africa, Germany, and Zimbabwe. She has curated shows and organised public talks in Switzerland, Malawi, Tanzania, and South Africa. Currently she works as a curator of the Michaelis Galleries at the University of Cape Town. She is a PHD Candidate at Rhodes University as part of the research team SARChI Chair ‹Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa›. Her research focuses on the Kwazulu Natal interior and calls for the development of context specific policy and that will provide the strategies for the mechanisation of the economic potential of culture in the context of small cities and large towns in South Africa. Specifically the research aims to produce recommendations for the creation of a well-structured municipal cultural policy for the small city of Newcastle that will be a resource that can generate new localised possibilities for the support of local cultural projects at municipal level.

Chasing Colonial Ghosts: Decolonizing Art Institutions in "Post-Apartheid" South Africa

Same Mdluli

In the beginning of 2015, the "RhodesMustFall" movement ignited a ripple effect that will continue to resonate in the unrest of institutions of higher learning across South Africa for some time. The "RhodesMustFall" movement began at the University of Cape Town when student activist Chumani Maxwele threw a bucket of excrement at the Cecil John Rhodes statue. This performative act spiralled into a movement that saw a generation of young South Africans challenging monuments and structures that are a representation of the past. While the protests were primarily in response to the lack of transformation within institutional structures that continue to ignore and neglect the "real" lived experiences of marginalised people—who in South Africa make up a majority of black African people—it is also important to point out that the "Rhodes-MustFall" movement was also a response to a continued monumental and symbolic presence of reminders of a painful past that South Africa has in many ways not yet addressed.

Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2017. Photographed by: Same Mdluli. Courtesy of the City of Johannesburg.

These reminders often find their way into art institutions such as museums and galleries, public spaces, all of which carry and house the institutional memory of monuments to colonialism and apartheid. It would therefore be inattentive not to begin by recalling some of Annie Coombes' reflections in *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* precisely because of the inferences it makes in pointing out that "one of the most startling periods of political and social transformation in recent history during which the South African debates on history and heritage, on 'truth' and lies, and on memory and make-believe demonstrated the health and vitality of a political culture of critique and countercritique."[1] The "RhodesMustFall" movement presented a similar moment, which in this article I posit has implicated an entire range of institutional factors—particularly in the arts and culture and heritage sectors.

At the core of the students' protests is how they exposed an uneasy discourse around the myths of the "rainbow nation" and the idea that "rainbow-ism" died with Nelson Mandela and the ideals his presidential administration had ushered into governance. Although the students' protests are in this instance setting the context for this argument, it also extends beyond the provocation posited by the students and rather positions entities such as galleries and museums as instrumental to outlining this narrative, and in so doing, interrogates whether the kinds of engagements with such colonial legacies can begin to imagine a decolonized history of South African art and art history.

Museums and galleries have indeed featured prominently in the shaping of South Africa's art historical narrative. In addition to furthering the colonial and apartheid project, museums and galleries also became sanctuaries from which nationalist ideals were cemented through the types of exhibitions and artists that were shown. With the political shift following the democratic elections of 1994 came the "post-apartheid" era, which demanded the visual art world in South Africa re-evaluate its values on how it would assimilate into the new political dispensation. This did not necessarily mean that museums and galleries where required to change their institutional structures to match that of the new political order, but rather that they were required to readjust their programming to be a more inclusive definition of art, culture, and heritage.

Overall, art, culture, and heritage occupy a precarious place in South Africa's socio-political conscious because they only ever become significant in historical moments such as the cultural boycott of the 1980s and increasingly become an obscured understanding associated with popular-ism and contradictions about self and artistic expression. One also needs to refer to how the idea of art, culture, and heritage was constituted in instances like the delivery of retired constitutional court judge Albie Sach's infamous address, *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines*. It becomes a significant document because Sach subsequently became instrumental in the establishment of the Constitutional Court art collection, which now sees hundreds of annual international visitors as a heritage site. There were many criticisms of the article when it was initially published, and rightfully so, because, in addition to being instructive and manifesto-like, it also reflected on an imagined role of art, culture, and heritage in a "liberated" South Africa.

The effects of Sach's address are more nuanced in terms of its influential role on a particular understanding of visual culture and artistic expression, one that posits the difficult questioning of the relationship between the culturally dominant and culturally dominated. Decolonizing art institutions in South Africa therefore requires a level of

reservation and furthermore an interrogation of who gets to determine the terms under which this debate takes place. An example of this debate can be seen in the idea of the township and "township art" that was coined as a label for particular kinds of works from the 1980s. Of all the stylistic modes of expression and schools of creative thought, from a historical perspective prior to 1994, the art centres in the townships are a common factor in the country's mental geography, preceding current global trends, signified through post-structural identity commonly referred to as Post-Modernism. However, this aspect of the cultural development of the moral geography of *Township* life in South Africa in context of an economic survival is rarely linked to the industrial development that sought to single out the country from the rest of the African continent for the sake of mineral wealth and fertile farmlands. This is essentially how informal human settlements were established. *Township* existence is therefore consistent with numerous new forms of social expressions borne of a common yet separate struggle, and was incited by the need to survive in a hostile terrain. Art produced in this context is thus more than a stylistic art genre typified by sentimental scenes glamorizing poverty, but rather is in terms of cultural existence the archetype of a South African phase and language more unique to this part of the continent and prevalent to the global development resultant of rapid industrialization of the world.

This is but one example, but in highlighting its meaning in the making of the social and cultural fabric of current cultural and artistic landscape it starts to generate a kind of scholarship and better understanding of art and culture within a geographical common expression that informs a more coherent national identity. One may think that in the "Post-Apartheid" era a more coherent narrative of South African art has emerged within South African institutions of learning. In many ways they have, and in many ways they have not, because the government is still dealing with problems around transitional issues—be they ideological, regarding funding, and/or procedural—but this absence points to a larger deficiency in terms of a lack of participation on the part of the arts community (which consists mainly of a Eurocentric perception towards art) in building a more inclusive and critical voice towards shaping matters of national concern.

There seems to be a disjuncture in institutions like the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), Wits Art Museum (WAM), and Hector Petersen Museum (HPM), for example, and the ways in which they form part of the social and cultural fabric of what formulates South Africa's artistic and cultural national identity. Such a disjuncture can also be traced back to the "rainbow-ism" connotation that sought to advocate for the arts and culture through the idea of "diversity" and its inclusivity of multiplicity and fluidity for creating a new institutional lens from which to allow a variety of voices and approaches to be explored. However, in her essay *On Being Included*, Sarah Ahmed speaks of "diversity as a form of public relations."[2] Ahmed's reading of the creation of "diversity" is that it is concocted as a political solution, one that can participate in making those who speak about racism the cause of the problem. The socio-political framework of South Africa is also such that terms like "diversity" and "multiculturalism" have the potential to exclude and alienate those whose realities do not match or fit neatly into the mould of such terminologies and their meanings. In the context of the curatorial space, they (terminologies and their meanings) legitimise their authority as the final arbiters through a set of conditions. Ultimately, this can be traced through a trajectory of history and the history of the museum, and gallery settings that encourage a particular kind of public engagement with the arts, culture, and heritage.

Museums and gallery spaces currently sit precariously as *markers* as well as *makers* of history. On the one hand, as *markers* of history they have the tendency to literally edit out certain narratives, making museums and galleries implicit in the processes of erasure. At the same time, this process of editing out has also allowed for the omissions and inaccuracies of representation to be highlighted. But on the other hand, museums and gallery spaces can be considered as *makers* of cultural history depending on the kind of public engagement they encourage. The process of decolonization as note by Khwezi Gule, is thus not just about a change of guard nor is it an optional extra. It is the imperative of our time and we have to admit that museums and other art institutions no longer have the authorial voice. By confronting this, it is hoped that such a discussion will offer a means to raise, probe, and address some of the incongruities and contradictions of celebrating such institutions that up until today continue to harbour colonial ghosts of the past.

Notes

1 Annie Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa,* Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2004.
2 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life,* Duke University Press, Durham, NC and London, 2012.

Same Mdluli is an artist, art historian, and writer living in Johannesburg. She holds a PhD in History of Art, MA in Arts and Culture Management from the University of the Witwatersrand and a B-Tech degree in Fine Arts from the University of Johannesburg. She has worked as an administrator at the Goodman Gallery and projects in both Cape Town and Johannesburg and taught art at various school levels. She has participated in various exhibitions, conferences locally and internationally and won some awards. She has also participated in a number of international residencies including being invited as a Junior Research Scholar at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles and a participant at the Diversitas Summer School in Oldenburg, Germany. This was followed by an invitation as guest researcher at the Institut National d'histoire de l'art (INHA) in Paris for the 'Culture Profession' programme under the department of Art and Globalisation. Her research interests are in contemporary African Art, Black Expressive Modes and Aesthetics as well as the conversations between Jazz and Visual Art. She currently serves as council member for the National Arts Council, is a member of the Black Mark: Critical Creative Thought collective and a sessional lecturer in the divisions of Fine Arts and History of Art at Wits University.

Train to Biennale

Michelle Wong

The presentation[1] opened with the first minute of the trailer of Train to Busan, a 2016 summer zombie movie that was a huge hit in Hong Kong[2].

"Train to Biennale," *Train to Busan* poster image appropriated by the author. Original source: http://empireonline.media/jpg/70/0/0/1280/960/aspectfit/0/0/0/0/0/0/c/articles/58074a7f0c6437272f612d0d/TraintoBusan_FINAL.jpg

When it comes to the monster or zombie apocalypse in Korea, I could, of course, have played a clip from the 2006 movie *The Host*, where a monster created by chemicals dumped into the Han River by the US military emerges to wreak havoc in Seoul. But the worst crime one can commit when speaking about Gwangju is to speak about Seoul. A lesser crime would be to speak about Busan. And so, I decided to go with a clip from the more recent, 2016 hit *Train to Busan* instead.

The scenes of KTX train stations in this clip alone trigger quite a bit of memory—of the numerous hours spent on trains, waiting at or running between stations, painfully reminded that although everything looks East Asian and familiar (including my own face), I cannot read, speak, or understand a single word of it. The three-hour, sometimes four, journey from Seoul to Gwangju is more or less the same length as my flight back to Hong Kong from Seoul, plus the train ride from the airport back home—so there were moments when I looked out of the train window and thought, what a funny thing it is, how transportation collapses and stretches time. Geographical distance is such a farce. What South Korea does well, whether you're a foreigner or local, is to put you in your right place.

Opening ceremony of 11th Gwangju Biennale, *The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)* August 201. Photo by Sabih Ahmed. Courtesy of Sabih Ahmed.

There is also something about the image and metaphor of the train, how it has an uncanny resonance with a large-scale art event like a biennale. A locomotive, plagued with zombies and monsters, it may be accelerating or slowing down. But nevertheless, it is destined for its doomed or transcendent final destination. The opening, the joy and exuberance of unveiling any exhibition; the crowds, the forums and symposiums and collateral events; the smell of ink on paper fresh off the press; words on the street that "oh, you must go see this work," "can you believe it, that work is still not installed," "that projector had broken down," "that light had stopped working but they fixed it." The biennale's entire runtime, the continuous bureaucratic maneuvers and reports. The cigarettes, the food, the booze.
"A Viciously Entertaining Ride" indeed.

Screen capture of *Train to Busan* trailer on YouTube. Original source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d4DACwz49o

Zombies and Monsters

At one point or another during the making of a biennale, everyone becomes zombies. Half alive, half dead, half asleep, and definitely hungry. The desire for one thing or another keeps us going. Or, the desires of the city hosting the biennale keep you awake day and night, toiling, making, destroying, emailing, fundraising, editing. The biennale itself and its supporting structures seemed to have become a monster. Supremely complex to navigate and communicate, often lost in multiple layers of translation, be it structural or visual or linguistic, and sometimes the space literally has pillars in it. This climate coaxes the monsters in us to come out for a stroll. Indeed, it is hard to tell whether we are broiling in the heat of disaster or basking in the light of paradise—we shiver with fear, we boil with anger, we quiver with excitement.

Gwangju at dusk, May 2016. Photo by the author. Courtesy of the author.

The city stays awake for the event that demands/commands the national and international spotlight once every two years, too. Over the course of the year, as we continuously traveled to Gwangju with artists more or less every month to prepare for the Biennale, we adopted a number of bars and restaurants. We started negotiating with the owners to ask if they would stay open till late for us, and they did. We also adopted some office spaces as our own, in particular, a nook inside the Asia Cultural Centre, the federal government-funded cultural centre that is notoriously unwelcome in Gwangju, a gargantuan site and fixture of competition in both an actual and symbolic sense. We also adopted exhibition spaces in the citizen-run 518 Archives, where the primary documents and oral histories of the 1980 May 18 student uprising—the uprising that inspired the creation of Gwangju Biennale in 1995 as a living memorial of the event—are stored. One must not assume that desires to relate to one another and work together cannot be barred by institutional constraints. The desire to be together is a very powerful tool; like a philosopher's stone, it can sometimes turn dust into gold.

Drivers and Passengers

A funny thing with trains is that some of them still use drivers, even though they are on tracks. The first thing that comes to mind is the curator as driver. She or he comes up with a vision for the biennale, and brings it into fruition against all odds. During the course of this ride, groups (if not armies) of crew members and mechanics in the metaphorical and actual sense are formed and deployed, and the train that is the biennale huffs and puffs along. For those sitting in the so-called drivers' seats, the biennale is often a ride with high stakes. It can be an entry point into a larger circulation and higher visibility both locally and internationally, a platform for testing otherwise physically and/or financially impossible ideas. To curate a biennale is to have an opportunity to make a statement, to direct the art world's gaze towards a certain direction, to create new possibilities.

The metaphor of curator as driver in this sense is not difficult to imagine. What about that of curator as passenger? One way to see it would be that curators are here for the ride—to fame, to access to large budgets, to a quick download of deep and vast networks. But the thing with trains on tracks is that they are headed in a certain direction no matter what. The destination cannot be changed (unless it goes off the tracks). There comes another part of a biennale-making experience where the event takes over in full speed. The machine is well oiled and fully fueled, and it just speeds to its end. At this point, you step outside of yourself and become a passenger to the event, observing from a mental distance in spite of all that is zooming past you.

My most distinct memory of this passenger experience was not at the opening of the biennale, but rather, at a reading group that was part of the monthly gathering leading up to the biennale. We were reading an essay by Julie Ault, titled "Active Recollection: Archiving Group Material." It was May 20, 2016, and so the city of Gwangju was painfully aware of the recently passed anniversary of the 518 uprising. The essay was translated into Korean from English, so each participant in the reading group chose to read the text out loud in the language with which they were most comfortable. And so for over two hours we were enveloped in this reading and discussion on expansive notions of histories and archives that trespassed two languages. At that point, no single person was driving, because when a city's silent awareness of its historicity, presents, and futures takes the driver seat, you sit back, and go for a ride.

Installation of 11th Edition Gwangju Biennale in progress, Metahaven's *Crying Mother* being mounted on the Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Hall, August 2016. Photo by the author. Courtesy of the author.

I sometimes wonder, why then do we need drivers at all, when the tracks have already been laid, and the arrival of the event is a mere inevitable fact. And then I thought, maybe not all trains are fully automated. And maybe, as much the role of curators in biennales is to steer it along the tracks, it is also to conjure up the climates that surround it. If the concept of a biennale sparks/starts the engine, the process through which a biennale comes into being, the shared experiences in forms of conversations, exchanges, and small gestures of politics and kindness, are the matter that form such climates. The sense of wonder, the celebration of curiosity, and for myself personally, the reminder of what it is to be human, for better or worse, is what art does at its best, and what a biennale stages at its best.

If the tracks of biennales are veins of desires—of individuals, institutions, even cities—I wonder, what bloods flow through them?

Notes

1 This text was written as a presentation for "The Singapore Biennale 2016 Symposium: Why Biennale At All?" that took place on January 21-22, 2017, at the Gallery Theatre, National Museum of Singapore. The symposium was convened by Dr Hoe Su Fern, Assistant Professor of Arts and Culture Management from the Singapore Management University School of Social Sciences, in partnership with the Singapore Art Museum. This text was presented as part of the session "Behind the Scenes: The Making of Biennales" on January 21, 2017. I participated in this panel as an Assistant Curator of the 11th edition of Gwangju Biennale, 2016 (GB11). Titled The Eight Climate (What Does Art Do?), GB11 was artistically directed by Maria Lind, with Curator Binna Choi, and Assistant Curators Margarida Mendes, Azar Mahmoudian, and myself. GB11 included not only exhibition and publication components, but also a ten-month-long program comprised of reading groups held in Gwangju, as well as lectures at universities and artist-led school initiatives in Gwangju and Seoul. Other speakers on the panel included Alia Swastika, Director, Art Jogja Biennale, Jitish Kallat, artist, curator, and Artistic Director, Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2014, and Monica Narula, Raqs Media Collective, Chief Curators of 11th Shanghai Biennale 2016. I would like to thank the organisers of the Singapore Biennale 2016 Symposium for the initial invitation, which prompted the writing of this text. I am also grateful to them for agreeing to publish this piece as we prepare for an elaborated version of this text that will be part of the Symposium's publication.

2 See video link at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyWuHv2-Abk.

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Decolonizing Art Institutes from a Labor Point of View

Binna Choi & Yolande van der Heide

A Dutch landlady corrects her Indonesian domestic worker's flower-arranging and scolds her for coming back late from her errand. This colonial scene is recounted in a compilation of film clips ironically entitled *Van de Kolonie Niets dan Goeds: Nederlands-Indie in Beeld, 1912-1942* (or in English *Nothing but Goodness in the Colony: The Dutch Indies in Pictures, 1912-1942*), and just some years ago has been made available to us by the ethnographic Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Yet, doesn't this colonial scene also ring true for contemporary art institutions, which in fact present post-colonial critical works? These same and often Western institutions determine the conditions in which colonial critical works are shown, how objects are shown, in which taste or style they are presented, and all in conversation with the structures of power that allow for the house, the gallery and so forth to exist in the first place.

"Maid Mina goes grocery: Sketch from the Dutch colonial life" from a compilation of film clips "Van de kolonie niets dan goeds : Nederlands-Indie in Beeld, 1912-1942" published by Het Tropenmuseum and Film Museum, Amsterdam in 2003.

To continue to follow the film: soon after the flower-arranging, a grocery-shopping scene follows. This act also stands in as a metaphor for an art institution, especially fulfilling the contentious funder-fundee relation, which predominantly influences

the labor relation. The white Dutch landlady plays the role of the funder. A clip shows her measuring time and her irritation over the delayed errand. Later on in the film, a scene reveals the domestic worker in fact reproducing the very same modes of oppression on her co-worker by making him carry the groceries by himself in spite of their overbearing load, a prejudicial act seeped in classism. While the action in this short film—whether it's fiction or a documentary is not so clear—goes on rather humorously accompanied by a variation of a popular lullaby in the Dutch Indies, it disturbingly reminds us that colonialism infects all of our minds after all.
Hence, we wonder, isn't there a way to discontinue this mode of colonial activity by cultivating new labor relations and culture, and concurrently engaging with the politics around identity and cultural heritage? The decolonizing practice has been focusing on the latter, but the latter hits the chord in our view, especially at a time when labor power is dispersed, where union efforts and ethics don't meet, where artists from (former) colonies are becoming superstars with premium works in the art markets (a superficial mode of representation).

Camp de Thiaroye (1987), film stills - directed by Ousmane Sembene

*

A different cinematic moment also astutely captures the riddled nature of colonialism. Ousmane Sembene's *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) is based on the lesser-known Thiaroye massacre, when French commanding officers turned their guns on their own soldiers, and an estimated 300 black African soldiers were killed on November 30, 1944. The soldiers were former prisoners of war, and freed from Nazi German camps and thereafter brought to a holding facility in Thiaroye, which lies on the outskirts of Dakar. In a call for justice, the soldiers initially sought equal pay with their white colleagues, but this was eventually dishonored and met with brutality as

it was regarded as mutiny. In Sembene's film rendition that lasts for two and half hours, we slowly follow the daily routine of soldiers in the camp along with a young Senegalese intellectual named Diatta. He speaks both French and English perfectly and serves as a sergeant, even though the French nation raided his village and killed much of his family years earlier. Diatta seems to embody all the dilemmas of African nations after colonial rule and offers us a complex perspective for examining how soldiers coped with the unjust treatment of the French power. They negotiated equal pay and went on to celebrate that seeming success of the negotiation, but ultimately got fooled by it.

What is significant for us here is that the film puts the issue of labor and wages at the center of its narrative in the relation between the colonizer and the colonized. Furthermore, it complicates this relation by revealing an internal inability to communicate and organize amongst the colonized. A mute soldier who is ironically named Pays, meaning "country" in French, was the only one who sensed something awry in the negotiation and the one who saw the French troops approaching the camp where the soldier lay resting after celebrating. No one tried to understand Pays' desperate murmuring as he tried to inform his colleagues and organize an escape from their downfall. In the original story, the soldiers were in fact from all parts of the French West African empire—from Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Chad, Benin, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, and Togo—and with no African language in common, they communicated in Pidgin French but didn't manage to find common ground and tackle the fundamental power relation at stake; thus, they were never quite able to commonly foresee their ultimate downfall. Here, we are confronted with an agonistic pairing between the necessity of demanding decent pay within the existing hegemonic structure and the necessity for counter-hegemonic structures and practices beyond capitalism.

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Costa Rica assembly, 2017

These cinematic examples of our diverse colonial heritage rang especially true to us as we exchanged and discussed them in Costa Rica earlier this year when we were taking part in the annual Arts Collaboratory (AC) assembly, a network of trans-local arts organizations predominantly located in the so-called "Global South" and funded by the Dutch fund DOEN. This network of similarly minded arts initiatives, including us at Casco, focuses on collective governance, social change, and sustainability practices in their respective contexts with the aim of being effective in and beyond the field of art. We were received by San Jose-located TEOR/éTica for ten days

where, alongside our regular program, we were shown around by our hosts, also to give more complex flesh to what is typically shown of Costa Rica as the land of coffee and Chiquita bananas. At the root of this agricultural stereotype, in fact, lies the exploitation of labor by people of color, dating back to the first arrival of Afro-Costa Ricans who were brought by the Spanish conquistadors as part of the slave trade in the 19th century.

With these particular histories of colonial heritage in mind, there are two practices in our organization that engaged with different modalities of labor relations in the context of art. One is the abovementioned Arts Collaboratory network, where the possibility of collectivizing labor and self-governance in a trans-local dimension is sought. Another deals with the common trap of invisibilizing reproductive labor. That is the "project" Site for Unlearning (Art Organization), which the Casco team has been developing with artist Annette Krauss, in our long-term engaging of the commons especially from a feminist perspective.

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Casco Team & Annette Krauss, unlearning meeting, as part of Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation), archive photo, Casco, Utrecht 2015

Casco Team & Annette Krauss, Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation), installation view (unlearning exercises I), at We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning, 2016, at Casco, Utrecht. Photo: Niels Moolenaar

Site for Unlearning (Art Organization) began in 2014 along with our move to a new building and the inaugural exhibition *New Habits*. As part of this relocation, the shifting team at Casco, as prompted by artist Annette Krauss, have taken on the challenge of unlearning institutional habits embedded in the many facets of our work. The process of unlearning itself is directed towards embodied forms of knowledge

and the (un)conscious operation and ways of thinking and doing, while integrating processes of de-instituting. Unlearning denotes, here, an active critical investigation of normative structures and practices in order to become aware and get rid of taken-for-granted "truths" of theory and practice.

The unlearning process had been proceeding with ongoing bi- or tri-weekly team meetings with Annette. In the beginning, we focused on identifying what we want to unlearn in common. The outcome was the "busyness" of art's conditioned labor: the habitual, psycho-somatic state of busyness—whereby "accelerationism" and the denial of singular and differential rhythms are identified and necessitated by the neoliberal condition. Our continued conversation also nudged us into determining how to distinguish the busyness from commitment, especially through mis-hearing busyness as business, and our reflection on that coincidence. We worked with the distinction between business with an "i" and busyness with a "y." While we understand *business* to be a word that names the operations of the economic framework in which we live, we saw *busyness* as the bodily-emotional condition produced by the constant need to perform within the rhythm of *business.* In short, we joke that we are unlearning the business of busyness.

This entire collective process of engagement within the team of those subjected to wage labor in an art institution could be considered as part of the unlearning. However, we also have developed about fourteen exercises over two years, some that we continue and are going to continue, others as one-time trials. One of the most structural exercises, which in fact became our new institutional habit, is a collective cleaning of our office every Monday. How did this come about? Out of frustration, two of our colleagues sent out an e-mail to the rest of the team addressing how busy everyone was and how no one except them kept cleaning our office. The e-mail was signed off with a poignant and ironic remark, "from your lovely housewives." This instance became a subject at one of the subsequent unlearning meetings, and an idea was put forward that we treat it as a regular collective unlearning exercise—to all clean together at the same time every Monday. The list of exercises includes reconsidering our wage system with the notion of well-being and beyond the monetary, or making a time diary in order to articulate and give value to the time of reproductive labor.

Site for Unlearning (Art Organization) has been interfering with our organization and especially in terms of the internal relations, while we have been grappling with the notion of the commons in our program, asking what an art for the commons might look like and ultimately questioning, *How can art and art institutions contribute to the commons?* The question, along with the unlearning process, has led us to take on the challenge of applying the commons to the back side of the institute, to embody its ethical principles in all facets of our internal work matters while further investigating and engaging with the commons in our public programming as well. Eventually, we took on the commons as part of our name, adopting our new institutional name of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons. The name change further binds us to continue to practice pre-figuratively. Oftentimes, an art institution is identified with and through the art it shows, because the latter is considered to be the primary focus of the former, and/or the latter represents the former. As common as it is, however, we have also witnessed that an art institution does not operate according to its art. For instance, showing art of capitalist critique does not mean that an art institution operates in non-capitalistic ways; showing art of anti-racism does not ensure that art organizations consist of practitioners from diverse backgrounds. This contradiction is

near impossible to avoid, but it's our conviction that we need to work on lessening it, if we want to prove the power of art more effectively and to prevent "art washing." For this reason, we continue the "art" of unlearning, and art as commoning, however slow its process may be.

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The Arts Collaboratory network extends this effort in a broader collective dimension in search of modes of solidarity practice. Since 2013, Arts Collaboratory has been undergoing an experimental process of transformation from an unnatural network brought together by funders to an interdependent and trans-local cooperative ecosystem operating in solidarity. Such experimentation is slowly garnered through mutual trust and shared resources and responsibilities in order to achieve a commonwealth and to become practically and actively engaged in "paradigms shifts" concerning the way the success of the member organizations was judged in the funder-fundee relation.

This relation matters especially given that most of the member organizations work under colonial heritage and its persistence. Most of the organizations get their funding resources from the West, and in particular from the Netherlands, which consciously and unconsciously embodies the legacy of the exploitative, judgmental, controlling mechanism rooted in the colonizer (as we saw in the films). And so the colonizer-colonized relation continues, keeping the organization's production/presentation machinery running without having a space for a fundamental questioning or for "radically imagining" an alternative reality of relations through which to produce and present.

To transform thus is to collectively reimagine a future vision as articulated, for example, in AC's co-written *future plan*, complete with a set of ethical principles for guidance in the process of self-governance. The *future plan* was in turn used to convince our primary funders to relinquish control, in practical terms, of the system of judgment and selection, progress and evaluation reports, allowing instead for AC to report to one another without dressing it up, and to also be transparent when it comes to struggles and failures, and all in the spirit of self-governance. The annual assembly, where rotating representatives from each organization come together to work and live with one another for ten days, is the backbone of this way of operating. Our joined major task in the coming years lies in the cultivating, managing, and sharing of these common material and immaterial resources and collective financial pot. In other words, Arts Collaboratory is about to further activate the process of commoning the network/ecosystem.

Binna Choi & Yolande van der Heide (Casco)
Binna Choi is Director at Casco.
Yolande van der Heide is Head of Publishing at Casco.

Casco is a public contemporary art institution in Utrecht, the Netherlands, dedicated to artistic research and experiments, practicing toward the commons. The artistic practices we focus on are cross-disciplinary, open to collaboration and process-driven. Our work traverses design, theory, and the wider social sphere. Since May 2017, Casco has been transitioning to study and practice the commons on the back side of the organization as well as in its public programs, as marked by its new in-the-making Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons.

On Cultural Translation
Sophie J Williamson

Translation is a skilful yet subjective art. Language is embedded in the culture from which it is formed and which continues to mould it; moving between languages requires a fundamental understanding of the subtleties of each society. Each language has its own system, customs and etymology, and the construction of meaning in one doesn't seamlessly interchange with that of another. As populism swings to the right, popular discourse pivots not on universal political agendas but on identifying who 'we' are: who is included and where the line of the other is drawn. The necessity to understand cultural perspectives other than our own is an increasingly urgent task.

In the 1958 novel *Deep Rivers*, the mystically whirring rhythm of the *zumbayllu*, or spinning top, is imbued with the ancient spirits of the Andean indigenous people. Rocks echo centuries of knowledge, rushing water sings of far-off places, and time dances to a different beat. The book's author, José María Arguedas (1911–1969), though born into a wealthy Peruvian mestizo family, learned about the world through the eyes of the Quechan servants who raised him. For him, the hegemony of the Spanish language—in which he was obliged to write—was incapable of capturing the union of body, mind, nature and spiritual ancestry so embedded in his Quechan perspective. Travelling overland from Iquitos to Lima, the terrain transforms from rich steamy jungle with snaking rivers into the sharp snowy peaks and deep gorges of the Andes, merging finally into the barren deserts that edge the vast South Pacific Ocean. Arguedas was acutely aware of the contradictions, displacements, cultural clashes and turmoil borne in this divided and colonised landscape. In his desire to authentically and intimately depict the life of the Andean people, and overcome the simplistic portrayals and othering of previous *indigenismo* literature, Arguedas blended language to construct a 'quechuization' of Spanish, infused with Andean expression and sensibility, and accentuated with Quechua syntax and vocabulary. Dense symbolism and peculiarities nameless or unfamiliar to the colonial reader, the plurality of nuanced experiences captures the convergence and dispersion of the cultures as he flexes and bends the language. In places, where language's malleability reaches its limit, Quechua remains in its mother tongue; the void left by the unattainable translation becomes a poignant message left on the page. Revealed in this lyrical duel is not only the mestizos's struggle to navigate the disparity between the two parts of their identity, but the near impossibility of translating this for a non-mestizo reader.

Though writing in the early 20th century, the uneasy clashes in *Deep Rivers* and Argueadas's merging of linguistic approaches to redress the disparate cultural perspectives have particular relevance for our current global identity crisis. As national consciousnesses become increasingly polarized, the process of defining the self seems constantly on the back foot. Those who are identified as friend or foe alters on a daily basis; as I write, President Donald Trump, who leads a vast nation built on a history of immigration, constantly redefines the enemy in his updated list of travel-banned countries, while Marine Le Pen French presidential candidate promotes her slogan '*Au nom du peuple*' (in the name of the people) and aligns her election campaign with Vladimir Putin. Even those creating the toughest borders

seem perplexed as to where their boundaries and affiliations lie. While the arts discourse is broadly liberal, national boundaries nevertheless frame much of our thinking. Exhibition listings, press releases and wall texts commonly announce: British artist *so-and-so*, Toronto-based *such-and-such*, or Nigerian artist, living between Helsinki and Berlin, *someone-else*. Philippe Lejeune, a specialist in the study of biography, describes a book's paratext as 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text'. Just as a book's cover image, title, dedication and preface direct the reader's treatment of a publication, these pithy declarations of the artists we work with invite a process of inscription, erasure and recoding informed by cultural presumption before we have even begun. Surely we know that an artist's biography cannot be so easily denoted or their practice so succinctly summarised?

The proliferation of biennials in the 1990s led to an anxiety in the 2000s over the biennalisation of art production, which in turn led to a backlash that caused a rush to the local with an explosion of residency programmes once again parachuting artists in for surface-level dialogue. While these initiatives intend to provide a space to demarcate and disseminate difference, the outcome is more often one that flattens into superficial sameness. Under a neoliberal agenda, art is often tasked with initiating and pollinating 'cross-cultural understanding' with the ultimate goal of creating a cohesive, multicultural society. But with the rush to understand one another, do we run the risk of razing nuanced individual narratives? As Hannah Arendt points out in her essay 'We Refugees', the experience of displacement is not only the loss of home and the comfort of everyday life, or being divided from one's family and social network, but the loss of one's language without which 'the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings' is also lost. As we face an increasingly migratory global society, including displacement on an unprecedented scale, the urgent cultural concern can no longer only focus of connecting geographic nodes in an attempt to destabilise what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have termed globalisation's 'Empire'. Instead we must establish a cultural ecosystem that recognises the geopolitical—and subsequently cultural—clashes and miscommunications implicating our immediate and everyday social climate. If Arguedas' Peru can be seen as a microcosm for the cultural disparities that exist worldwide, perhaps a similar cultural Esperanto is required in order to articulate its unpronounceable nuances.

In the UK, this hybridity has long been discussed in the public sphere by contemporary artists: Rasheed Araeen's criticism of the exotic other, ethnic stereotyping and the hegemonic discourse of the art world; Mona Hatoum's sculptures and installations exposing culture's conflicts and contradictions, displacement, power and politics; John Akomfrah's epic and enigmatic video essays on identity, migration, history and ecology; Yinka Shonibare's trademark brightly coloured Dutch-wax, fabric-clad figures exploring the post-colonial condition; and Lubaina Himid's paintings and installations considering colliding issues of labour, migration, race, gender and class; to name but a few. On an international stage, the reality of 'sovereign culture' has been increasingly questioned, a case in point being the Venice Biennale's criteria for 'national pavilions' becoming ever more fluid: the introduction of the pavilion of the Republic of the Seychelles, which is the embodiment of the post-colonial condition, since it has no recorded indigenous population; the Roma pavilion, which has flourishing cultural heritage yet comprises a community that is ethnically heterogeneous and geographically dispersed; and artists representing countries other than those of which they are citizens (for example, Yael Bartana

represented Poland in 2011, Liam Gillick represented Germany in 2009, and Chinese artists were dominant at the 2013 Kenyan Pavilion, supposedly reflecting the country's influx of Chinese workers). Furthermore, this year will see an addition to the Biennale's national pavilions: the Diaspora Pavilion. Curated by David A Bailey and Jessica Taylor, the exhibition will include work by Larry Achiampong, Barby Asante, Ellen Gallagher, Isaac Julien, Paul Maheke, Erika Tan, Abbas Zahedi and other artists whose practices 'expand, complicate and destabilise' our understanding of diaspora as a contemporary and lived experience.

In his essay 'Patriotism and its Futures', social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues that the formula of hyphenation (his examples being, Italian-Americans, Asian-Americans and African-Americans) has reached saturation, where the 'right-hand side of the hyphen can barely contain the unruliness of the left-hand side'. Despite the legitimacy of nation-states coming increasingly under fire, we nevertheless see diasporic communities remaining loyal to their origin, a 'delocalised transnationism'. Appadurai, elucidating further, poses the impossibility of the existing conception of—in his case—Americanness containing this spectrum of transnations. As cultural identity becomes increasingly protean, the plausibility of nation-state rhetoric seems ever more redundant. The intricacies of ancient and modern Jewish diaspora, generations of colonisation and the transportation of slaves is now superimposed by contemporary movements of economic migration, forced political exile, widespread refugee crises and environmental displacement. Among the artistic community, it is commonplace to have parents of two different nationalities, to have been born and raised in a third country, and perhaps now to live in a fourth. Subsequently, art production equally tangles these reference points: Chinese-British Dutch artist Jennifer Tee's imaginary meetings between Hilma af Klint, Wassily Kandinsky and Tao Magic; Korean-Canadian London-based Zadie Xa's personalised semiotics drawing from Talchum and hip-hop alike; or the profound cultural symbolism found in the work of Vietnamese-born Danish—but Berlin-based—Danh Vō, for example in his use of a Bomann refrigerator received from the Immigrant Relief Programme. This complex geopolitical landscape of contemporary international experience is what Sarat Maharaj has termed the 'scene of translations', and it has long been a battleground of negotiation for artists whose practices fall outside of hegemonic spheres. While these practices draw from a complex worldwide network of interrelations, the outcomes are still nevertheless translated through a process of Eurocentric cultural transfer inscribed with Western terminology. Indian author Amitav Ghosh tells the anecdote that, 'To make ourselves understood, we had both resorted […] to the very terms that world leaders and statesmen use', a language that according to Ghosh is based on the supremacy of the West. When thinking about this in an art context, there is the risk that the curator's positioning of an artwork (in the role of the cultural translator) will overshadow the artist's voice. For those artists who wish their work to be seen independent of their cultural context, this can be a cause of frustration: for example, at 91 years old artist Geta Brătescu still struggles to escape contextualisation in the political shadow of Ceausescu's totalitarian regime, or to quote from a title of one of Glenn Ligon's works: 'I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background'. How then can we position these works in order to circumnavigate the hegemony of Western cultural language and enable what Arendt described as 'unaffected expression'? James Joyce's colossal 100-letter invented words to represent experiences indescribable through our language perhaps offer a solution—if an impractical one. A mash-up of 'thunder' in numerous languages opens *Finnegan's Wake*, a description of transcendent magnitude: Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovar-rhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk.

Pratchaya Phinthong, whose work has consistently traced the lines of geopolitical and economic undercurrents, attempted to circumnavigate this filtration of the self and other by bringing audience and subject into direct dialogue in his 2013 exhibition *Broken Hill* at the Chisenhale (Profile *AM*369). The Natural History Museum in London holds in its collection the *homo rhodesiensis* skull; hailed as the ancestor of all *homo sapiens*, it has been instrumental in understanding human evolution. This groundbreaking artefact, discovered in 1921 in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), was stolen by the British Empire, under colonial entitlement. Zambia's campaign to return the priceless object has to date been in vain, and instead the Lusaka National Museum displays a facsimile copy. Drawn to this story, Phinthong borrowed this replica to present in the gallery space, accompanied by one of the Zambian Museum's guides, Kamfwa Chishala, to narrate the complex geopolitical history of the skull to visitors, as he does daily to Lusaka locals and tourists. Empowering the work to perform dialogue, and presented through Chishala's personal subjectivity, Phinthong brings individual agency to the fore. Each visitor's reading of the work was inescapably different, as each brought to the one-on-one conversation with Chishala their distinct circumstances, outlook and experiences. Phinthong's approach to art-making is one that pivots on exchange and directly confronts polarisation; relinquishing authorship, his work is performed through the human narrative which constitutes its meaning. Whether presenting stacks of valueless Zimbabwe dollars, amassed debris equivalent to the weight of wild berries collected daily by exploited seasonal Thai workers in Sweden, or a replica prehistoric skull, he does not create objects but rather produces a dialectic flux of ethics, beliefs and values bridging seemingly irreconcilable individual circumstances.

If, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts, translation is the most intimate act of reading, surely this privilege of intimacy should be permitted to the reader, or in the case of visual art, the viewer. But if the translation of visual art beyond hegemonic cultural language necessitates nuanced individual mediation, how can this be feasibly achieved without demanding the personalised experience of Broken Hill? In Marcel Duchamp's essay 'Le processus créatif', he proposed that there are two coexisting elements in dialogue with one another in every creative act: the unexpressed but intended, and the unintentionally expressed. In 1934, he published the *Green Box*, 94 loose notes relating to the development of his magnum opus *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23. Disparate attempts to theorise sections of the work have drawn from alchemy and numerology through to Freudian psychoanalysis, Zen, Hinduism and the Cabbala, and yet the work remains, as Duchamp may have said, 'all things to all men'. The loose leaves posed a translatorary conundrum, and it wasn't until the collaboration between George Heard Hamilton, an art history professor at Yale, and artist Richard Hamilton, that a meaningful interpretation emerged. While George Heard Hamilton translated between languages, Richard Hamilton took on a role as 'monolingual translator'; ineptitude in French, rather than being a disadvantage, allowed him to capture the underlying concept. Creating a visual transliteration of Duchamp's deletions, insertions, highlights and annotations, Richard Hamilton formed a graphic 'isomorph' using a language of symbols, varying fonts and typographic layout to capture the spontaneity of thought processes at work in the original. True to Duchamp's thesis of the coexisting forces in the creative act, Richard Hamilton's reworking of the *Green Box* allows for the original's ambiguity, uncertainty and continual reconsideration. Duchamp praised it as a 'crystalline transubstantiation'. Richard Hamilton's success was in the translation of the essence of the work into something new, instigating fresh perspectives about it. While translation aims to directly convert and retain the same meaning, transubstantiation allows for interpretation based on a dialogue with the original.

Translation historian and theorist Lawrence Venuti rejects the idea of the author's singular genius and instead proposes translation 'as a work in its own right' and the need for readers to have 'a more practical sense of what a translator does'. In his seminal 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility*, he proposes the increased visibility of the process of translation, allowing readers to register and confront the works' foreignness rather than have it concealed from them. In the field of translation studies, the pejorative term *translatese* refers to the awkwardness of unidiomatic translation, such as clunky language or over literal conversion of idioms or syntax: exposing the translator's capacity to authentically translate the meaning of the original. Having exhaustively investigated his own biography and identity through pseudo-documentary, scriptwriting and anthropology, Simon Fujiwara's recent work involves a move away from his previous preoccupation with indeterminate truths, instead employing a type of aesthetic translatese to instigate a productive disjuncture. *Lactose Intolerance*, 2015, is a series of seven large oil paintings commissioned by Fujiwara from Mansudae Art Studio, the state-run art and propaganda manufacturer in North Korea. All depict the same glass of milk, each painted by anonymous artists in a different character according to Fujiwara's selection from the factory's style options, from nostalgic through to hyperrealist and early Pop. Closed off from the outside world, the circumstances in which the paintings were made is as unfamiliar to the Western art-going public as a glass of fresh milk is to the unnamed artists who painted them (there is no dairy production in North Korea). The works take on a superficial mimicry, a fictitious familiarity of both the art history and the subject matter they imitate. Drawing attention to the work's divergent audiences—in turn the products of global economic and political forces—by deliberately withholding the fluency of translation, Fujiwara's visual translatese registers the geopolitical chasm of cultural interpretation.

This is not to endorse a perspective of cultural opacity: the dangerous doctrine of an absolute 'epistemic barrier' between self and other underpinned the institutionalised ethnic and cultural separation of Apartheid. However, translation implies an understanding about understanding; what it means to know a language—and what it means not to know it. As poet and translator Alastair Reid writes: *lo que se pierde* what gets lost / is not what gets lost in translation but more / what gets lost in language itself *lo que se pierde*. Concerned with conflict—both in profoundly sensitive cases, such as the Rwandan genocide, and within everyday contexts—Christian Nyampeta's long-term artistic-philosophical inquiry 'How to Live Together' (derived from Roland Barthes' 1977 lecture series of the same name) seeks to offer alternative forms of exchange. Informed by ancient Western asceticism and contemporary Sub-Saharan African philosophy, his current research explores the impulse to write. Bringing together refugee groups and places of sanctuary, a collaboratively written script—based on a fictional narrative about a novelist working in a time when all words are copyrighted—will explore the boundaries of language in their diasporic cultures and the possibilities of articulation beyond formal linguistics. If we can admit defeat in transparent translation, is there then instead something to be gained from recognising and embracing a lack of understanding? Can we transcend languages, whether linguistic or visual? If contemporary hybridity is infinitely nuanced, plural and porous, perhaps creating a framework within which a multitude of collective voices can be heard is the only plausible solution. As Maharaj asserts, hybridity is 'the triumph over untranslatability': while we embrace the international space as the meeting ground for a multiplicity of languages, both linguistic and visual, these do not so much translate into one another as 'translate to produce difference'.

It seems apt then to end with a reference to religious scripture, the disparate readings of which have been cause for bloody clashes throughout human history and continue to agitate modern society. John Steinbeck's 20th-century ethical exploration *East of Eden* is a contemporary rendering of the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Running through the novel, Steinbeck's characters unpack the words spoken by God to Cain when exiling him in the hope of properly understanding their meaning. According to one translation of the Bible, God orders Cain to triumph over sin, while according to another, God promises Cain that he will defeat sin. The original word's meaning and its subsequent implication shifts throughout the book, until a Hebrew word offers a conclusion: 'the word *timshel*—'Thou *mayest*'—that gives a choice.' The ambiguity this translation allows and the impossibility of concrete direction it poses instead offers the characters the opportunity to interpret and act with free will.

Perhaps this is the most appropriate approach to take with the conundrum of heterogeneous cultural translation: allow art the potential to remain indeterminate and its interpretation undirected.

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Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn

Ivan Muñiz-Reed

Coloniality is ever-present. Even decades after the period of formal colonisation has ended, it has persisted through structural forms of privilege and bias. Beyond their more obvious economic and social manifestations (such as the racial stratification of labour and the proliferation of inequality and racism), these oppressive hierarchies also pervade the realm of culture; but so much of the modern world we know and experience has been constructed out of Western imperial categories that the coloniality of knowledge is perhaps harder to discern and much more insidious to overcome.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano has described coloniality as a 'matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies on the global and local level, functioning alongside capital to maintain a modern regime of exploitation and domination.'[1] He argues that if knowledge is colonised, then one of the tasks ahead is to de-colonise knowledge.[2]

Pedro Lasch, *Coatlicue and las Meninas*, from the series *Black Mirror*, 2007–present. Courtesy of the artist.

What are the implications for contemporary curators and museums that are responsible for interpreting contested histories and whose prime matter is knowledge? How are curators and art institutions positioned within the colonial matrix, and is it possible for them to restructure knowledge and power—to return agency to those who have lost it?

In order to imagine a decolonial curatorial practice, it's important to define the context and parameters from which decoloniality emerges. While decolonisation refers to the completed socio-historical process of independence from colonial powers, decoloniality is an ongoing ethico-political and epistemic project, which seeks to de-link from colonial structures that have persisted throughout modernity and which underpin Eurocentrism and systems of discrimination.

The concept of decoloniality can be traced back centuries, but a brief genealogy elicits the work of Quijano and a number of scholars, thinkers and activists from across Latin America, and more broadly from the Global South, who generate critical theory from an alternative perspective: the perspective of the colonised and the oppressed.[3] Most of this literature either emerges from—or is framed within—the Third World and is considered the most valuable contribution from Latin American scholars to the fields of critical theory, philosophy and ethnic studies. As such, it has gained international attention, attracting many contributions from around the world, and constituting what has been identified as a decolonial movement or decolonial turn in the domain of knowledge.

The aim of decolonial theory is to re-inscribe histories and perspectives, which have been devalued through 'radical exercises of un-thinking, de-disciplining, and re-educating',[4] that reformulate fundamental questions in the realms of philosophy, theory and critical thought. In the field of art theory, the main contribution is the term decolonial aesthesis/ aesthetics, which has recently gained currency primarily through the work of Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo (and his collaborators). Mignolo argues that aesthesis, an ancient Greek concept, which broadly describes the senses—'an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation, a sensation of touch'—was absorbed in the seventeenth century into Immanuel Kant's concept of aesthetics.[5] Mignolo suggests that Kant's theorisation of aesthetics was the cognitive operation that marked the colonisation of aesthesis, a process that led to the devaluing of any sensory experience conceptualised outside of European aesthetic categories. Kant's aesthetics emphasise sensing the beautiful and the sublime. According to Mignolo, Kant's work established European standards, which were then projected universally. Mignolo's counter-concept, decolonial aesthesis, therefore becomes a 'confrontation with modern aesthetics, and its aftermath (postmodern and altermodern aesthetics) to decolonise the regulation of sensing all the sensations to which our bodies respond, from culture as well as from nature.'[6]

Although Mignolo doesn't apply his theory specifically to curatorial practice, his criticism of Kantian aesthetics could be easily extended to the authoritative role curators and art institutions exercise as gatekeepers of the beautiful and sublime. Curators, who have become central figures in cultural production within the art canon, have the power to decide which (and how) histories are told. Perhaps Mignolo's biggest criticism of Western art institutions (and the work of curators/critics such as Nicolas Bourriaud) is that in their articulation of a postmodern or altermodern aesthetic they often omit the violence perpetrated throughout modernity in the name of 'progress', 'freedom' and 'peace', and thereby propagate the silencing of suppressed histories.

A decolonial critique of postmodern and postcolonial discourses is that although they both focus on understanding the aftermath of colonialism, this is all effected within the framework of European philosophy with little regard for the exploration of problems arising outside of Europe. Although postcolonial theory is considered very valuable for analysing and critiquing imperial structures, decolonialists argue that ultimately, by operating within the academy and through European-generated categories, they construct a 'Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism'.[7] In this sense, Mignolo regards Bourriaud's attempt to proclaim an altermodern aesthetic (his 2009 exhibition at London's Tate Gallery), as comparable to Weber's or Habermas' formulation of modernity, whose philosophical frame is still 'drinking in the fountains of European Renaissance and their Enlightenment "secular" imperative.'[8]

Decolonial thought, on the other hand, is not constructed from or in opposition to European grand narratives, but rather from the philosophical, artistic and theoretical contributions that originate from the Global South. Many important decolonial concepts are articulated within Transmodernism—a philosophical and cultural movement founded by Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel—in addition to the work of Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals, such as Martinique-born, Afro-Caribbean writer Franz Fanon and Martinican Aimé Césaire, who are its historical backbone. With this in mind and using Mignolo as a framing device, a decolonial curatorial practice would advocate for an epistemic disobedience, replacing or complementing Eurocentric discourses and categories with alternative perspectives.

It's hard to avoid mentioning Jean-Hubert Martin's seminal 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in this context. Beyond assigning pride of place to art scenes developed beyond the West, it bore the decolonial stamp, not only through its inclusion of a wide range of silenced histories and indigenous cosmologies, but in the way it challenged the notion of globalised artistic parameters, which have cast the shadows of primitivism and ethnography onto cultural production from non-Western culture. It illustrated the decolonial principle that there is no single universal aesthetic, but rather a pluriversality of aesthesis.[9]

Although many curators around the world have since assumed comparable politics of inclusion, there are colonial structures that persist at an institutional level. Systematically including oppressed histories into the museum has proven to be insufficient, and in fact, when not carefully enacted, has led to an institutional tokenism, which has only served to reinforce imperial power hierarchies. These institutional conditions, together with the unhelpful use of separatist categories, such as folk or outsider art, are a product of the colonisation of aesthesis and inexorably affect and restrain curatorial practices.

An example within Australia is the obstinate dominance of white, male artists in state galleries and their collections, and the segregation of non-Western artistic production into different exhibition spaces. As curator Chandra Frank notes, it is a responsibility of institutions and curators to create 'policies that guide towards the dismantling of normative paradigms that privilege certain ways of knowing, seeing and curating over others.'[10] This principle should extend well beyond the more overt binaries of coloniser/colonised, Western/non-Western and into all other spheres with implicit inequality. On the issue of gender, for example, feminist discourses exist within a decolonial framework, since many of the normative principles of male dominance have been propagated by the same matrix of power. Viewed under this logic, the day the Art Gallery of New South Wales reaches an even gender representation in a collection

hang will mark a significant decolonial triumph—a step forward for the institution, its curators, artists and audiences.

Exposing these institutional biases, however, is not an easy task for curators, since they are working from inside the marble pillars. It has often been artists—who are better positioned to criticise the institution—working with collections that have perpetrated some of the most interesting examples of epistemic disobedience. As discussed by Mignolo, Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992–93) is a quintessential example of decolonial artistic praxis. For the exhibition, Wilson incorporated objects from the museum's collection (the Maryland Historical Society) and rearranged them in ways that exposed the biases of museums to under-represent the uncomfortable histories of the oppressed. His intervention offered a new viewpoint of colonisation, which forced viewers to confront a muffled perspective of their colonial past.

Another example mentioned by Mignolo is *Black Mirror*, an ongoing series by Mexican artist Pedro Lasch. For the 2008 iteration of the series—commissioned by the Nasher Museum of Art to accompany its blockbuster exhibition *El Greco to Velázquez*—Lasch selected sixteen pre-Hispanic figures from the museum's permanent collection, which he then positioned on plinths with their backs turned to the audience. In front of each of the pieces, large sheets of reflective black glass acted as mirrors, as though the indigenous figures were silently contemplating their own existence. On closer inspection, behind the reflective surfaces a different set of images—European colonial era paintings—could also be seen. Thus in a single plane, indigeneity, coloniality and the self collide, implicating the audience through their moving reflections.

The work of both Lasch and Wilson involves the selection of items from pre-existing collections (comparable to the approach of an institutional curator) to further a decolonial agenda. In an Australian context, artist Brook Andrew has created a series of projects that have similarly relied on the collections. Andrew is himself an avid collector and in many of his recent projects he has combined his own archive with objects sourced from collaborating institutions. In each of his collaborations he breathes new meaning into these items, either through suggesting alternative readings of the past or challenging the supposed neutrality of the archive. Having collaborated with a number of institutions locally and internationally—such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Powerhouse Museum, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia—Andrew's work is a testament that re-framing or re-contextualising objects can be a powerful curatorial decolonial tool. In a similar vein, Tony Albert's series *Rearranging Our History* (2002–11), derives its power from re-contextualising a different kind of archive: kitsch souvenirs and items from popular culture's representation of Indigenous culture in Australia, which the artist has gathered over years. Although in isolation these objects could appear naïve or harmless to some, their toxicity comes to the fore when brought together.

Returning to Mignolo and the Latin American decolonial movement, there have been a few curatorial attempts at representing decolonial aesthetics, but in my view they have fallen short. An exhibition of decolonial aesthetics at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá was followed by a second exhibition and workshop—presented in 2011 at Duke University in Durham, USA—which expanded on the earlier exhibition by incorporating participants from East Asia into the dialogue. Although these exhibitions have been successful in defining a theoretical and historical framework, they failed to identify the way in which artistic practices might fit into such a framework beyond a very obvious connection to coloniality.

From a curatorial perspective there is no apparent epistemic shift in the curatorial process. The exhibitions do not seem to do justice to the ambitions of the critical theory, or at least they fail to illustrate its breadth and complexity. The majority of the artists included are men, for example, and the entire premise seems to be reduced to works that directly reference colonialism. The format skews toward the didactic and illustrative, and seems oblivious to the difficulties of 'absorbing' non-Western art and Global South discourses into the museum context. Maybe it has to do with the fact that Mignolo begins by admitting that he is not a specialist in art history or criticism, and hence his analysis of the strategies used by the artists and curatorial approach is narrow.

In my view, the most interesting example of a decolonial curatorial strategy, and far more radical and illustrative of the decolonial ethos, is Cuauhtémoc Medina's Biennial program *Dominó Caníbal* (*Cannibal Dominoes*, 2010) at PAC Murcia in Spain. For this year-long series of overlapping solo exhibitions, Medina broke with curatorial convention by using a counter-model as the central framing device: each artist was asked to start from his or her predecessor's work; adding, removing or modifying something from the previous exhibition, thereby 'cannibalising' the previous efforts. Historically, Medina positions his biennial within a transmodern context, which acknowledges the geo-political complexity of memory making in the postcolonial:

My starting point is the operation of the game of domino, which is a very widespread transcultural point of production. Based on games of Chinese dice, it was then taken to Italy, from where it spread to the new world with the Spanish and Portuguese colonisations, becoming very popular in Latin America. From a historical viewpoint, it reflects the migratory route of the game from Cathay to the Caribbean, passing through the European routes of early capitalism; it is a map of the historical process that led to the modern world. Furthermore, the domino effect refers to the chain of historical and argumental moments that define the links between colonisation, post-colonialism and capitalist globalisation.

Dominó Caníbal is an epistemic rebellion that disregards the traditional biennial model and shifts the power from the institution and the curator towards the artists. In addition, the equal gender balance and diverse geographical origin in the selection of artists is in accord with the decolonial agenda.[11] As Medina notes: 'It's not based on any autonomy or individual identity, but rather on a continuous negotiation of languages, materials and aesthetics.'[12] Moreover, there is the allusion to the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade's 1928 'Manifesto Antropófago' (Cannibal Manifesto), wherein he describes Brazil's conflation of foreign influences as a sort of cultural cannibalism, which gives rise to something new and unique. By using *antropofagia* as the core principle and frame of reference, Medina favours an alternative, non-European viewpoint and at the same time nods to a cultural condition experienced by the colonised world in its "itinerant search for origins".[13]

Although all of these instances are crucial steps towards healing the colonial wound, decoloniality is not limited to academics and curators. Decoloniality is a cultural call for arms, an invitation to rearticulate our collective past experience, questioning its weight and biases, in the hope that with every step forward, we might make increasing sense of our condition and contribute to the possibility of a world without coloniality: the world otherwise.

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Brook Andrew

Notes

1 Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina," *Anuario Mariateguiano*, Vol. 9, No. 9, 1997; Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad," *En Perú Indígena*, Vol. 13, No. 29,1992. (please confirm this is correct.)

2 Ibid.

3 It's important to note that although Quijano coins the term 'coloniality', there are many decolonial writers that had already articulated the same idea. As sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel notes, Quijano formulates a concept based on the ideas of other Indigenous and intellectuals of colour without a proper acknowledgement: 'The idea of the articulation of race as the organizing principle of the world capitalist system or of the colonial relationships of epistemic, social, economic, patriarchal, political or cultural power that remain today after colonialism, is a subject that has been extensively analysed, discussed, raised, deepened and recognized by authors such as Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Dubois, Fausto Reinaga, Angela Davis, Sylvia Wynter, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, Cedric Robinson, Ali Shariati, Malek Bennabi, Ho Chi Minh, Enrique Dussel and many other thinkers from the global South.' For the full article see "Ramon Grosfoguel: Hay que tomarse en serio el pensamiento crÍtico de los colonizados en toda su complejidad," *METAPOLÍTICA***,** No. 83, October - December 2013.

4 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2014, interview for Ku Leuven [https://theo.kuleuven.be/ apps/centr_bevrijding_ newsletter/view/145/].

5.Walter Mignolo, "Aiesthesis decolonial," *Calle 14: Revista De Investigación En El Campo Del Arte*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2011, pp.10-25.
6 Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez. 2013. "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings." *Social Text*. July 15. .
7 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2014, interview for Ku Leuven [https://theo.kuleuven.be/apps/centr_bevrijding_ newsletter/view/145/].
8. Alanna Lockward, Marooning the White Cube as Epistemic Disobedience: *BE.BOP. BLACK EUROPE BODY POLITICS 2012-2016*. What does refer to? Book? Exhibition? Incomplete source.
9 Pluriversality is a concept used by Mignolo that can also be traced back to Enrique Dussel's writing on transmodernity.
10 Chandra Frank. 2015. "Policy Briefing: Towards a Decolonial Curatorial Practice." *Discover Society*. June 3. Accessed 21.06.2017. http:// discoversociety.org/2015/06/03/policy-briefing-towards-a-decolonial-curatorial-practice/.
11 Artists included were Francis Alÿs, Bruce High Quality Foundation, Tania Bruguera, Jimmie Durham, Kendell Geers, Cristina Lucaws and Rivane Neuenschwander.
12 Cuauhtémoc Medina, *Dominó Caníbal* curatorial statement, Sala Veronicas, Murcia, Spain, Proyecto de Arte Contemporaneo Murcia, Spain, 2010.
13 Sam Thorne. 2010. "Dominó Caníbal." *Frieze.com*. April 1. Accessed 21.06.2017. https://frieze.com/article/domino-canibal.

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Decolonising UK World Art Institutions, 1945–1980

Claire Wintle

Between 1945 and 1980, UK museums and their collections of art and artefacts from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas played an active political and social role in attempting to decolonise the British Empire. As spaces which forced museum practitioners and visitors to contend with the material remnants of empire, and as arenas which demanded the interpretation of a world undergoing rapid political change, in their very materiality, UK museums of world art and anthropology supported the trialling and enacting of forms of decolonisation, neo-colonialism, independence and anti-colonial resistance.[1] They acted as microcosms of wider political encounters.

While pre-1945 and post-1980 UK museum practice and world cultures collections are relatively well researched, attention to the intervening years has been minimal and limited to individual institutions. One assumption, often emphasising stagnant display practices, is that museums with world cultures collections were "scenes of neglect".[2] In 1987, in his summary of the mid-century period, broadcaster and author Kenneth Hudson wrote that such organisations "may collect widely, but they do not dig deeply. The political consequences of doing so would be too serious, or so it is felt".[3] But while the particular political consequences of world art museum practice may sometimes have been buried, they were also emphasised and exploited in important ways. Indeed, while some museum displays remained neglected in this period, behind the scenes, UK world art institutions were dynamic spaces, attempting to manage new metropolitan cultures and the demands of the former colonies. While in some ways this was a deeply conservative moment in museum practice, in certain activities, the foundations of some of today's best, "decolonised" museum practice can be found.

There were certainly cases where British museum practice acted as a mask for progressive political change. Collections acquired through colonial frameworks continued to pour into museums as if Britain still ruled its subjects: when colonial officials returned to the UK after independence, many donated the collections they had acquired during their careers abroad. Colonel Douglas Hamilton Gordon (1895-1961), for example, was a British Officer stationed in India for thirty-two years, but only began his programme of donating stone implements and pottery figurines to Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (MAE) and University College London's Institute of Archaeology after Indian independence and his corresponding retirement. There are also several cases of returnees retraining and taking on curatorial posts in the UK, such as William Archer, who was in the Indian Civil Service until 1948 and went on to become the Keeper of the Indian Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Kenneth Bradley, District Officer in Northern Rhodesia between 1926 and 1942 and the director of London's Imperial (later Commonwealth) Institute between 1953 and 1969. In some instances, smaller institutions disavowed their imperial histories: when West Berkshire Museum offered its Tibetan collections to a war-torn Liverpool Museum in 1950, it was typical of many smaller museums that had decided to move away from collecting and caring for world cultures exhibits in favour of a new emphasis on local social history, assuming that "local", "British" history did

not include the "other".[4] At the same time, the larger, more specialist museums that accepted these transfers cemented the colonial legacy that these collections evoked. In these ways, museums acted as devices through which those involved could retain their former imperial identities.

Yet, we also see an early embracing of more collaborative, egalitarian museum practices in this period. For example, in 1950, the MAE in Cambridge hosted placements for practitioners from Sarawak and Singapore, and in 1966, the British Museum did the same with individuals from Nigeria, Malaya and Australia, supporting the development of museums in decolonising nations.[5] Training and "sharing" expertise can of course be cast, rightly, in a paternalistic light, but decolonising countries were also able to make their mark on UK museum practice on other terms. Especially at university museums, postcolonial scholars used UK collections as a resource: the annual reports at MAE and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford are littered with references to elite, educated scholars who employed UK museums for research purposes, and, indeed, added to the collections. Sometimes these donations were personal offerings of cosmopolitan, professionally interested individuals; in other cases they were officially framed as donations from national bodies. The government of Pakistan, and the National Museum of India, for example, both donated series of objects to MAE after their countries' respective independences.[6] If we understand the gift as forging reciprocity and indebtedness, these and other similar examples of decolonising nations donating to UK museums can be acknowledged as a shared collecting practice based on a changing, more equitable political relationship, and the self-confident global status of these new countries.

This period also saw the growth of national museums in former British colonies: they formed an important if complex arena for articulating political freedom, and British museum practitioners had to respond to their demands. For example, several museums acquiesced to requests from newly independent nations for the return of sacred objects from their collections during this period. In 1962, in the same year of Ugandan independence, MAE repatriated the regalia of the Ganda war deity Kibuuka to the new state's national museum. Indeed, as Derek Peterson observes, "The museological work of repatriation and reassembly was contemporaneous with the political work of self-constitution": the Minister of Education in the Kingdom of Buganda collected the sacred regalia from the Cambridge museum during the very same visit he made to the UK to finalise the legalities of his country's new constitution.[7]

Arguably, these requests weren't just concurrent with decolonisation, but occasions to trial, enact and push forward the end of empire. This was the case when Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other Indian government officials became implicated in the return of a set of Buddhist relics to India which were then in the collections of the V&A and the British Museum. Both India and Ceylon had cultural and religious claims on the relics, and the Indian government used the practical process of repatriation to emphasise a rejection of British hegemony as well as develop an emergent pan-Asian cooperation.[8] An amicable division of the relics between India and Ceylon eventually came about through lengthy negotiations between government departments and the interventions of Nehru and his counterpart in Ceylon, Dudley Senanayake. In a summary of the final result, an official in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs wrote: "The attempt of the British Museum authorities to ignore Indian sentiments […] can now be foiled[…]. An opportunity has now been afforded to mitigate the feeling of ill-will to which any political differences may have given rise between the people of India and the people of Ceylon."[9] Elsewhere, a government

official in the Ministry of Education made clear that the "division [of the relics] will be at our initiative or our agreement with Ceylon and not by the UK."[10] In these negotiations, countries were substituted for institutions, and world art had become a political matter.

Projecting the macropolitics of global change onto the micropolitics of the museum tells us much about the broader role of museums historically and today. Museums mirror political change, but they are also more active than this. They help politicians, practitioners and audiences manage, trial, disavow and embrace geopolitical shifts.[11] In some unusual cases like the Commonwealth Institute, a museum-cum-trade centre that forged formal financial agreements with commonwealth countries in return for their representation, organisational and funding structures pushed museum practitioners to acknowledge decolonisation, forcing them to take decolonising nations seriously as stakeholders and collaborators.[12] More typically, it was the material presence of imperialism with which museums had to contend: there were simply so many remnants of empire, that they could not be ignored, even in the short term. They had to be confronted: hidden, exchanged, accepted, described, interpreted, displayed and—in exceptional cases—repatriated. Objects were a point of concern, contact and disagreement between emerging nations and the former metropole. It was the tangible and the material that forced museum staff members to conceive of and respond to a changing world, even if that process included denial and tentative assent as well as enthusiastic acceptance.

Working at the interface of politics and museum practice also allows us to rethink the political moment itself: shedding light on mid-century museum practice and the role of newly independent nations in the British sector forces us to acknowledge that the "end" of empire was not simply driven from the metropole, either at the museum or on a geopolitical level. Actors in the Global South were agents, too. We also see an eagerness *and* reticence in UK art institutions in the mid-twentieth century to engage with changing political circumstances: decolonisation, we are reminded, is both a forward-looking *and* conservative process. The intersection between the disciplines of history and curating therefore calls for a more nuanced use of terminology. While historians describe "decolonisation" as a mid-century moment and as a tentative, incomplete, even neo-imperial process that occurred in fits and starts, in museum and art gallery studies and practice, the term "decolonisation" is used to refer to an eradication of imperialism from contemporary cultural institutions.[13] Perhaps a realignment of these terms is required: "decolonising the art institution" is a current, worthy aim, but in our bid to eliminate the deepest forms of colonial legacy, we might also acknowledge the more conservative, neo-colonial tendencies inherent in any form of "decolonisation", in order to expunge those, too.

Notes

1 For a detailed institutional case study exploring this argument, see Claire Wintle, "Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes," *Museum & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2013, pp. 185-201.

2 Ivan Karp, "Other Cultures in Museum Perspective," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1991, p. 378.

3 Kenneth Hudson, *Museums of Influence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. vii.

4 Correspondence from Herbert Coghlan, Newbury Museum, West Berkshire, to

Liverpool Museum's director, 20 September 1949, Archives, Department of Ethnography, World Museum Liverpool. Museums in Birmingham and Manchester made acquisitions along similar lines in the 1950s and 1960s.

5 See annual reports of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Cambridge, 1950 and 1951; Department of Ethnography, "Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees for Ethnography on the State of the Department," May 1966, Archives, Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, British Museum.

6 See annual reports of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Cambridge, 1952 and 1976.

7 Derek R. Peterson, "Introduction: Heritage Management in Colonial and Contemporary Africa," in Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua and Ciraj Rassool, eds., *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 15-16.

8 For the complex history of the return of the relics, see Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007, pp. 133-164.

9 Internal memoranda, Ministry of External Affairs [n.d.], K/52/999/41, Records and Management Section, UK Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

10 Internal memoranda, Department of Education [n.d.], K/52/999/41, Records and Management Section, UK Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

11 Claire Wintle, "Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 5, 2016, p. 1519.

12 Claire Wintle, "Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes," *Museum & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2013, pp. 185-201.

13 On the historiography of historical decolonisation studies see John Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire," in Robin Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. For decolonisation in museum studies see, for example, Christina Kreps, "Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology," in Janet Marstine, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twentieth-Century Museum*, Routledge, London, 2011. On the disciplinary contradictions of the use of "decolonisation", see, Claire Wintle, "Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 5, 2016, p. 1519.

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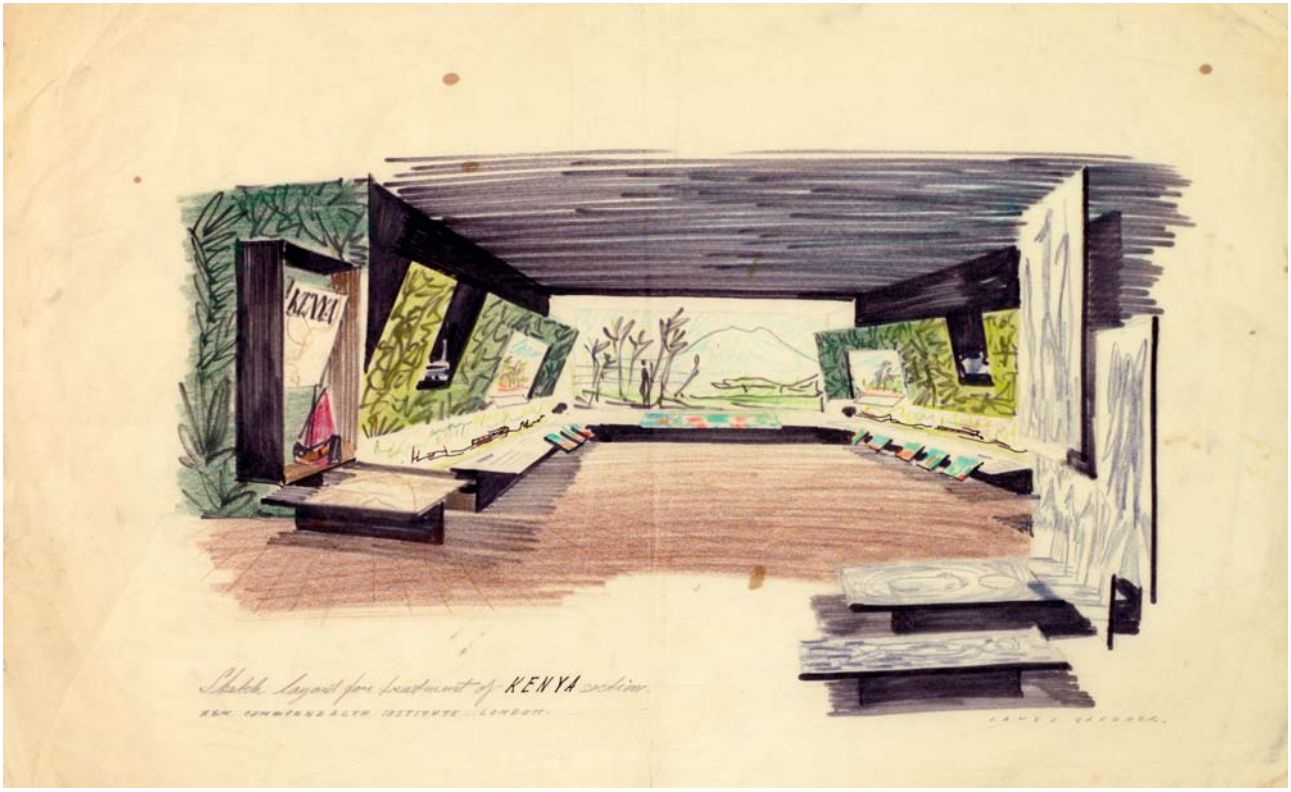
In the process of sketching the new displays of an independent Ceylon for London's Commonwealth Institute, how did designer James Gardner's perspectives change?
Sketch for general layout of proposed Ceylon court, Commonwealth Institute. James Gardner, c.1961. Catalogue number: DES-LJG-3-3-2-18. James Gardner Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.



How did the choices required in the framing of a colony in turmoil shape designers' understandings of decolonisation?
Sketch for general layout of proposed Kenya section, Commonwealth Institute. James Gardner, c.1961. Catalogue number: DES-LJG-3-3-2-31. James Gardner Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.

Acknowledging the Post_Coloniality of Higher Art Education. Considerations from the Swiss Perspective

Sophie Vögele and Philippe Saner

Switzerland oftentimes celebrates itself as being the nation of humanitarian tradition, birthplace of the founding father of the Red Cross. But this picture of neutrality, openness and tolerance is disrupted by a number of popular initiatives having taken place continuously since the 1960s initiated by conservative and right wing parties.1 In all these simultaneous, different, and at times contradictory articulations of Switzerland, it becomes clear that the fact of it being a migrant society is not present at all although the actual immigration flows are even more important than within the 'classical' immigration societies such as New Zealand, Australia or Canada (Müller 2013). But in the context of celebrations around Switzerland's humanitarian tradition – last year the Swiss Red Cross celebrated its 150th anniversary – it is blinded out that people seeking for asylum might stay on. And, in the context of mainstream argumentation, the reality of immigration is dismissed through violent discursive denial (see for instance Michel and Honegger 2018). This understanding lines up with the European context: Largely and very convincingly 'Europe' pretends to be untouched by the devastating ideology it exported all over the world by its imperial expansion through its being composed by the powerful narrative of Europe as a colorblind continent (Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015). This narrative frames the continent as a space free of 'race' – and thus free of racism. Moreover, this perception of Western Europeans has also gained near-global acceptance. Thus, European identity is formed along structures which work to constantly externalize and de-familiarize racialized populations with the effect that, although their numbers are substantial and rising fast, they are presented to be incompatible with the very nature of Europeanness. Their non-representation is supported by their categorization into ethnic groups and, by a focus on processes of migration rather than on the emergence of native minorities, implying that there are only 'foreign' migrants in addition to the 'native' white population (El-Tayeb 2011). Thus, what we are currently facing is not only a denial of the reality of immigration but of the embeddedness of our historical present in colonialism. The effect of such denials is complicity with, and obscuring of, racist structures within society.

The specific sector of tertiary education in general and the field of art school in particular is not exempt from being structured by these power relations. The research project *Art.School.Differences. Researching Inequalities and Normativities in the Field of Higher Art Education* brings to the fore the subtle working and intricacies of institutionalized processes of inclusion and exclusion that resonate power relations instated during colonization. We conducted this comprehensive research with our team between 2014 and 2016 at the Institute for Art Education in collaboration with the Zurich University of the Arts, the Geneva School of Art and Design, and the Geneva School of Music.2 Our findings show that within negotiations about criteria of assessment among jury members for the admission of candidates, through the design of the curricula and promotional material, and through the strive for internationaliza-

tion, there are massively exclusionary moments in regard to class, *race*/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and the body that apparently seem undetected and unintended. These moments and processes can only be understood in consideration of intersectionality and colonial power dynamics at play that reinstate a very specific norm (Vögele and Saner, n.d.).

Indeed, a complex and differentiated picture of inclusivity and exclusivity can be revealed in the specific sector of the tertiary education comparable to international research that found educational art institutions to be the "preserve of the privileged" (Malik Okon 2005; Burke and McManus 2009). This social uniformity stands in great contradiction with the flamboyant self-descriptions of art schools in global competition, and with the idealistic concepts of art "as a civilising force that has the power to both challenge and transcend historically entrenched systems of social inequality" (Gaztambide-Fernandez et al. 2012: 2). María do Mar Castro Varela drew attention to the problem with education stating that it is seldom perceived as an important catalyst for actually upholding the status quo in terms of gendered and ethnic exclusion. We found that precisely such contradicting discourses and a simultaneity of desire are at the core of inclusion and exclusion at art schools anchored in colonialism and privileging a mainstream norm. To briefly illustrate, we would like to touch on 'diversity' and its relationship to 'internationalization' within the context of art school.

International diversity and the Other

Ahmed defines diversity as "technology of happiness" (Ahmed 2010: 153), that tends to be delegated or to be projected onto minority positions to enrich the majority standard. Ahmed, thus, calls for looking into "what diversity does by focusing on what diversity obscures" (Ahmed 2010: 14). She finds that diversity as a technology of happiness sustains institutionalized discrimination and racism, and secretly re-centers an "institutional whiteness". Within art schools it can be observed that *gender equality offices* are being redefined as *diversity offices* without being allocated more financial resources or manpower. However, their responsibility of preventing any kind of discrimination is increasing in complexity and intensity – a task impossible to manage that necessarily entails shortcuts and omissions. Thus, as we could observe, normalization eventually enters the institution through the back door. Furthermore, diversity has to be seen in the context of neoliberal politics of exploitation and regulation of difference. From the perspective of political queer theory, Antke Engel analysed these relations and found that subjects celebrated "act as role models of the adaptation to challenges of neoliberal transformation – not because of their social difference, but because they know how to deal with that difference and transform it into cultural capital" (Engel 2011: 56).

This new form of production and regulation of difference in late capitalism and its regimes of so called migratory background are relevant especially in the circulating discourses on 'internationalization' in art schools. There, diversity merges into internationalization and tends to be an added value in order to benefit the institution and, thus, at best looses its altering or transforming potential (Castro Varela 2010: 249). This can be illustrated in the enquiry of citizenship, a defining political and identity-forming category in Switzerland, among art schools in 2010: An overrepresentation of German and French students could be determined, contrasted by an even more striking underrepresentation of students from southern Europe, Ex-Yugoslavian countries and Turkey. They accounted only for approx. 3% of art students compared to over 10% of the general population. On a general basis, art schools prove to be international in terms of their students' citizenships because one third was non-Swiss.

But that internationality remains very restricted to affluent states by 75%. This is supported by the fact that English, German and French are predominant first languages of the foreign students. Moreover, through this internationalization, the missing of significant groups of people of Swiss society is obscured. People being any of first to third generation with origins in the post-Yugoslavian successor states, Portugal and Turkey are not part of the art school students neither of the teaching staff. That obscuring is even more pronounced if we consider that more than 50% of the art students *do* have a history of migration. But, obviously, restricted to that specifically limited section of countries accounting for 'international' (Seefranz and Saner 2012). The violent impossibility of certain migrant subjects in the name of a diverse student body clearly has no transforming potential left.

In findings from *Art.School.Differences* we could see that there was a clear attribution of more cultural capital to international students: They were considered to have high symbolic and cultural capital whereas candidates identified to have migration background with a previous residency in Switzerland were not considered having the necessary cultural capital for access to higher art education. These two attitudes toward diversity resulted in an oscillation between desire and disregard toward the Other: We, on different occasions, encountered a great desire for the Other, more precisely an interest in being creatively inspired by someone exotically Other. This interest often was articulated as a great opportunity to enrich and benefit the institution. On other occasions, the inclusion of the diverse Other was assessed as an impossibility on the grounds of the Other being too different. The desire as well as disregard for the Other is hierarchized and enforces power relations (Hall 1997). It not only entails a denial of the Other but also means to invigorate existing racist, sexist, and Eurocentric differentiations (Mecheril and Plösser 2009). Furthermore, migrants of second or third generation were often deemed to be acceptable within the institution if not being clearly 'visible' as migrants anymore. That supports the observation of powerful normalization with the effect of mainstreaming the art student population in terms of class and *race*/ethnicity. The implementing of diversity into art schools, especially if it is achieved through internationalization, obviously shows that migrants do not fit into the institutional body, they do not embody the specific difference valued. Indeed, our evaluation reveals a complex interplay between a narrowly defined bodily and psychic constitution required, as well as a specific cultural capital preferred, such as appearance, way of behaving, interests und cultural knowledge, etc. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, 1990). It becomes clear how the norm is re-instated and that thereby it especially is class adherence that has inclusionary and exclusionary effects in its intersectional working with *race*/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and the body.

Acknowledging post_coloniality

Contrary to their promise of social mobility, Swiss art schools appear to be clearly characterized by processes of social closure that are related to a constant re-instatement of the norm and specific notions of the Other. An important dimension within this process is a multifarious interplay between internationality and diversity: On one side, there is preference for a very specific group of international students with particular social backgrounds, and on the other there is an irritating co-existence of a desire as well as disregard for diversity in terms of Otherness that can entail quite a massive de-legitimization of (female and queer) migrant subjectivities. This particular process of social closure is based on dominant discourses on the Other that clearly reflect a Eurocentric mindset and Western perspective. We thus are urged to consider the post_colonial dimensions of the social conditions of higher art education by

asking: Can we address the privileging of the norm and institutional discrimination by applying a post_colonial perspective (Vögele and Saner 2018)?

Post_colonial theorizing addresses the hierarchical relationship between the 'known' and the 'knower' and how it is constantly re-instated (Spivak 1988). It becomes clear that there is a tension between a denied shared presence of the so-called 'knower' toward positionalities and individuals not part of the hegemonic framework of the so-called 'known' (Fabian 1990: 753f). The 'knower' is situated within the norm of the mainstream, unaware of the privilege to represent and 'speak for' the 'known'. Simultaneously, and to secure a dominant position, the 'knower' is closely related to the 'known', needing the distinction in order to remain within the superior position of the 'knower'. However, the inherent structure of that very relationship between the 'knower' and the 'known' obfuscates the mutual dependency by assigning a primordial position of knowledge and enforcing the supremacy of representation over the represented. Within the specific process of a re-instatement of the norm addressed above in institutions of higher art education, this dimension of 'known' and 'knower' is especially prevalent as the intake into the institution is clearly regulated through a thorough admissions process that suggests a certain knowledge of the candidate. If a normatively composed institution in terms of *race*/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and the body, puts itself in the position of the 'knower', it is actively inscribed within power relations that were fundamental to the justification of colonial expansion. There thus, in our view, is a necessity for rendering art schools accountable of their normalization and their specific relationship to diversity. This will allow for a de-colonization of such institutions.

A first step toward this goal is in seeking an equal reciprocal exchange: Equal reciprocal exchange that can achieve diversity and is able to address institutional normativity has to be aware of historical and colonial power relations that structure our thinking. For an equal exchange with reciprocal engagement, there is the need to establish a mutual recognition and a democratizing of processes that are based on respect and equal power of decision-making of all the ones involved. The guiding perspective has to be multiple and aware of hegemonies, processes of institutionalized discrimination, and their entanglements with colonial power relations. Within the admissions process to art schools and the hiring of faculty, there is the need for particular conditions of recognition that allow groups and individuals to experience themselves in relations of self-confidence, self-respect and self-assessment (Castro Varela and Mecheril 2010: 89). If this is neglected, there necessarily will be a disregard and marginalization of certain interests and thus a confinement of Other perspectives to the less powerful position of the 'known'. But if a critical self-awareness of members of the institution becomes self-evident and if a self-critical sensibility to power relations is set as a strategic priority of the institution itself, we believe that the overdue decolonization of Western art institutions can be started off.

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Notes

1 Some of them have won a majority – a more recent one resulting in controversials with the EU being the *Masseneinwanderungsinitiative on February 9th 2014.*
2 For more information on *Art.School.Differences* see online: bit.ly/a_s_d (last access: 30.4.2017). For the final research report containing our comprehensive findings refer to Saner, Vögele, and Vessely (2016).
3 María do Mar Castro Varela made this comment during her keynote at the ‚Conference on Gender and Migration in Different Tracks of Higher Education' at the Swiss Federal Institute For Vocational Training (SFIVET) in Zollikofen, Bern on 31.10/01.11.2014.

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2017 he is a research associate and doctoral student in the project „Facing Big Data: Methods and skills needed for a 21st century sociology“ (PI: Prof. Sophie Mützel, PhD), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation within the National Research Programme 75 on Big Data at the University of Lucerne.

How to Be Affected in Postcolonial Public Spaces? Ethnographic Remarks on a Multifocal World in the Making …[1]

Rohit Jain

But where exactly will be the location of this historic rendezvous?[2]

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In fall 2014, I was teaching a course at the Zurich University of the Arts. It took place at the newly inaugurated Toni Areal, a former yoghurt factory turned into a prestigious project of urban development in the gentrified district of Zurich West. The course was in a module called "Interculture" and was attended by students from art education and community arts. We discussed the unacknowledged role of colonialism in the Swiss public space and about what kind of subjectivities emerge in an environment of assimilation and exoticism, racism and diversity marketing. During the break of one of the sessions, a few students and I were walking across the bridge over the entry hall. Our attention was drawn to a person in the center of the hall. I identified a young man—of South Asian origin, so it seemed to me—who was wearing a red T-shirt with a white cross on it, and who was holding a can of beer. He was walking slowly around the boundaries of a rectangle marked with scotch tape, his head bowed down. At one corner there was a pile of empty beer cans. I heard a student of my class asking: "How did this guy get into building?" I was rather astonished by the question and answered: "I guess this is a fellow student doing a performance." The student was skeptical, and others agreed. We discussed the incident in class against the background of our syllabus, but many of the students still remained skeptical about my interpretation. By chance, I met the performer some days later at a party in an art space on Langstrasse, a demographically highly diverse area, where mainly Italian guestworkers dominated the public space till the 1970s and that now combines clubbing, galleries, sex work, and gentrification. The German-Sri Lankan actor Patrick Balaraj Yogarajan had just finished his degree at the Zurich University of Arts. He told me that later on the day of the performance, he was even kicked out of the building by the security staff. We were glad about the coincidence, which allowed us to discuss the performance, and enjoyed one of the rare opportunities to chat about everyday racism in Switzerland as well as on our transnational lives and biographies—without any need to explain or justify it.

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One can learn a lot from this vignette about the ethnic composition and about discrimination or inclusion of the students, staff, and teachers at the Zurich University of Arts. That is to say, of how a person of color who does a performance on the public presence of race, bodies, and space is not easily identified as fellow student—particularly when the performance inserts the non-middle class representation of Tamils in Switzerland into a middle-class space like the Zurich University of Arts.

Concerning the Zurich University of Arts, the project Art.School.Difference has taken up the issue.[3] It has shown in detail how selection processes are exclusive concerning class, race, abilities, and age. Further, the project made clear that institutions, in order to be more inclusive, have to reflect and transform the question of "Othering" in

information events and brochures, in formal selection processes of students and staff, and in curricula.

Yet, I want to argue that the claim of "decolonizing art institutions" should not remain at the level of institutional non-discriminatory measures or strategies of inclusion only, as important and relevant as they are. Rather, the vignette also sheds light on the ways the public space in Toni Areal is produced by a specific cultural regime of gazes. It shows how different persons within the same space look or are looked at, are seen or not seen, are being affected by the space or not, can be present or not. The vignette reveals a racialized hegemonic gaze, which identifies (il-)legitimate bodies according to a politics of locality, which isomorphically equals race, culture, and place. This hegemonic gaze is insisted upon fiercely, hinders self-reflection and, therefore, ignores and bypasses multifocal perspectives and other, transnational public spaces – for example Patrick's. To put it bluntly, the mainly white, Swiss bodies of the art students in my class were resisting the "Other" returning their gaze, and therefore were unable to connect to a multifocal world, which is very real, but beyond their horizon. It is striking, again and again, that an understanding of multiple identities and hybrid life-worlds is not a self-evident part of the cultural repertoire in a city where around 40% of the population have a migration background, and where symbols of globalism and hybridity are so omnipresent—in graphic design, in club culture, or in multicultural cuisine. And I would argue that the space of the artistic institution or the field cultural production as such were not an exception to this production of locality,[4] but rather a continuation. Cultural hybridity, which is so much the currency of artistic production and popular culture in postmodernity, seemed to be only decoded as a sign in a simulacrum and not as a lived reality of the many, let alone as a political project.

"White space" – under cover performance and racial profiling in Toni Areal, photo: the author

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Being trained as an anthropologist with a background in postcolonial studies and anthropology of globalization, I have gotten involved in different artistic productions and institutions in Zurich in the past few years. One important global development during this time, which also became obvious in Zurich, has been the ambivalence between the drive toward internationalization of artistic production, research, and education and the stubborn resistance against it. Another, phenomena has been a growing interest in postcolonial issues in Swiss academia, in arts, in media, and in the public—at least at its critical margins. This was not self-evident, considering that in the official and hegemonic mythology, "Switzerland has nothing to do with colonialism."[5] Only in the last ten years have a new generation of researchers, activists, and artists shown how Switzerland had not only been collaborating in colonial economic

exploitation, but that its hegemony, that is to say, its education system, its academic knowledge production as well as its public culture have been marked by colonial complicity at first and by postcolonial amnesia afterwards and up to today.[6]

While these postcolonial scholars, activists, and artists confronted the dominant society with the unwanted facts of colonial complicity, their work was also meant to create public spaces for themselves, their allies, and minorities in general. By representing their "other(ed)" bodies and narratives, they became subjects "in a different way." They affectively articulated their experiences of racism, transnationalism, and hybridity—and therefore *multiplied the public space*. In these spaces, for example, Bollywood cinema was not a curiosity anymore, as it was discussed in the Swiss hegemonic public. For me it became a legitimate biographical, cultural, and political reference in a multifocal global public space, connecting early childhood memories, the contradictions of liberalizing India, and a politics of hybridity in Zurich.[7] And even this subject position was shown to be ambivalent, since, in the process of writing this piece, I was confronted by a Tamil activist and theater director for whom Bollywood movies represented the violence executed by Indian military forces in Northern Sri Lanka during the late 1980's. There was always this double moment in the project of "Postcolonial Switzerland," of addressing the dominant society to induce social transformation, but at the same time of creating a space of feeling at home in a globalizing world beyond the provincialism of Switzerland and Europe.

It is against this background of my coming of age as a postcolonial scholar and person that Hamid Dabashi's recent essay, "Can Europeans Read?"[8] had such an important intellectual and affective impact on me when I read it for the first time. Dabashi had written the essay as a response to a debate initiated by some European philosophers, who defended themselves against alleged accusations of "Eurocentricism." Yet, the main point in Dabashi's argument is that for most postcolonial scholars today "Europe" has ceased to be the main political, moral, or philosophical reference point. Or, as he states it very simply, "We have been to much greener pastures." The decentralizing of global capitalism, with growing middle classes in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, as well as the transformations induced by the Arab Spring, he argues, have made the epochal narrative of "West against the Rest" obsolete. Hence, both in its colonial and in its critical anti-colonial stance, this mythological code is no longer able to grasp the multifocal planetary realities. Rather, "Europe" is just struggling with its imperial historical legacy, without being able to even slightly understand what is going on in other places, in the multifocal world in the making. *"[Me and many colleagues] are part of a generation of postcolonial thinkers who grew up compelled to learn the language and cultural of our colonial interlocutors. These interlocutors have never had any reason to reciprocate. They had become provincial in their assumptions of universality. We have become universal under the colonial duress that had sought to provincialize us*."[9] While one can surely still feel anger in the tone in Dabashi's piece, the perspective and the attitude are totally calm and clear. He embodies a self-conscious position of knowing his history, his anchored worldliness in a postcolonial geography, his academic capacity and social status. At the same time, the piece shows an honest interest, an offer, and desire for conversation—under the conditions, however, that "Europeans" overcome their epistemic narcissism and their postcolonial anxieties. "*It is long overdue that Europeans exit the certainty of their mythical self-philosophizing and re-enter history. They must come down off their high horses and fat Humvees and stop philosophizing me, and instead kindly consider philosophizing with me. The moment they dismount they will see me, Walter Mignolo, and Aditya Nigam waiting, with laptops open. But where exactly will be the location of this historic rendezvous?*"[10]

This self-conscious attitude is quite an important departure from the postcolonial debates of the 1990s. These were defined by "provincializing Europe" and on exploring spaces of hybridity as the location of resistance and critique. Yet, these debates were theoretically and politically constrained by the inscribed gap between "the colonizer" and "the colonized." The claim for a new cosmopolitanism[11] and or for conviviality[12] showed that this generation of activist scholars became aware of the limits within their work and that theirs was not an intellectual project of blunt criticism and resistance. Rather, in order to be successful, it should be anchored in the changing historical conditions of decentralized capitalism, in an ethical prospect of the good life and in the hope for a new beginning. Wouldn't otherwise even the most self-conscious postcolonial critic still carry the burden of racism for which he or she was not responsible? And where were the spaces for friendship and solidarity across the color line, while not adopting a colorblind universalism?

Dabashi's paper forcefully embodies the self-conscious claim for a mode of thinking which goes "beyond the limits of the condition called 'postcoloniality,'" that is to say, for a new cosmopolitan conversation within a *multifocal planetary horizon*. However, the context of its appearance also marks the difficulties and contradictions involved in negotiating these cosmopolitan places in the practice of the globalizing fields of humanities, arts, or popular culture—let alone in politics, science, or economy.

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There seems to be a gap between the ongoing and accelerated globalization (of the academic and artistic fields and institutions) and the lack of cultural, ethical, and affective resources to reflect and shape these processes. The bodies, institutions, technologies, and images that operate these processes are still inscribed by colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal ruptures and contradictions. Yet, there are no readymade recipes, theories, methods, practices, or identities to understand und inhabit this new world in the making, which has left behind the provincial universalism of European modernity.[13]

I would argue that the affective uproar in the debate between the postcolonial scholar Dabashi and his white "European" fellows cannot be explained solely through philosophical argument. Rather, I argue, that the main theoretical point in Dabashi's paper is that the particular experiential position within postcolonial geography not only influences the arguments one makes and the texts one might choose to read, but moreover, *how one is affected by* these arguments, books, and authors, images, and objects within the historical and political conditions from which they get their meaning. Reading European philosophers and social theorists or literati through the filter of their translation into the historical and cultural realities and archives of postcoloniality reveals not only the gestures of European colonial power, but also opens new epistemological horizons and avenues of ethical action.

Taking this argument of the postcolonial worldliness of knowledge seriously would mean that an understanding between philosophical positions or probably human relations in general is only possible if one's own and "the Other's" position in a postcolonial geography is existentially recognized—a process, I argue, that is fundamentally embedded in an affective dynamic. Sarah Ahmed argued that affects are like the surface of the body, which make it possible to align with persons, objects, and images in a specific way—or not to align. This emotional surface of bodies is regulated and negotiated within power relations, public culture, and historical settings. Therefore, the politics of affects regulate the way people can create communities and publics, the

common cultural ground for understanding the language of "Others." There is no escape into a universalism without addressing experiential and existential differences within the postcolonial condition. Thus, the intervention by Hamid Dabashi might be less about the philosophical arguments about Eurocentrism or Universalism. Rather, it is about conveying the experience of being in the world differently, about communicating that there is world beyond the imagination of European modernity, which cannot be understood through philosophical arguments but only through experiential exposure, recognition, and affective alignment. So where und when will a real encounter take place, one that makes it possible to leave the postcolonial condition behind us? And, moreover, under which ethical and affective conditions—and in what kind of space?

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While postcolonial academics, activists, and intellectuals have written brilliant pieces about how colonial histories are inscribed in bodies, archives, or even affects, they are not able to intervene or even adequately explore these sublime levels of our multifocal world in the making. Culture and aesthetics are part of the hegemonic making of globalism. Yet, art has a privileged position for productively reflecting these processes. The aesthetic tensions of hybridity and authenticity, of materiality and virtuality, and of locality and globality are the cultural repertoire of de-centered capitalism.[14] And, the other way around, the conditions of globalism affect aesthetic practices in everyday life, and in the field of artistic production. Artistic and curatorial practices are capable of intervening in the aesthetic, affective, and ethical spheres, which are so seminal in making (sense of) the postcolonial geographies of de-centered capitalism, and in acknowledging the colonial ruptures and wounds written into the archives of our bodies.

An interesting project of decolonizing art institutions by intervening in the politics of locality was initiated by Katharina Morawek—at that time curator of Shedhalle Zurich—and the Viennese artist Martin Krenn. In the project "The Whole World in Zurich," they curated a process of practical social utopia on the subject of urban citizenship.[15] Against the backdrop of the fact that 25% of the city's population was excluded from voting due to being foreigners, the project invited an expert group of activists and scholars who were to explore the potential of the city as space for social transformation. The curators and the expert group departed on a process of so called "Hafengespräche" ("harbor conversations") on the three topics of freedom of mobility, freedom to services, and freedom to representation. For every topic, an expert group came up with its specific curatorial formats for engaging decision makers, activists, and migrants in a conversation of how to induce change. The historian Kijan Espahangizi and I, who were tackling the issue of freedom to representation, decided to invite cultural producers of color and/or with a migration background. We wanted to explore and discuss how a public space should look and feel, so that we were able to be at home. The first session was amazingly full of analytical confusion over the term of racism (which is totally misused in Swiss public as a term to describe physical violence by right-wing extremists instead of structural racism), of forceful biographical stories of discrimination, transnational family life and conviviality, as well as of criticism on the failure of the city's cultural policy. The raw and fragmented, perhaps even carnivalesque, atmosphere of the first session embodied an experience that didn't have a social form or a shared language, ethic, or aesthetic. Within the open setting we had offered, political affects co-emerged into a new *collective* public practice—compared to the intimate, often lonely biographical contemplations on being "Othered" that the participants had been used to previously. In the performative process of assembling,

the participants claimed the "right to appear," which was much stronger in its affective presence than by explicitly claiming it by words.[16] This unexpected assembly had triggered something that might be what Raymond Williams had called a "structure of feeling," "a social experience which still in *process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, and its hierarchies, indeed."[17]

Sub-public assembly – Salon Bastarde "in the making", photo: the author

Based on this experience, a collective initiated a series of happenings, which was called Salon Bastarde. The first happening was a late night show called "A Family Festival of the Second Generation" ("Familienfeier der Second@s"), which combined a historical-political review of assimilation and self-representation of second generation youth since the 1970s with the performance of contemporary voices of Second@ artists, researchers, and activists, which inscribed their histories and practices into the public space. In a similar fashion, an evening called "Afrodrexciya" explored the utopian archives of black diasporic music culture by combining sound listening sessions, storytelling, and live acts. In a third event, the Salon Bastarde, together with the political-cultural center Autonome Schule Zürich (ASZ), organized a "Banquet at the border" in Uster, where asylum seekers are held in bunkers and not allowed to leave the districts. During a carnivalesque dinner cooked by activists from ASZ, performative interventions by migrant activists and Roma artists made it possible to reflect on the long history of the racist border regime in Switzerland and to inhabit the borderlands "in a different way."

The Salon Bastarde was a political-affective intervention into the public space of Zurich. It attuned its protagonists to each other and allowed for a re-coding of the hegemonic public space. It produced an alternative public (space), which was not there before and which assembled people to perform a self-confident affective community.[18] Through the collaborative curatorial decisions, the agency of the institution Shedhalle was transferred to a social process in which the aesthetic, affective, and ethical conditions of postcolonial amnesia were both exposed and disrupted and a utopian moment of a new beginning became tangible.

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While the project "We all are Zurich" was an interesting, experimental way to decolonize both the routines of the institution(s) involved as well as the racialized public space of Zurich, it also has limits for thinking through a program of "decolonizing art institutions," as the Salon Bastarde accepted the local public space as well as the political framework of democratic citizenship as its reference point. Nikita Dhawan—following Spivak—is right to be skeptical about the allusion to subalternity and hybridity in European migrant activism as long as these practices are not understood within global power relations.[19] In exposing the urban Swiss space as "Othered" space within the framework of inclusive citizenship, the manifold contradictions that connect Europe to its former colonies and that manifest themselves in the materialities that build this space and in the bodies which inhabit it, were not engaged. So far, the Salon Bastarde was an important local intervention, which remained within the limits of a European space and discourse.

The contradictions and the challenge to "decolonize art institutions" become much more evident, but also more relevant, when scaling up to global dimensions. This became obvious at the International Conference DRAFT, which took place in Zurich in summer 2016. It was the second conference of a project with the same name, curated by Gitanjali Dang and Christoph Schenker, which assembled eight interdisciplinary teams (one curator, one artistic position, and one critical observer) from eight different cities from all over the world, in order to come up with artistic strategies on how to intervene in public spaces and debates. The teams from Cairo, Cape Town, Hamburg, Hong Kong, Mexico City, Mumbai, Shanghai, and Zurich had met in 2015 in Mumbai to present their ideas. One year later in Zurich, they presented their ongoing projects to each other, to students from an international summer school, and to a wider audience. There were two ethnographic moments that made clear the inherent contradictions of this project of building up an international conversation or even collaboration in the field of public art.

In one incident, a participant of the conference told me that he had told a joke to a South African man. Thinking that the joke was racist, the latter laconically answered that in some townships in his home city, one might be seriously injured if one tells this particular joke. While the participant was very self-critical about the incident, he could not fully understand the reaction of the South African student, which—and that is the point—is probably neither necessary nor possible. It only shows how, despite a globalizing popular culture (in this case of comedy) and a common framework of a summer school in art, these do not automatically deliver the affective, ethical, and cultural disposition that makes it possible to translate such complicated issues such as race und postcoloniality into an effective and affective community. In a second incident, during a discussion during a coffee break, I was told the rumor that some students had expressed their suspicion that the conference was taking place in Zurich in order to show "how rich" Switzerland was and how inferior the guests were. Without taking this as serious evidence for the organizers' intention, it just expressed the immense experiential gap that must be bridged between participants of the conference accustomed to the gentrified public space of Zurich West and others who were used to the infrastructure and the public spaces in the megacities of the Global South. Not only were the public spaces totally different, but so were the respective framework, resources of the art institutions, as was the practice of intervening in public spaces.

Yet, there was also another moment at the conference that showed the potential of artistic and curatorial projects to intervene in these ruptures in postcolonial public

spaces. In the project "Psychotropic Swiss Gold," knowbotiq, Nina Bandi, DJ Fred Hystère, and I presented our ongoing work, in which we explored the aesthetic, affective, and ethical levels of postcolonial amnesia in Switzerland, particularly Swiss trade with gold. In the presentation, the team gave background to a performance that had taken place a day earlier. The project and presentation combined artistic, theoretical and ethnographical practice on how Switzerland was involved in the gold trade with the apartheid regime and still is one of the biggest refining countries of raw gold. "Swiss Psychotropic Gold" explored how a history of violence was systematically neutralized in a regime of postcolonial amnesia. The problem was not that there was no awareness about the Swiss involvement in this history of violence, so we argued, but rather that there was an aesthetic regime that hindered subjects in the public to be affected by this knowledge. After the presentation, one member of the South African team reacted excitedly to the presentation by adding that the history just presented was connected to a place only a few hundred kilometers away from where he lived. He told the stories of the exploited bodies in the mines during apartheid and how the structural discrimination continued in today's mining industries. Although it was early morning, one could feel the full attention of the whole audience. One could hear a pin drop in the room. Suddenly, the different experiences of Switzerland suppressing its history of violence and of South Africa renegotiating the history of apartheid were affectively articulated in this space. Suddenly, it was felt as a shared history. The transnational cultural archives opened and the mass of imaginations, memories, and analyses—which were there before but not activated—could be connected. Suddenly conversations, social relations, new communities, and identifications seemed possible, those that were not possible before. On a meta-level, the DRAFT project should be looked at as the making of a new transnational public space itself, which was embedded into specific aesthetic conditions and strategies of being aligned, affected, and recognized.

Hacking the public? – Being affected by "Swiss Psychotropic Gold", by knowbotiq, at DRAFT conference in Zurich, photo: author

To be sure, the meaning of this singular moment should not be exaggerated. Yet for me it was an important ethnographic moment for understanding that we are in a multifocal world in the making, which needs adequate aesthetic, ethical, and affective repertoires, rather than only good philosophical arguments, efficient institutional set-ups, good business deals, technological solutions, or legal judgments.

The argument I want to make here is that we won't get far in terms of decolonizing art institutions if we don't have a good analysis and practice of the aesthetic make-up of public spaces in the context of de-centered capitalism. A decolonial program should not only focus on institutional measures of antidiscrimination or new funding policies, although this is highly important. If the institutional transformation is going to be successful, it has to be connected to a new aesthetic, affective, and ethical practice, one that accepts the ontological status of multiplied subjectivities, spaces, and bodies, of simultaneities of different public spaces, of the postcolonial worldliness of knowledge production. Art and art institutions should contribute to questioning the cultural mechanisms that govern this multifocal world in the making. Firstly, it is probably the strength of good artistic or curatorial practice, ethnography, or activism to inhabit and investigate the liminal spaces of the possible and impossible in the context of global change and rupture. Secondly, institutions and practices in the artistic field are themselves embedded in these global conditions, which requests reflexivity and critique as some of the main capacities of art. In the best of cases, artistic practices and institutions can contribute to the understanding and intervene in the contradictions and utopias of our times. In the worst of cases, they participate in producing and reproducing the cultural and aesthetic texture of a new hegemony. In this sense, we should not only ask where and when the historical rendezvous of decolonizing art institutions will take place, but also *how*.

Notes

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Some Theoretical and Empirical Aspects on the Decolonization of Western Collections

Marie-Laure Allain Bonilla

In academia, decolonial thinking and methodologies have been developed by scholars such as Anibal Quíjano, María Lugones, Walter Mignolo, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ramón Grosfoguel, or Linda Tuhiwai Smith[1] who are attempting to stray from the Western canon of thinking and to produce a radical alternative knowledge that takes "seriously the epistemic perspective [...] of critical thinkers from the Global South thinking *from* and *with* subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies."[2] Rather than an anti-European critique, it is about adopting "a perspective that is both critical of Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism."[3] In the context of museums, to decolonize would mean, "resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies" and "vindicating radical multiplicity."[4] It would start out by recasting modernism, insofar as this paradigm is bound up with European imperialism and coterminous with Eurocentrism. Indeed, according to the decolonial thinking, museums will not be able to decolonize their practices if they stick to the old taxonomies and values of art history as it was built during the past centuries. If we follow Dipesh Chakrabarty's prescription for the discipline of history, Europe should be provincialized and a transcultural approach of art history is much needed.[5] It would mean "going beyond an '*inclusive*' move to question the foundations upon which the notion of modern has been constructed."[6]

This epistemic turn can be seen in museums in the programming of solo shows from non-Western artists or of historical survey exhibitions that try to recast modernism by adopting a transcultural approach: such as *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* (1995), *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* (2010), *Non-Aligned Modernity: Eastern-European Art and Archives* (2016), or *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965* (2017), just to name a few examples. But these are temporary events. Ideally, a reconfiguration of art history narratives should go deeper and find a way to have a more long-lasting effect on the institution than the one produced by a temporary event, as groundbreaking as it can be.[7] Hence, a reworking of museums' collections and their displays seems the right move. If the beginning of all decolonization is theoretically a *tabula rasa*, as Frantz Fanon pointed out,[8] it is hardly an option in the case of a pre-existing collection. Things have to be negotiated and reworked *from within*, and *with* a pre-existing framework. For example, as it has been done at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, a negotiation with the collection can be made by inviting scholars and artists to work directly on the objects of the collection in order to create a new understanding and reading.[9]

But even if this experimental methodology, which took place in an ethnographic museum, "can be applied to other museums with varied historical collections,"[10] it is not a sufficient prescription to decolonize museums of modern and contemporary art, since their collections of art from the 20th and 21st centuries continuously evolve and grow. To decolonize museums collections would also mean adopting a moral and ethical position regarding the way artworks are acquired in order to make "Museums

moral again,"[11] assuming not that they have been "moral" once, but rather that their mission is to provide moral and ethical perspectives on our collective cultural and artistic memories.

To achieve this decolonial goal, museums are confronted to two complementary aspects:

- the theoretical one, which can help to give some guidance as for the way to
- solve the epistemological and ethical problems;
- and the empirical one.

We will, successively, explore the shortcomings of these two aspects in order to highlight the difficulties museums are facing today regarding the construction and the reworking of their collections in a decolonized perspective.

Theoretical Aspects

Interestingly, it is only recently that Western museums have started to show interest in the decolonial issue. In 2012, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid launched a research group, *Península. Procesos coloniales y prácticas artísticas y curatoriales* [Colonial Processes and Artistic and Curatorial Practices], to provide: an analysis of the role of the Iberian Peninsula in colonial processes, the visibility of representations and narrations from diverse past and present institutional spheres, in addition to the responses of artists, curators and researchers regarding some of the problems that stem from these narrations.[12]

In Spain still, a seminar explicitly entitled "Decolonising the Museum" was held in November 2014 at the MACBA in Barcelona.[13] It addressed colonial legacies still rooted in European museums and mindsets, as well as solutions already offered by curators to overcome these legacies. Very recently, in September 2017, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven gathered scholars, curators, and directors of art institutions around the topic of the collections "Collections in Transition: Decolonising, Demodernising and Decentralising?".[14] Even if it did not emanate from a museum, we can also mention the symposium, "De-Colonizing Art Institutions," organized in June 2017 by the Postgraduate Program in Curating of the Zürich University of the Arts but held at the Kunstmuseum in Basel.

Nonetheless, this apparently recent incursion of decolonial thinking into museums was in fact preceded by a sister thought, the postcolonial theories, which have abundantly served curatorial discourses in the West since the 1990s[15] and are to be found in art institutions under various forms, which refer more or less explicitly to them. They can be found:

- in the adoption of a geopolitical revisionism in acquisition politics;
- in the rewriting of new scenarios for the displays of their collection (by adopting a non-Eurocentric point of view);
- in the search of more horizontality in their relationships/partnerships with institutions and individualities from the Global South;
- or in their statements, with the use of rhetoric borrowed to postcolonial thinkers and writers (to date, Édouard Glissant is the main one[16]).

The role and the impact of postcolonial theories on art institutions were nonetheless reassessed at the turn of the century. This can explain the recent switch to decolonial

thinking that can appear as a more effective and radical tool than postcolonial theories – the very prefix "de" implies an action, whereas the prefix "post" suggests only a state, a condition.

In 2000, in Australia, a conference entitled "Postcolonial + Art: Where Now?" examined what postcolonial theories still have to provide to Australian visual arts, and how postcolonial revisions of (art) history have affected (or not) mainstream institutions.[17] The same year, in Great Britain, artist and thinker Rasheed Araeen, one of the most active support and diffuser of these theories through the journal *Third Text*, made a radical stand in an article.[18] According to him, the use of postcolonial theories would strengthen the dominant assumptions that they are supposed to question at the cost of the artists who would find themselves prisoners of their prescriptions. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity would be "bogus" (fake)[19] because it would be anhistorical and would help promote "postcolonial exotica."[20] But it is less the theory in itself than the "ambivalent and uncritical attitude of these postcolonial intellectuals towards art institutions and their multicultural projects"[21] that Araeen challenged. He reproached Edward Said with his lack of commitment to art discourse and with leaving his idea of exile universalized and seized by the institution. And he condemned Stuart Hall for his insistence on thinking of the cultural journey of the artist as an essential content of the artwork, which would then be used to enhance otherness in the ideological context of multicultural politics.

Araeen only saw their presence within art institutions as a way, for the latter, to legitimize their neoliberal program. Unlike the Australians who endeavored to assess the way postcolonial theories are absorbed by mainstream art institutions, Araeen concentrated almost exclusively on the role played by some of their most important producers (Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Hall). He pursued his gripes in the following years, rebuking them for forging theories (particularly the ones of cultural difference and ethnicity) that, according to him, brought about the British Black arts movement downfall[22].

If the tone and the content of Araeen's criticisms are depreciatory and seem to be rough and unfair, they should however be seen as "symptomatic of a growing unease with the contradictions in contemporary society."[23] These contradictions reside, for instance, in the gap between the formulation of radical theories and their effective practical applications within institutional politics. To blame theoreticians for a misuse of their theories falls under a fantasy to consider them as "gatekeepers of contemporary culture."[24] But under this fantasy, in reality, hides a central question: *What do we expect from theory and from the theoreticians?*

This question is fundamental to acknowledging that we cannot rely entirely on theory to build new methodologies and/or new ways of practices. Theory is a tool that can be used to justify certain choices and orientations but it is not by any means self-sufficient. How to make theories efficient within the framework of museums? How to transpose theories into practice? A group of scholars, artists, and art activists gathered under the banner of the Transnational Decolonial Institute (TDI) tries to "*critically* [engage] the Western tradition of "art" [...] and its postmodern and altermodern updates."[25] The group co-signed a "Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto" in 2011 and since then has been working toward a "cure to the colonial wound,"[26] which would result from communal work and engagement. However, the activities of the TDI (international conferences mostly) are not much deployed and have trouble entering art institutions and shaking them.

Finding a cure to the colonial wound is a difficult task, as Sarat Maharaj underlined it. He identified a *postcolonial pharmakon*, at once "poison and remedy," to cure binarisms, and a *postcolonial panacea*, which would be a strategy of inversion of power relationships.[27] But pharmakon and panacea are in conflict. Indeed, by overthrowing power relationships, the panacea recreates a binary system that the pharmakon then tries to treat, creating an infinite vicious circle. It was demonstrated at the Third Guangzhou Triennial in 2008, where, by attempting to overthrow postcolonial power relationships, the curators (a team including Sarat Maharaj), were in the end pushed into counterproductive binarisms: Asia vs. the West, postcolonialism vs. "post-postcolonialism."

Therefore, if theory should be treated cautiously insofar as it can either be distorted or increase a failure: how can an art collection concretely be decolonized? Where to begin? What are the concrete issues that institutions are facing?

Empirical Aspects

To adopt a decolonized approach of the collection, which means, a decentralized and non-Eurocentric point of view, does not come without pitfalls. In the field of acquisition policies, programs are being set up keeping in mind reaching the widest scope of action, geographically speaking, in order to *be as inclusive as possible*. Departments devoted to non-Western areas, to which a curator from the dedicated region is usually assigned, are created to develop research comprising market investigation.

Interestingly, Tate Modern's former director Chris Dercon legitimized the fact by having started to buy art in geographic areas where the Western art market hadn't arrived yet (such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia), as *a consequence of the disproportion* between the museum budget and the increase of market prices.[28] Dercon was not dishonest with this statement, but he missed addressing the issue of Tate's position. For a European museum, collecting art from almost all over the world could be interpreted as the maintenance of a colonialist attitude of plundering other cultures to enrich its own.

In the era of globalization, museums are caught in a paradox: on the one hand, the need to make their functions and policies evolve towards a geopolitical revisionism informed by postcolonial and decolonial perspectives; on the other, the risk of imposing a new geo-aesthetic expression of the Western model and perpetuating a colonial cultural domination.[29] For instance, in a few decades we will have no protection at all in terms of having issues of restitution occur regarding modern and contemporary artworks if attention is not paid to the way non-Western artworks are currently acquired by Western museums.[30] Tate Modern attempts to resolve part of the problem by organizing international curatorial exchanges and partnerships with local organizations in Kabul, Lagos, or Amman.[31]

International exchanges and partnerships with banks are also the solution found by the Guggenheim to implement its Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative (2012-2017), which fosters cross-cultural interactions and exchanges between artists, curators, and audiences via traveling exhibitions, educational programs, online activities, and collection building.[32] This project focuses on three large regions to which art experts from the regions were appointed—June Yap for South and Southeast Asia, Pablo León de la Barra for Latin America, and Sara Raza for the Middle East and North Africa. But despite a will to have a global reach, the project radically eliminates sub-Saharan countries. This omission was legitimized as follows: "The Middle East and

North Africa share a lineage that makes their consideration as an area of focus for this project more logical than with the greater continent of Africa, especially in terms of artistic developments."[33] This argument, implicitly reinforced by the idea that Arabic culture would have reached a higher level of development than Black African cultures, is the persistence of the assimilation of Africa to a "heart of darkness,"[34] a recurrent point of debate since the 1990s in many discussions on contemporary African art that try to find a way to avoid this North/South separation of the African continent. Apart from the cultural and artistic justifications, the eviction of the southern part of the African continent could also be interpreted through the economic prism of prospective partnerships, which in the eyes of UBS seems to be more appealing (promising?) in the Middle East than in Senegal or the Democratic Republic of Congo. This encourages us to consider just how much a partnership with a bank shapes museum policy in terms of collecting, exhibiting, and educating.[35] Furthermore, UBS being the main partner of the Guggenheim project irremediably links this latter to capitalism and dubious financial practices, as the Swiss bank was involved in financial scandals in 2008. It is even disconcerting that the bank name appears so prominently in the title of the project, thus tinging the whole project with this funding aspect. Indeed, as Reesa Greenberg wrote,

> The term private money resonates because in many spheres of the art world, particularly after the financial crises of 2008, private money is perceived as negative, even malevolent, in part because financial speculation is seen as the cause of the ever-inflating art market, and in part because the excessive wealth of the 1% has once again transformed the art world into a favored playing field for the super-rich, where artworks function as über-luxury goods.[36]

If to be involved in this philanthropic project could be one of the ways for UBS to restore its image, it seems, however, under the pretext of promoting art, also to be a niche in which to develop other financial placements and partnerships and to expand its activities more globally. Answering this hypothesis would though require more research.

According to Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez, the concept of global art, supposedly synonymous with openness, total inclusion, and the free circulation of goods and people, is nonetheless the expression of the *coloniality of power*.[37] Therefore, the way museums acquire artworks from all over the world and the financial partnerships in which they are contracting to complete this task must be analyzed. Inasmuch as museums drastically lack public funding, they must turn to the private sector to get their project funded. But at what price? In his article "Making Museums Moral Again," art critic Holland Cotter pointed out that,

> "Some museums [the MET, the Guggenheim] were urged to stop taking money from ethically dubious corporate or personal sources, including board members who deny that climate change is underway. Others were called out for condoning, if not actively supporting, inhumane labor practices, like those imposed on migrant workers building new Guggenheim and Louvre franchises in Abu Dhabi."[38]

Knowing the role played by colonialism in the genesis of capitalism, solutions have to be found in order to decolonize funding and to aim for more horizontality in the South/North exchanges.

Collections "are both about our failings and about our successes. They signify relations between things and ideas, between the inheritance of meaning and its erasure over time."[39] Therefore, beyond finding ethical funding in order not to reproduce the *coloniality of power*, museums have to define the terms of their collection and for this probably look at their shortcomings, and do some introspective work to understand how to address the lacks. For instance, the Stedelijk Museum and the Centre Pompidou recently each organized an exhibition of their collections addressing the issues of the latter.[40]

At the Stedelijk Museum, the question was knowing if the museum "reflect[ed] the geopolitical reality of the world."[41] After having gone through the number of artworks from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East present in the collection, the assessment was that the representation of "art from areas outside Europe (particularly Western Europe) and North America (i.e., the United States) is marginal. […] In itself, this is nothing new."[42] In his essay, Jelle Bouwhis, the curator responsible for the exhibition *How Far How Near – The World in the Stedelijk* (September 19, 2014 – February 1, 2015), went back through the history of the exhibitions held at the Stedelijk since the 1930s that had displayed non-Western art.[43] From objects from Papua New-Guinea and Africa exhibited alongside artworks from European modern artists, to African photography via art from South America, the history of Stedelijk exhibitions unveils the influence of "Soft Power"[44] on the museum. In this context, Soft Power has to be understood as the possibility for modern art to "represent an ultimate notion of freedom and cultivate forms of (geographically motivated) exclusion."[45] It can explain why exhibitions of South American artists or South African artists could have been organized at the Stedelijk but without receiving "a follow-up, simply because the presented works were difficult to slot into the paradigm of modern art."[46]

At the turn of the 21st century, the Stedelijk adopted for a different strategy, establishing long-term programs such as *Project 1975: Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Unconscious* or *Global Collaborations* that were meant to develop partnerships with art institutions in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia through exhibitions, residencies, exchanges, and collaborations, etc. Furthermore, the Stedelijk started to purchase the artworks produced (or selected) for the exhibitions held during those programs, building a collection piece by piece that more accurately reflected the shift of the museum towards more inclusivity of non-Western artists. *How Far How Near* exhibited some of these artworks, such as those by Meschac Gaba, Abdoulaye Konaté, and Billie Zangewa, showing a strong interest for artists from the African continent.
At the Centre Pompidou, the story is quite different. *Une histoire: art, architecture et design, des années 80 à aujourd'hui* was a collection display curated by Christine Macel and held at almost the same moment as the one in Amsterdam (July 2, 2014 – January 11, 2016). It then traveled to the Haus der Kunst in Munich under a slightly different title: *A History: Contemporary Art from the Centre Pompidou* (March 25 – September 4, 2016). With more than 400 artworks on display, the aim of this exhibition was to show the extent of the collection rather than to reassess its shortcomings and its lacks. Unlike the Stedelijk exhibition that was a critical introspection, the curator's statement shows that the aim was to inscribe the Centre Pompidou's approach into the classical discourse on the globalization of the art world (starting with 1989, the biennials phenomenon, etc.) and not to reassess the pitfalls of the collection regarding this history.[47] Even if Macel recognized that "because it has become nearly impossible to keep track of the entire worldwide development of art, a targeted selection was made rather than the goal of totality pursued,"[48] the non-Western areas, particularly the sub-Saharan part of the African continent, are nonetheless underrepresented in the

collection.[49] It was thus surprising to have chosen a photograph by Samuel Fosso (*La Femme américaine libérée des années 70*, 1997, acquired in 2004) to illustrate the press release sent by *e-flux*, as well as the announcement on the Haus der Kunst website. But what Macel asked was: how to address the concept of global art from a collection perspective, and how to resolve the problem of the recontextualization of an artwork? Does any so-called good, self-respecting museum need to own some "basic standards" of a (global) art history in its collection?

Conversely, in China for instance, newly founded museums are compulsively acquiring Impressionist canvases. Less about a desire to include the European avant-garde in the discourse of Chinese art history, it is more the strong use-value of these artworks that is sought after, in order to be appealing for tourism, following the "impartial economic logic [saying that] The 'success' of museums is determined by the number of visitors they attract."[50] Beyond the stakes of the market, what are the epistemological interests in owning these masterpieces? The question can be applied to any museum in the world collecting art from another part of the world, which is seen as marketable or exotically stimulating (pick one). It seems urgent to rethink the role and the mission of art museums before the globalization phenomenon, which follows the modern one, creates homogenized spaces and narratives where we would see almost the same kind of artworks and discourses whether we are in Rio, Houston, Shanghai, London, or Abu Dhabi.

Conclusion

For Western museums of modern and contemporary art, the shift towards a decolonial approach of their acquisition practices was clearly triggered not by the Independences, but much later by the globalization phenomenon which accentuated the imbalances and therefore called for non-Eurocentric policies. The different examples discussed show that the idea of decolonizing Western museums art collections (implying at least two aspects, the theoretical one and the empirical one) is a very complex issue worth further consideration. However, this decolonial challenge cannot be limited to acquisition policies and should be considered in the various sectors and missions of museums, whether those are acquisition policies turned toward non-Western artists and areas, collection displays with new narratives, the programming of temporary exhibitions of artists previously marginalized, or museum policies at large such as the recruitment of non-Western/non-white staff (not just as guards or cleaners) or education programs specifically oriented toward the deconstruction of dominant discourses.

The question of knowing how to succeed or to conceive a decolonization of museums (and their collections) cannot be reduced to only the theoretical quest of a remedy that could be applied to any museum—each museum has its own history and therefore should look for its own recipe—, nor can it only rely on the purchase of artworks supposed to rectify the narratives. The battle will probably not be won until museums become spaces of "knowledge-without-power,"[51] taking full responsibility for their role in the construction of influential narratives that are shaping the history of art, and more broadly the history of our world, in our collective memories.

This article is a shortened and rewritten version of "'Is it conceivable to decolonize the collections from Western museums of modern and contemporary art?'. Theoretical and practical aspects." *Muséologies* 10th anniversary issue, October 2017. Accessible online: URL to be added once I have it.

Notes

1 See in particular Aníbal Quijano. "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad," *Perú Indigena* Vol. 13, No. 29, 1992, pp. 11-21; Chandra Talpade Mohanty. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, Durham, 2003; María C. Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2007, pp. 186-219; Walter Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, OH, 2012; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, London/Dunedin, 1999; Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3, 2007, pp. 211-223.
2 Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," p. 212.
3 Ibid.
4 "Introduction," in L'Internationale Online ed., *Decolonising Museums*, 2015, p. 5. Accessed January 2016, http://www.internationaleonline.org/bookshelves/decolonising_museums.
5 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000.
6 Monica Juneja, "Global Art History And The 'Burden Of Representation'," In Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel Eds., *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art And Cultures*, Zkm, Karlsruhe, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2011, p. 282.
7 For instance, *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) is said to have globally changed the history of exhibitions, but what was its real impact on the Centre Pompidou's policies? This is the kind of question that needs to be asked now that we have some distance.
8 Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p. 35.
9 Clémentine Deliss, "Materiality and the Unknown, Dating, Anonymity, the Occult," in L'Internationale Online ed., *Decolonising Museums*, p. 34.
10 Ibid., p. 33.
11 Holland Cotter, "Making Museums Moral Again," *New York Times*. March 17, 2016. Accessed March 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/arts/design/making-museums-moral-again.html?_r=0. The use of the adverb "again" implies that museums have been moral once. This questionable statement could be the subject of a whole article.
12 See Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *Península. Procesos coloniales y prácticas artísticas y curatoriales.* Accessed July 2016, http://www.museoreinasofia.es/pedagogias/centro-de-estudios/investigacion/peninsula.
13 See proceedings published on L'Internationale Online. Accessed January 2016. http://www.internationaleonline.org/bookshelves/decolonising_museums.
14 See full program here: https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/collections-in-transition-sold-out/
15 See Marie-laure Allain Bonilla, *Visualiser la théorie. Usages des théories postcoloniales dans les pratiques curatoriales de l'art contemporain depuis les années 1980*. Ph.D. dissertation (art history), Rennes 2 University, 2014.
16 For more detail, see our previous article published on the topic: Marie-laure Allain Bonilla. "Some Sketches for a Hypothetical *Postcolonial Theories for Museums* Handbook," *Qalqalah*, No. 1, 2015, pp. 51-63. Available online: http://www.kadist.org/en/programs/all/2115.
17 See published proceedings: Charles Green ed., *Postcolonial + Art: Where Now?*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Woolloomooloo, 2001.
18 Rasheed Araeen, "A New Beginning. Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics," *Third Text*, No. 50, 2000, pp. 3-20.

19 Ibid., p. 8.
20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Ibid., p. 11.
22 See: Rasheed Araeen, "Re-Thinking History and Some Other Things," *Third Text*, No. 54, 2001, pp. 93-100; Rasheed Araeen, "The Success and the Failure of the Black Arts Movement," *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2004, pp. 135-152.
23 Nikos Papastergiadis, "Cultural Identity and Its Boredom: Transculturalism and its Ecstasy," in Nikos Papastergiadis ed., *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference,* Rivers Oram Press, London, 2003, p. 162.
24 Ibid., p. 164.
25 See Transnational Decolonial Institute. Accessed July 2016. https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/about-2/.
26 Ibid.
27 Sarat Maharaj, "Sublimated with Mineral Fury: prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium Asia," in *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, *The Third Guangzhou Triennial*. Guangzhou: Guandong Museum of Art, Time Museum, 2008, p. 53. Exhibition catalogue.
28 Chris Dercon speaking at the international conference *Les Clefs d'une passion* held at the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, June 12-13, 2015.
29 See Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez, "Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geo-Aesthetic Region," in Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg eds., *The Global Art World. Audiences, Market and Museums*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2009, pp. 98-116.
30 That is one of the acquisition logics followed by some collectors of contemporary African art, such as Puma's former CEO, the German Jochen Zeitz, who has been collecting contemporary African art for about twenty years with the idea of presenting it in a dedicated museum built on the continent in order to make it accessible to an audience directly concerned. The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) opened in September 2017 in Cape Town. It is not the first private museum of contemporary art in Cape Town. Last year, collector Piet Viljoen inaugurated the New Church, which hosts his collection of art from South Africa. Nonetheless, the Zeitz collection goes beyond the borders of South Africa and is much larger. For his part, Congolese businessman Sindika Dokolo, married to the daughter of Angolan President Isabel do Santos, would come to own no less than 5,000 artworks. Pending the opening of his own venue to host his collection in Luanda, Dokolo showed it in 2015 in Porto (Portugal), where he is considering establishing his European base. He also fights for the repatriation of African art stolen during the Angolan civil war and the colonial period.
31 Different programs have been established, such as The Unilever Series: turbinegeneration, which involves schools from the U.K. and all over the world working with Tate's collection, or the Level 2 Exchange Series, which works with local art structures abroad and helps create exhibitions.
32 To date, 125 artworks in a variety of mediums have been added to the collection, bringing together 67 artists from the selected areas. See the Guggenheim website for more information: https://www.guggenheim.org/MAP. Accessed July 2016.
33 Excerpt of the statement from the Director of Media and Public Relations, Betsy Ennis, as a response given to the South African online Journal *ArtThrob* asking why the sub-Saharan region of Africa was left out of the Guggenheim UBS Map Global Art Initiative. The rest of the statement read as follows: "Societies in Northern Africa pride themselves for their historical links to Arabic culture and language dating to the conquest of the region by Arab Muslims in the 7th and 8th centuries. The Middle East and North Africa have also shared the fate of suffering Western colonial rule, mainly French and British, followed a postcolonial experience where Egypt took the lead in

advocating national rhetoric that based itself on an Arab cultural revivalism in the early 20th century. There are shared cultural commonalities that continue to tie the North African states to their counterparts in the Middle East. Arabic language, and primarily its script, play a leading role in disseminating political and cultural coherence. Language and script were particularly important tools for artists in the mid century who utilized script to create a unique abstract modern visual discourse. Contemporary artists continue to explore these shared histories and legacies." Published online April 18, 2012 by M. Blackman: "Sub Saharan Africa out in the Cold," *Artthrob*. Accessed May 2012 (no longer available). http://www.artthrob.co.za/News/Sub-Saharan-Africa-out-in-the-Cold-by-M-Blackman-on-18-April.aspx#.

34 See, for example, Olu Oguibe's argument in "In the Heart of Darkness," *Third Text*, No. 23, 1993, pp. 3-8.

35 This important question needs to be addressed and requires further research that looks closely at links between private corporations, banks, and art institutions.

36 Reesa Greenberg, "Activist-Patron-Curators and North American Museums," in Heidi Bale Amundsen, Gerd Elise Mørland eds., *Curating and Politics. Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections*,Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2015, p. 53.

37 Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez, "Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geo-Aesthetic Region," p. 110. The expression "coloniality of power" was coined by sociologist and political specialist Aníbal Quijano. See: "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad."

38 Holland Cotter, "Making Museums Moral Again."

39 Clémentine Deliss, "Materiality and the Unknown, Dating, Anonymity, the Occult," p. 24.

40 More than 100,000 artworks for the Parisian museum and 90,000 for the Amsterdam museum.

41 Jelle Bouwhis, "How Far How Near – The World in the Stedelijk," in *How Far How Near – The World in the Stedelijk*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2014, p. 1. Exhibition catalogue.

42 Ibid., p. 2.

43 See Ibid., p. 1-16.

44 Ibid., p. 9.

45 Ibid., p. 15.

46 Ibid., p. 12.

47 See the English online version: Christine Macel, "A History," *Haus der Kunst*. Accessed July 2016. http://issuu.com/haus_der_kunst/docs/160418.hdk.essay.christine_macel/5?e=4227978/35159290.

48 Christine Macel, "A History," p. 4.

49 To pick just two examples: Chéri Samba is the only painter from the sub-Saharan part of the African continent to be represented in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, and only five photographers from this area are represented as well (Zanele Muholi, David Goldblatt, Guy Tillim, Malick Sidibé, and Samuel Fosso).

50 Mirjam Kooiman, "The Dutch Voc Mentality," in *Decolonising Museums.*

51 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1989, p. 41.

Trained in curatorial studies, **Dr. Marie-Laure Allain Bonilla** specializes in the history of exhibitions—her PhD dissertation highlights an untold history of the uses of postcolonial theories by curatorial practices in contemporary art since the 1980s. Her primary research concerns museum acquisition policies in the global era and the possibilities to decolonize institutional practices through

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