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# THIRD TEXT

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY ART & CULTURE



magiciens de la terre

LES CAHIERS  
DU MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE

6

SPECIAL ISSUE £4/£7

incorporating BLACK PHOENIX

# THIRD TEXT

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY ART &amp; CULTURE

## 6 SPRING 1989

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**Editorial/Subscription**

*Third Text*  
303 Finchley Road  
London NW3 6DT

**Subscriptions**

Rates for four issues

**Individuals**

UK	£14
Europe	\$30
International (airmail)	\$40

**Institutions**

UK	£28
Europe	\$50
International (airmail)	\$60

**Cheques are payable to  
Kala Press**

*Third Text* is published by  
Kala Press, part of the  
organisation Black Umbrella  
(Project MRB)

Black Umbrella (Project MRB)  
is financially assisted by  
Greater London Arts.

Typeset by Emsset, London  
NW10.

Printed by Whitstable Litho,  
Kent.

**Distribution**

Central Books  
14 Leathermarket  
London SE1 3ER

Ubiquity Distributors, Inc.  
607 Degraw Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
USA

Marginal Distribution  
37 Vine Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M69 1VP  
Canada

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ISSN 0952-8822

We are grateful to Yves Michaud, the editor of *Les Cahiers*, for his permission to publish in English the articles in this special issue of *Third Text*. These articles were originally published in *Les Cahiers du Musée d'Art Moderne*, No 28, at the occasion of the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, Paris. The copyright of these articles are with Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris.

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**JUAN FRANCISCO ELSO PADILLA**

We regret to announce the death, in November 1988, of the Cuban artist Elso Padilla, at the age of 32. Jimmie Durham's discussion with Padilla, published in the last issue of *Third Text*, serves as a brief introduction to the artist's work and ideas at a time when the work of young Cuban artists is only now becoming available to European audiences. We extend our sympathy to his relatives and friends.

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We acknowledge the financial assistance of  
the Arts Council of Great Britain



# Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse

Rasheed Araeen

This issue of *Third Text* comprises all but one<sup>1</sup> of the articles from the special issue of *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, Paris, which has been published to coincide with the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*. Our own objective in publishing these texts in English is to inform our readers about this material, and we are doing this without necessarily agreeing with the position of *Les Cahiers* or with the views of all the contributors. What interests us primarily is the debate around this exhibition; and in view of the stated aims of the exhibition, to which most of the articles are in sympathy, we feel that it is necessary that these aims are examined.

Going through the texts I have become aware of the ignorance concerning the actual state of affairs vis-à-vis other cultures (save the articles by Brett and Fisher), let alone their modern achievements. The central concern remains the same old-fashioned debate about the relationship between modernism and the traditions of others. It is not perhaps generally known that the 'other' has already entered into the citadel of modernism and has challenged it on its own ground.

The question is no longer only what the 'other' is but also how the 'other' has subverted the very assumptions on which 'otherness' is constructed by dominant culture. The lack of knowledge of, or a reluctance to recognise, what has actually occurred, historically and epistemologically, has led to the perpetuation of the very same assumptions which the exhibition claims to question. Some of these assumptions, which form the basis of modern art history, have been questioned by Benjamin Buchloh in his interview with Jean-Hubert Martin, but the discussion remains entrenched in the liberal/humanist framework.

1. Lucy Lippard's text from *Les Cahiers* is not included due to a previous commitment of the English version.

It seems that anthropology has also played an important role in the concept of *Magiciens de la terre*. The main preoccupation of anthropology continues to remain with the 'primitive', with what Buchloh calls 'the original "Other" '; and although recent work in anthropology has attempted to correct some of the earlier assumptions — particularly the notion that so-called primitive societies are static, and their artists anonymous, this correction is somehow misplaced. Moreover, the foregrounding of anthropological discourse in the context of the exhibition has somewhat distracted our attention from the fundamental issue of the relationship between the globally dominant Western culture and other cultures. If the relationship between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' is of inequality, is it possible for an equal exchange to take place within a framework which does not challenge this relationship?

Why is there such an obsession with so-called primitive societies? Where are these societies? Are not most Third World societies today part of a global system, with a common mode of production and similarly developing social structures? Although countries like India and Brazil may not be as industrialised as those of the West, the mainstream of artistic production there has for some time been part of what Jean Fisher calls 'the paradigm of modernism'. It is true that there are cultures which somehow still operate outside the limits of Western culture, but can we say that they are not affected by modern developments? Their marginality has little to do with the nature of their cultures but with the extremity of their exploitation and deprivation resulting from Western imperialism. The main struggle of many of these cultures is for the recovery of their land, as pointed out by both Jean Fisher and Guy Brett, and their entry into the modern world is very much part of their struggle for self-determination.

The attempts of radical anthropology to question some of the old assumptions are not of much use when they relate them only to so-called primitive societies of the past and do not take into account the priority of present-day struggles and their challenge to the hegemony of Western culture. The thrust of its main argument is often displaced from the centre of struggle (modernism/modern art) to the 'predicament' of other cultures.

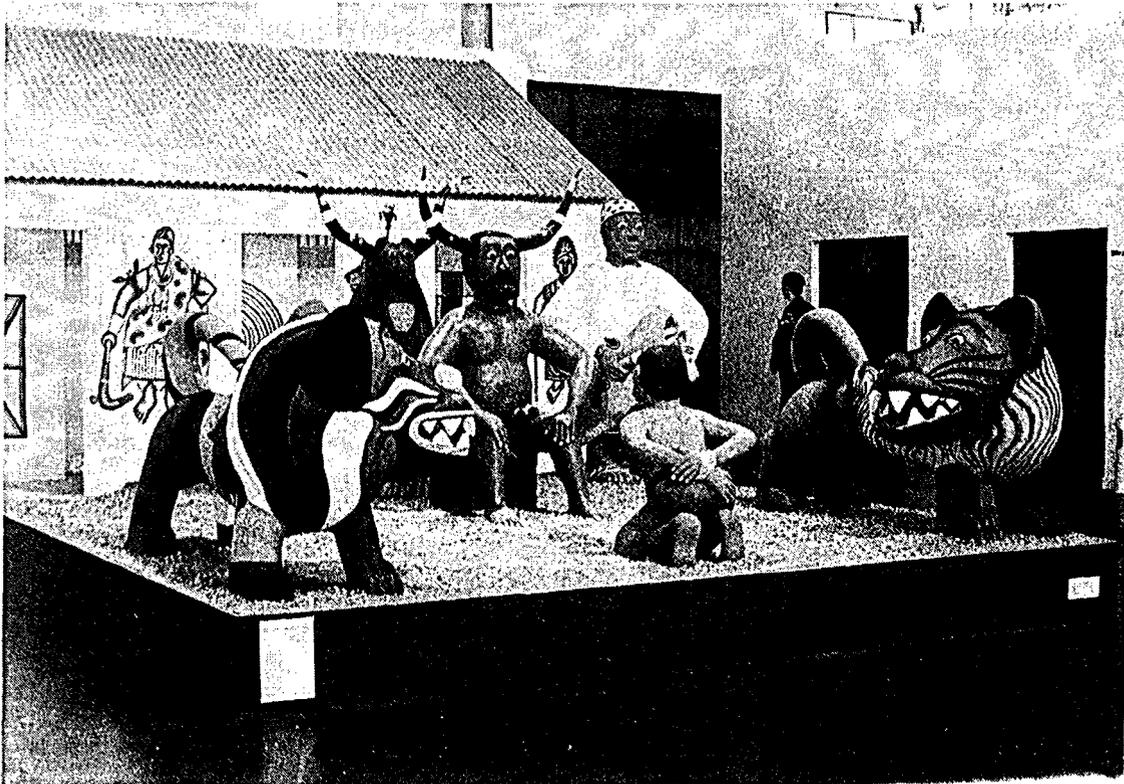
It is perhaps the recent shift towards the right in the art world, caused by the collusion of conservative, liberal and humanist forces, which has displaced the issue of power and status from the ideological struggle to cultural eclecticism. The idea of 'anything goes' is legitimised by the benevolence of dominant culture, creating a space in which the 'other' is accommodated in a spectacle that produces an illusion of equality.

*Magiciens de la terre* is indeed a grand spectacle with a lot of fascination for the exotic. There is nothing wrong with a grand spectacle, but if it ignores or undermines issues of a historical and epistemological nature then we must not be bogged down by the excitement and fascination it has produced. However, exoticism is not necessarily inherent in the works themselves. It is in their decontextualisation, not

only in the shift from one culture to another (which is inevitable), but more importantly, in the displacement from one paradigm to another; this has emptied them of their meanings, leaving only what Fredric Jameson calls a 'play of surfaces' to dazzle the (dominant) eye.

The issues here are too complex to be confined to the mere domains of ethnology and sociology. Art history may be a limited context in which to deal with cultural issues, particularly when it remains firmly entrenched in its eurocentricity, but ethnology and sociology can confuse basic issues concerning the function and status of art in advanced capitalist society. This confusion can lead us to believe that human creativity, aesthetics and art are the same things, legitimising self-expression where it is not transformed into a discourse related to the historical dynamics of its time, and where there is little recognition of the constraints and limitations of art as a professional practice. This makes it necessary to ask whether the status of art, its meanings and significances, are fixed within particular cultural or historical formations or whether they can be defined universally?

CYPRIEN TOKOUDAGBA (Benin) Installation 1989



*The term quality has been eliminated from my vocabulary, since there is no convincing system to establish relative and binding criteria of quality ...*

*I will... go by visual criteria alone, my vision and that of my colleagues...*

Jean-Hubert Martin

Is the EYE enough to recognise what we appreciate to be art? If the mere creation of visual images (whatever the reasons for making them) and their attractiveness to the EYE are enough to recognise what is art, and that their significance is available to individual sensibilities, why do we need other discourses (art history, theory and criticism, among others) in order to legitimate them as Art?

In order to understand the function of art, and the privileges of its producers (artists), in our modern culture, we need to confront the fact that the production of the commodity is fundamental (both materially and ideologically) to the very historical formation of this culture. Therefore, is it not necessary that we address ourselves to the value of the commodity and to the role it plays in global domination, instead of becoming enchanted by humanist proclamations against its fetishization? Is not the constant attempt of the bourgeoisie to humanise its dehumanised body, a condition which constantly requires s(t)imulation for its survival, creating a beautiful Mirage of many colours? It will not be realistic to deny the magical effects of such spectacle, but we should also know that there is nothing magical about it.

The concern for mass participation in our contemporary culture is understandable and is laudable, but mass participation in capitalist society is an illusion which can mask its fundamental contradictions. In the carnival everybody is equal! But what happens when the carnival is over?

In the beginning it was Modernism, modernism for everybody all over the world irrespective of different cultures. When the others began to demand their share of the modern pie, modernism became postmodernism: now there is 'Western' culture and 'other' cultures, located within the same 'contemporary' space. The continuing monopolisation of modernism by Western culture (particularly in the visual arts) is to deny the global influences of modernism, and to mask its function as a dominant force of history to which peoples all over the world are increasingly subjected. If other peoples are now, in turn, aspiring to its material achievements and want to claim their own share, why are they constantly reminded of its harmful effects on their own traditional cultures? If the aspiration to modernity and modernism is detrimental to the creativity of other cultures, why is this concern confined only to the production of art? Can we separate the question of contemporary production of art from the dominant economic system and its global effects? The trap here is too attractive: the concept of

'others' as mere victims of dominant culture will be to deny other cultures their ability to question their domination and to liberate themselves from it. Why is the aspiration of other cultures for secularism and materialism seen as antithetical to their own traditions?

The shift from modernism to postmodernism does not absolve us from our responsibility to look into the history of modernism and to try and understand the implications of what it includes and excludes. What it excludes from its recognition is not only what Buchloh calls 'the plurality of cultures', or the continuation of past traditions, but also 'the objects of high culture' produced by the 'other'. The elitism of modern art is clear to all of us, and this is not the place to argue for radical alternatives. However, any challenge to modernism, as far as Third World is concerned, must come from a premise which recognises its postcolonial aspirations for modernity. Of course, the conjuncture of postcolonial aspirations in the Third World countries and the neocolonial ambitions of advanced capitalism has produced new conflicts and contradictions, which in turn have necessitated the emergence of a critical discourse that rightly interrogates modernism's utopian/broken promises. Modernism for the 'other' remains a basic issue.

\* \* \* \*

*Magiciens de la terre* has brought to the surface, perhaps unwittingly, some of the questions which are fundamental to the understanding of this exhibition. It would be extremely difficult to discuss all the questions in detail in the space of a single article, let alone find some answers. But I feel compelled to deal with these questions after having seen the exhibition and felt terribly disappointed by the whole enterprise. One would normally feel obliged to be grateful when one is actually a participant in such an international exhibition, but it is also essential that the paternalism of power must constantly be questioned if we are not to be imprisoned by its benevolence.

My disappointment with the exhibition is not due to the quality of the work, or the display. In fact the exhibition looks very attractive; almost all the works are given equal space and are arranged in such a way that in some cases it is difficult to distinguish visually between the 'modern' and the 'traditional'. Having said all this I must also express my appreciation of some very beautiful works, particularly those of the Chinese, Chilean and Brazilian artists. My main criticism concerns the lack of any radical theoretical or conceptual framework that can justify the *togetherness* of works which represent different historical formations.

It is claimed that all the works, irrespective of their cultural origin, are presented 'on equal terms'. But is this 'equality' not an illusion? How is this 'equality' achieved, if not by ignoring the differences of different works? Of course, the differences have been allowed to enter into a common space. But what is the significance of this entry? Is it possible for 'difference' to function critically in a curatorial space where the criticality of 'difference' is in fact negated by the illusion of visual

similarities and sensibilities of works produced under different systems, displacing the question of the unequal power of different works from the domain of ideology to cultural aesthetics. No wonder the common denominator here is a presumed 'magic' of all works which transcends socioeconomic determinants. If Western artists sell their work for large sums of money, this is not due to an imperative of power which legitimates their work as precious commodities but the presumed magic of their work! Why does this magic not work in the case of non-European artists?

However, *Magiciens de la terre* is an extremely important exhibition. Not only for its physical scale — one hundred 'artists' from all over the world in an exhibition occupying both the top floor of the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Grand Hall of La Villette — but also for its global ambition; not only for its claim to represent many different cultures but also for its presumed intention to question those cultural distinctions which have divided the world. These claims take on a particular significance when viewed in the context of the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution with its famous proclamation of LIBERTY, EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY. We know what has happened in the whole world since then. If the French Revolution inspired the peoples of the world to seek freedom and equality, it is also now a reminder of the constant failure of its aims. But it seems that the Emperor does not want to be reminded of his nakedness, not when he is actually wearing so many colourful clothes imported from all over the world. Shouldn't we in fact be grateful for an imperial benevolence (the project has cost 3 million pounds) that has enabled magicians from all over the world to participate in and celebrate something whose spirit relates to all peoples? Shouldn't we just do what is expected of us: entertain and not ask silly questions on such an auspicious occasion?

\* \* \* \*

Are we being dogmatic or cynical in our attitude? Let us look at the exhibition again, to see what it comprises and what it claims to achieve, historically and epistemologically, before we pass judgement on it.

Jean-Hubert Martin, the Director of the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Commissioner of the exhibition, in his statement of 1986 describes the exhibition as comprising the following sections:

1. Artists from the artistic centres: A representative selection of art today, showing the mature artists of the last twenty years most committed to the avant-garde; artists with links to non-European cultures.

— African and Asian artists living in the West whose work reveals elements of their own cultural roots. Western artists whose work shows a concern for cultures other than their own.

2. Artists who do not belong to these centres but to the 'peripheries'.

- Works of an archaic nature intended for ceremonies and rituals, linked to transcendental religious experience or magic...
- Traditional works showing an assimilation of external influences (e.g. aeroplanes or motor-bikes found on Nigerian Gelede masks).
- Works from the artists' imagination, sometimes marginal, re-inventing or re-discovering a cosmogony or interpretation of the world.
- Works of artists who have been trained in Western or Westernised art schools.

The claims (paraphrased) are as followings:

- *Magiciens de la terre* is the first world-wide exhibition of contemporary art.
- It questions the false distinction between Western cultures and other cultures.
- And its main objective is therefore to create a dialogue between Western cultures and other cultures.

It is the 'super-empiricism' (as Yves Michaud, the editor of *Les Cahiers*, has phrased it) of Jean-Hubert Martin which has formulated the framework of the exhibition and one shouldn't object to it. All exhibitions, national or international, work around predetermined frameworks, which are often thematic or historical, and the limitation of the aims can be justified by the specificity of frameworks. But what is special about this exhibition is its extreme ambiguity, masked by the goodwill and dedication of its organisers. And yet it can be located within what is often described as colonial discourse.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, *Magiciens de la terre* is a departure from the famous exhibition, 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art (MOMA, New York, 1984) since *Magiciens...* does not deal only with objects from other cultures but includes living artists from these cultures on a basis which appears to be one of equality: the world is equally divided between Western and non-Western artists with equal participation. But what is the significance of this departure? Does the mere inclusion of non-Western artists in this exhibition question the basic assumptions on which past similar exhibitions were based? Are these not the same assumptions that privilege the Western artist (modern, white and male) and exclude the non-Western artist (the 'other') from the domain of modern art? This question can be dismissed on the basis that the exhibition's objectives are different, and it does not deal with the question of modernism or the history of modern art. But is this dismissal not based on the assumption that other cultures have not yet responded creatively to modernism and have only become victims of what Jean-Hubert Martin calls 'Western contamination'? The very use of the word 'contamination' echoes the essentialism of 19th century racial cultural theories, according to which cultures belonging to different races must remain pure for their survival.

2. For further reading see my article 'From primitivism to Ethnic Arts', *Third Text* No. 1, Autumn 1987.

On the state of art outside the Western world, Jean-Hubert Martin contemplates: 'the imposition of Western codes of behaviour upon the Third World has destroyed or at least contaminated everything; and in our eagerness to chastise ourselves we failed to go and see what was really happening'. I will not disagree with the question of imposition, but what are the results of this imposition? Its victims are everywhere, except for those who managed to keep themselves inside their own traditions? So Martin sends his men to Indian villages in search of 'what was really happening', by bypassing all that which had anything to do with modern developments:

I want to show individual artists, not movements or schools, and in that sense I'm trying to do exactly the opposite of what the Biennale de Paris has traditionally exhibited when it relied for its selection on the information provided by the cultural functionaries of the individual countries who are all more or less imitating mainstream culture of the Western world, the Ecole de Paris or New York painting.

Was the Director of Folk Art in Delhi not approached for his contacts and advice? Why was the 'functionary' of the Folk Art Museum more authentic than a 'functionary' of the Museum of Modern Art? By

BOWA DEVI (India) Installation 1989



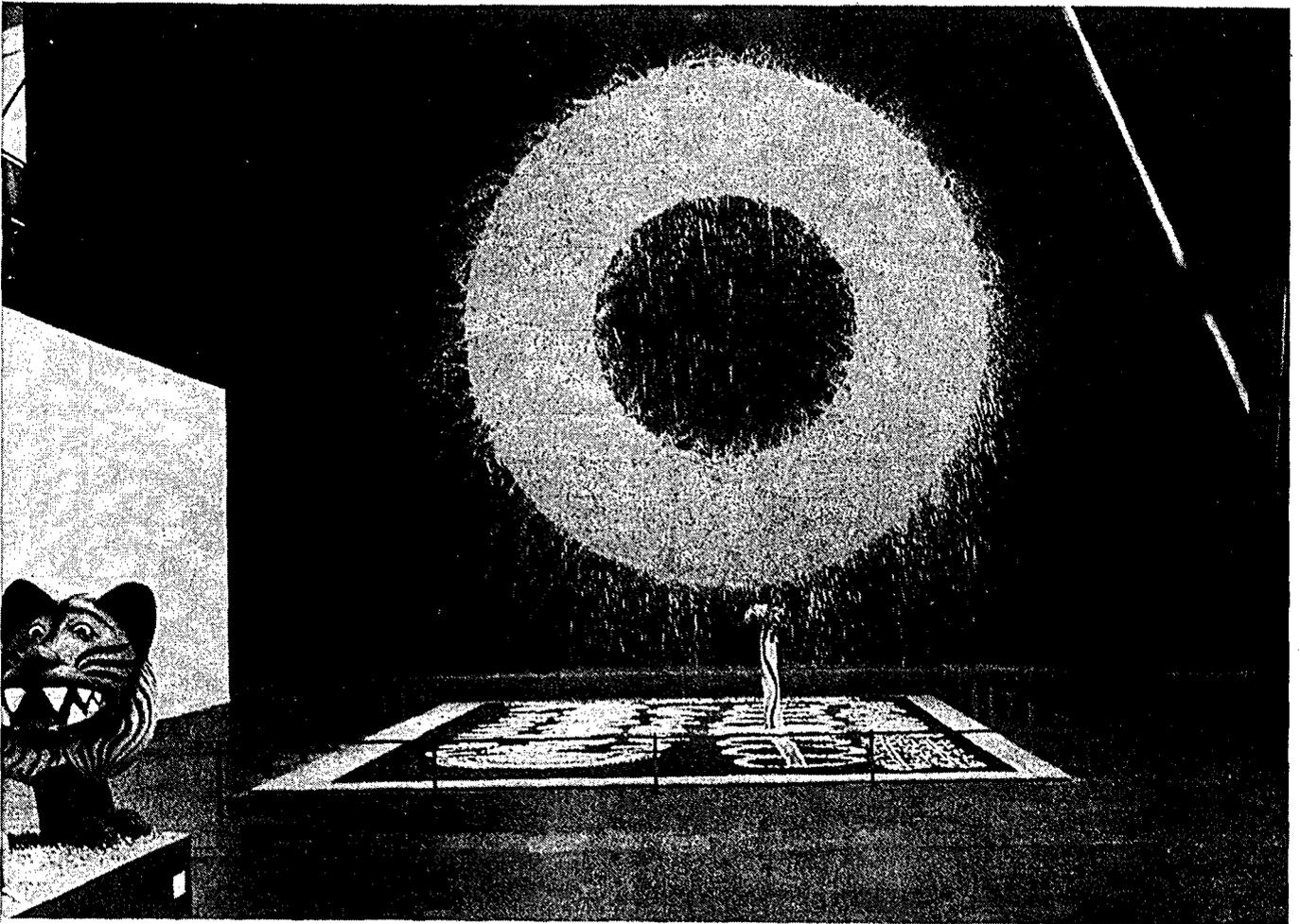
bypassing the institutions of modern art in India are we not deliberately ignoring its recent history? And in recognising only traditions, is one not reminded of the same old colonial game of promoting tribal/traditional structures in the perpetuation of imperial power?

Metaphors are important in the understanding of a complex reality. And here is one: Bowa Devi, one of the *Magiciens* (sic), a folk painter from Bihar, India, stands in front of her wall painting during the opening of the exhibition, accompanied by a man (perhaps her husband) and a boy (perhaps her son). Every time someone approaches and addresses them (they are unable to communicate verbally because of the language problem, but this is beside the point), they raise their hands together in the air and do *namaste* (the Indian way of greeting), in the manner of an Air India hostess. This is constantly repeated during the whole occasion. What better way than this to communicate!

Perhaps Bowa Devi's response was not in itself a gesture of submission. It depressed me because it reminded me an Indian stereotype: meek and humble, ready to salute as soon as the master is in sight. Moreover, the entire exhibition was conceived and arranged in such a way that it would minimise all differences and conflicts. In fact, the process of homogenisation worked so well in some cases that even extreme differences appear to be eliminated. Entering the Grand Hall of La Villette and looking towards the end wall, one immediately noticed a large work by Richard Long which covered the whole wall and overshadowed everything else. However, on approaching it, one then saw traditional works by Esther Mahlangu (South Africa) and by the Yuendumu Aboriginal community (Australia). All these works were placed in such a way that their 'similarities' eradicated their differences. It was revealing the way the question of the difference of status of the artists in the exhibition was discussed in the Colloquium a few weeks later. It was argued by an official that there was in fact no difference because it was not evident in the exhibition.

If all the things are equal and same, why was nobody sent to the villages of Europe? Is there no folk or traditional art in Europe? If the purpose of the exhibition was to question distinctions between modern works of art and folk or traditional art, why was this not done also within or in relation to Western culture? It appears that the assumption is that Western culture alone has passed from one historical period to another and its contemporary creativity is represented only by modern art. Can one avoid an implication here that other cultures, in spite of their contacts with the West, do not yet have a modern consciousness? Or if they do, it is not important to their creativity?

Are we really breaking the distinctions or reinforcing the very same assumptions which divide the world into the West (modern/dynamic) and the 'Other' (traditional/static)? There is no point in repeating here that traditions do not necessarily represent static societies. The important point is that other cultures have already aspired to modernity, and as a result have produced modern works of art. Many of the artists from Africa, Asia and Latin America are now to be found



RICHARD LONG (UK) *Mud Circle (on the wall)* 1989  
 YUENDUMU ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY (Central Australia)  
 Ceremonial Ground Painting, Installation 1989

living in the Western metropolis where they have been in the forefront of modern movements. Their work has very little to do with what Martin calls 'their own cultural roots'. Of course, their relationship with the Western society they live in is problematic, as much as their relationship with modernism, and in many cases this problematic has entered into their work. Is it not the actual presence of the 'other' in the Western society which has exposed many of its contradictions? Why are we so afraid to recognise these contradictions?

If, as pointed out by Martin, 'cultural functionaries' of Third World countries have failed to expose the best of their contemporary work, how do we explain the total ignorance about the achievement of non-

European artists in the West? Why are they invisible? Look at any major gallery, museum or art journal, in the West and you would know what I mean. In spite of the claim to represent the world, it is the white artist who is everywhere.

How can we judge those works of art which have not been allowed to enter the international art market, and which do not have the privileged position of their Western contemporaries? Is it not paradoxical that Martin should speak from the very position which refuses to recognise the necessity of non-European artists entering the paradigm of modernism to question those distinctions he himself wants to destroy?

It is significant the way a distinction between Western artists and other artists living in what Martin calls 'artistic centres' has been made. Whilst African and Asian artists are identified by 'their own cultural roots', Western artists are recognised by 'their concern for cultures other than their own'. In other words, the relationship of African and Asian artists to their cultures is presumed to be 'natural', but it is not clear what connects Western artists to other cultures. Of course, we all know that the Western artist occupies historical space (read Hegel), and it is his historical mission to be 'concerned' with other cultures.

The difference between 'their own' and 'other than their own' is fundamental to the distinction between AfroAsian artists and Western artists, and I would go further and say that it's this presumed difference which has prevented the recognition of modernity in the work of AfroAsian artists whether they live in the West or in their countries of origin.

It would be a useless exercise here to cite the actual achievements of AfroAsian artists vis-a-vis modernism, not only because prevailing ignorance will turn every argument into 'the victim syndrome' but in the face of prevailing attitudes and assumptions in the West it would face an intellectual blockage which would be difficult to break through.

Instead of recognising the problematic position of other cultures in relation to modernism, with all its conflicts and contradictions, Martin only sees pastiches and imitations of Western culture everywhere. And then he perhaps concludes that modernism is no good for other cultures. They better keep out of it (postmodern prescriptions?), by sticking to their own traditions. Martin's sincerity and good intentions are not in question here. He seems to be a very good chap and is genuinely concerned about the divisions which exist between different cultures and the resulting lack of dialogue. During our private conversation, he explained his position to me:

I do not make distinctions between objects in the museum of ethnology and the museum of modern art. They are all art, and I want to break those distinctions which keep them apart. All art objects, if they are beautiful and represent creativity, give pleasure; and this is my aim for the exhibition. I want people to look at these objects and enjoy them. I don't care whether they have any value or status.

Nobody would disagree with his concern about the 'distinctions', but it does not seem to deal with or question those structures which

underpin these distinctions. There is no harm in one's idiosyncratic understanding of things, but if it is not located, both theoretically and historically, within the specificity of the discourse called art, then one is not really serious about one's intentions.

The distinction between the modern and the traditional is not really false, because it is the result of a historical force which is dominant today. If we wish to challenge this distinction then it will have to be done within a context which challenges the dominance of Western culture. *Magiciens de la terre* has very cleverly confused this question by assuming that other cultures are facing some kind of spiritual crisis resulting from 'Western contamination'.

The crisis is in fact of Western humanism; its failure to come to terms with the modern aspiration of the 'other'. What happened in Iran, for example, is not the result of what Jean-Hubert Martin calls a 'search for spirituality', but a direct result of Western imperialism which frustrated the aspirations and struggles of Iranian people to achieve a modern, secular and democratic society in the postwar period. The Shah of Iran was not an Oriental despot but an imperial puppet for whom modernism meant imitating everything Western or American. When, in 1972, a museum of modern art was built in Tehran, with American design and technicians, its administration was handed over to an American team; which, of course, spent millions of pounds (Iran's money) buying American works. As for Iranian artists, they were perhaps living in exile in London, Paris or New York and ignored on the basis that they were producing 'imitations' of Western art.

It is easier to be cynical and dismissive about modernism in Third World countries than to recognise not only those structures which are responsible for what is actually happening in other cultures, but also those assumptions which continually reinforce the marginalisation of the Third World.

The example of Iran is an extreme case, but it is meant to be a metaphor. The struggle in Third World countries is not for 'spirituality' but for independent societies, which are democratic, modern and secular, and contemporary art produced in these countries is part of this struggle. The question of socialism is extremely important for us but it does not supercede the present stage of anti-imperialist struggle to claim our independent place in the modern world.

The failure of *Magiciens de la terre* to take into consideration the present historical and material conditions of other cultures, their aspirations and struggles to enter into the modern world with all its conflicts and contradictions, and what they have actually achieved within these limitations, is to mystify the production of art and to remove it from the question of power and privileges. By this failure it has defeated its own stated objective to provide a viable framework which would break the distinctions and allow a dialogue among the diversity of contemporary art from all over the world.

## EDITORIAL

This summer issue of *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* has been published to coincide with the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* as a first critical reflection on that project.

When one takes into account the originality of this exhibition, which is the first truly international exhibition of contemporary art, and when one takes into account that what it really is (what it will show and how it will show it) will produce the kind of effects and provoke the kind of reflections which could scarcely be envisaged when the project was conceived, it would have made little sense to bring together a set of theoretical texts whose whole thrust would have been in some sense predetermined. It would, moreover, have been dishonest to contemplate having texts taking sides with or against an exhibition which nobody had seen and which it would almost certainly be difficult to have a clear idea about in advance.

We therefore decided to ask for contributions from people who, in one way or another, are engaged in similar or related enterprises, from specialists who have long taken an interest in this opening up of art to what has, for a long time, been seen as its peripheries. Thus we contacted ethnologists and anthropologists, art-critics and fieldworkers.

The contributions then fell into fairly natural categories. After a general overview of the main contours of this project, we present more detailed surveys of particular fields. We cannot claim to cover the whole world; these 'dispatches' from the field (from Japan, Australia and India) are valuable as sounding

boards for ideas, and, I might add, because of their tone and rhythm, which speak for themselves.

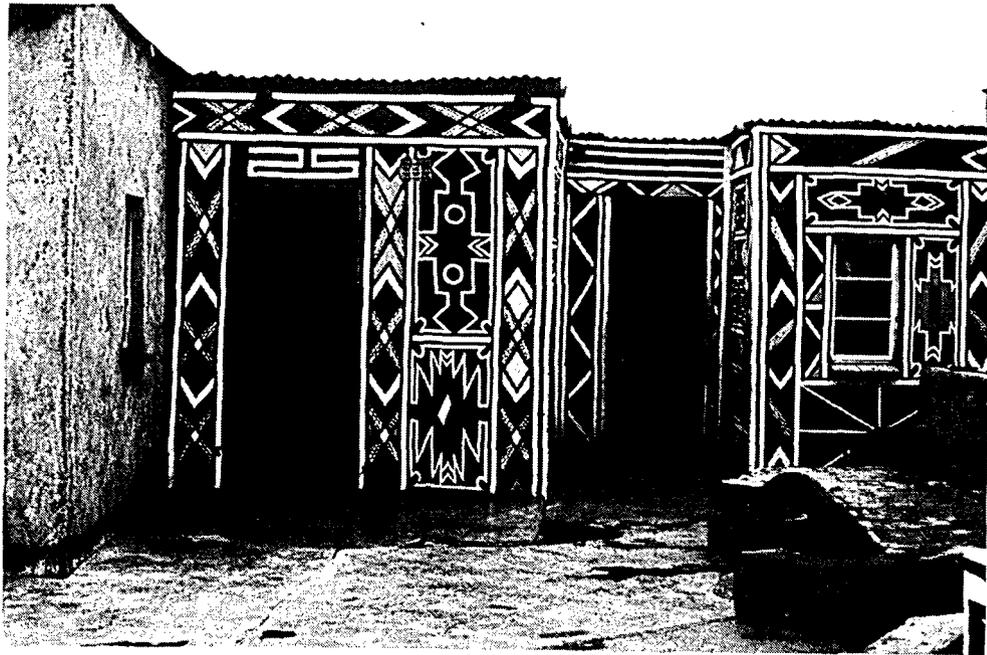
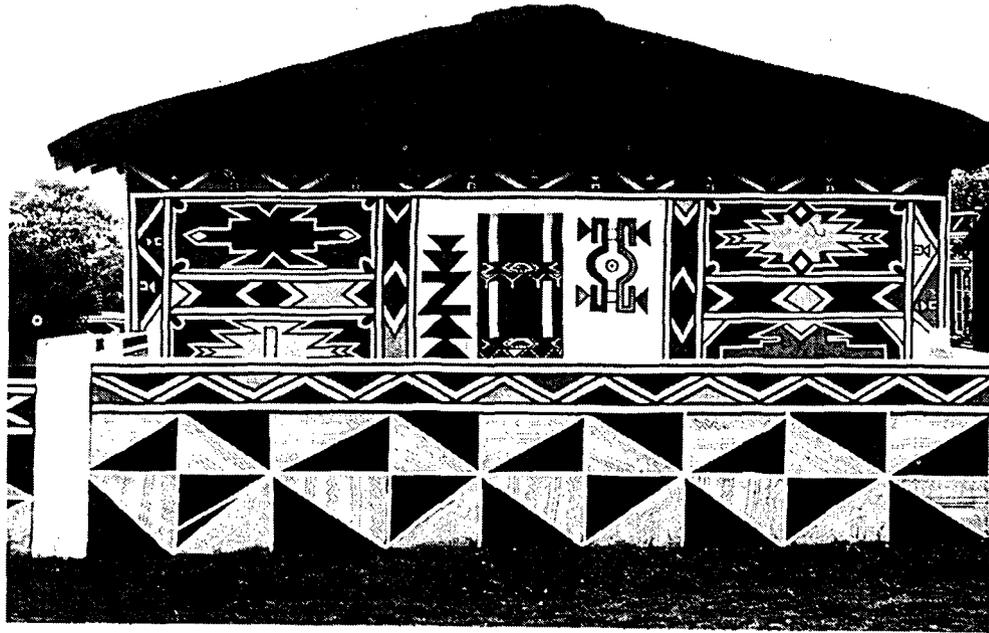
We then hand over to the anthropologists and ethnologists. They write of that foreign way of looking which is applied to so-called primitive arts, and of the efforts which we must make to modify our approach, of the methods we should follow and the revisions that this entails, as well as of the advances that have already been made.

The last, and longest, group of articles reflects on what is at stake in *Magiciens de la terre* and on the conditions and perspectives of such a project. These articles speak of a watershed in our conception of art.

We are aware, in this edition, that the thoughts presented are in the process of being worked out, that the documentation is being constantly refined and reformulated, that the whole represents the practical application of a way of thinking. That indeed was our aim: neither to praise the project nor to criticize it, but to take it seriously and attempt to gauge its strengths.

In doing so, we feel we are being faithful to the spirit of *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, which is both to study and re-evaluate the recent past and to engage in the most advanced research and explore the newest perspectives with the conviction that new ideas can be born of this combination of two critical thrusts.

Yves Michaud



ESTHER MAHLANGU Mural Painting (Mabhokho, Kwandebele) 1987  
(Photo. A. Magnin)

# INTERVIEW

BENJAMIN H.D. BUCHLOH — JEAN-HUBERT MARTIN

*Benjamin Buchloh:* In the discussions of the last few years, the question of cultural decentralization has emerged as increasingly important: from the decentering of traditional conceptions of the author/subject construction to the challenge of the centrality of the *oeuvre* and the concept of the work of art as a unified substantial object. But it ranges further, from the critique of the hegemony of the class culture of bourgeois Modernism to the challenge of the dominance of the cultural production of the Western Capitalist world and its market over the cultural practices in the social and geo-political 'margins'. Cultural decentralization aims at a gradual recognition of the cultures of different social and ethnic groups within the societies of the so-called First World as much as at the recognition of the specificity of cultural practices within countries of the so-called Second and Third World. Does the project *Magiciens de la Terre* originate in these critical discussions or is it just another exercise in stimulating an exhausted artworld by exhibiting the same contemporary products in a different topical exhibition framework?

*Jean-Hubert Martin:* Obviously the problem of centre and periphery has been reflected in European-American avantgarde culture in recent years, but our exhibition project *Magiciens de la Terre* is a departure from that. First of all, already on the geographical level we want to reflect on contemporary art production on a global, worldwide scale. But

the questions of centre and periphery have also been asked with regard to authorship and *oeuvre*, especially since, in a number of the contexts with which we will be dealing, the artist's role and the object's functions are defined in a manner entirely different from our European way of thinking. As for the problem of marginality, it is difficult and delicate to include artists from different geo-political contexts in an exhibition of Western (Euro-American) contemporary art, the dominant art of the centres. But we come to recognize that in order to have a centre you need margins and the inverse is true as well. Therefore *Magiciens de la Terre* will invite half of its approximately one hundred artists from marginal contexts, artists practically non-existent in the awareness of the contemporary art world.

*B.B.:* How will you go about this project without falling precisely in the worst of all traps, seemingly inevitable: to deploy once again ethnocentric and hegemonic criteria in the selection of the participants and their works for the exhibition?

*J.-H.M.:* I agree, this is in fact the first trap one thinks of but I would immediately argue that it is actually an inevitable trap. It would be worse to pretend that one could organize such an exhibition from an 'objective, unacculturated' perspective, a 'decentered' point of view precisely. How could one find a 'correct' perspective? By including artists on a

proportional scale, or by having the selections made by cultural functionaries in each country, whose principles are infinitely less elaborate than ours? Or by political commissaries from the UNESCO, according to the size of the population of each country? I do not believe that this is possible. It would throw us back into the worst mistakes from the beginning of the Paris Biennale when the artists were selected by national commissaries who only chose what they considered to deserve the official stamp of cultural and political authority. It was bound to become a disaster of officious and official culture. Therefore, I have argued for the exact opposite: since we are dealing with objects of visual and sensual experience, let us really look at them from the perspective of our culture. I want to play the role of somebody who selects these objects from totally different cultures by artistic intuition alone. My approach — in a way — will therefore be the opposite of what you suggest: I will select these objects from the various cultures according to my own history and my own sensibility. But obviously I also want to incorporate the critical reflections on the problem of ethnocentrism, the relativity of culture, and intercultural relations which contemporary anthropology provides.

*B.B.:* Which are the self-critical and corrective elements in your method and procedure? Are you actually working with anthropologists and ethnographers on this project, and with specialists from within the cultures that you approach from the outside?

*J.-H.M.:* Yes, I have collaborated with numerous anthropologist and ethnographers in the preparation of this project. This collaboration has proven to be very fertile since it has helped to assess the role of the individual artist in the various societies, their specialized activities and the functions of their formal and visual languages. By the way, our exhibition project emerges at a moment when many anthropologists have started to ask themselves why they have privileged myth and language traditionally over the sign of visual objects. The corrective critical reflections I am primarily thinking of are ethnographic theories of ethnocentrism as they have been developed over the last twenty or more years. I have also

benefitted from the advice of ethnographers and specialists of local and regional cultures when it came to obtaining precise information in order to prepare research and travels. In some cases we have conducted these exploratory travels in the company of ethnographers. We went for example to Papua New Guinea in the company of François Lupu.

But let us not forget, after all, I have to think of this project as an 'exhibition.' That is, if an ethnographer suggests a particular example of a cult, let us say in a society of the Pacific, but the objects of this culture would not communicate sufficiently with a Western spectator in a visual-sensuous manner, I would refrain from exhibiting them. Certain cult objects may have an enormous spiritual power, but when transplanted from their context into an art exhibition they lose their qualities and at best generate misunderstandings, even if one attaches long didactic explanatory labels to them. In the same manner I had to exclude a number of artisanal objects, since many of the societies we are looking at actually do not differentiate between artist and artisan.

*B.B.:* Another crucial problem of your project as I see it is that, on the one hand, you do not want to construct a colonialist exhibition, like the one in Paris in 1931, where the objects of religious and magical practices were extracted from their functions and contexts as so many objects displayed for the hegemonic eye of control, Imperialist domination and exploitation. On the other hand, you neither want to simply aestheticize these heteronomic cultural objects once again by subjecting them to the Western Modernist concept of 'Primitivism'.

*J.-H.M.:* Our exhibition has nothing to do with that of 1931 which clearly originated from the perspective of economic and political colonialism. The exhibition of 1931 has, however, inevitably served as a negative reference point for the authors of the catalogue and will be critically discussed. Concerning the problem of the cultural object and its context I would like to make two arguments. First of all, when it comes to foreign literature, music and theatre, nobody ever asks this question, and we accept translation — which we know

to be most often a falsification — as a form of mediation. Now you might argue that these are temporal and aural forms of artistic experience, different from the spatial and visual objects we are dealing with. Here different modes of reception clearly apply and a Western viewer sees in a manner altogether different from an Asian viewer, even though the moment of retinal experience is actually identical. But, nevertheless, to argue therefore that it is impossible to present visual — spatial objects outside of their cultural context seems absolutely horrible to me when, in fact, since centuries this type of communication has occurred within the fields of literature for example. That is my first argument...

B.B.: If I may interrupt here, it seems evident that your problem is that of Modernist art history which has traditionally only contemplated the objects of high culture, even though Modernist avantgarde art is constituted in the dialectic relationship with mass culture from its very beginnings. The objects and the users of mass culture — if considered at all — were at best compartmentalized into a different discipline (sociology, or more recently that of mass cultural studies). In the same manner that traditional art history has always excluded the plurality of cultures within bourgeois culture, your attempt to select only the 'highest artistic quality' from the cultural practices of 'the Others' runs the risk of subjecting them to a similar process of selection and hierarchization.

J.-H.M.: This is another point to which I will return. But let me first make my second argument. A criticism instantly voiced with regard to this project is the supposed problem of decontextualization and the betrayal of the other cultures. Yes, the objects will be displaced from their functional context and they will be shown in a museum and an exhibition institution in Paris. But we will display them in a manner that has never before been employed with regard to objects from the Third World. That is, the makers of the objects will be present for the most part, and I will avoid finished moveable objects as much as possible. I will favour actual 'installations' (as we say in our jargon) made by the artists specifically for this particular occasion. Works of art are always

the result of a ritual or a ceremony, and that is just as true for a famous painter of the 19th century where — in a manner of speaking — we are looking at a 'mere residue' as well. One always speaks of the problem of 'context' when it come to other cultures, as though the same problem would not emerge for us in the confrontation with a Medieval miniature or even a Rembrandt painting when we visit the museum. Only a few specialists really know anything at all about the context of these objects, even though we would claim that these objects constitute our cultural tradition. I know that it is dangerous to extricate cultural objects from other civilizations, but we can also learn from these civilizations which, just like ours, are engaged in a search for spirituality.

B.B.: This concept of an abstract transhistorical experience of 'spirituality' seems to be at the core of your project. In that respect it reminds me of the exhibition '*Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art* which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984. There a presumed spirituality was equally placed at the centre of the exhibition, operating regardless of social and political context, regardless of technological development of the particular social formations. Don't you think that the search for the (re-) discovery of spirituality originates in the disavowal of the politics of everyday life?

J.-H.M.: Not at all. As you will recall, the main criticism levelled at this exhibition at the time was that it was a formalist project. To me it seems important to emphasize the functional rather than the formal aspects of that spirituality (after all, magic practices are functional practices). Those objects which act in their spiritual function, on the human mind, objects which exist in all societies, are the ones of interest for our exhibition. After all, the works of art cannot simply be reduced to a retinal experience alone. It possesses an aura which initiates these mental experiences. I would go even further and argue that precisely those artistic objects which were created twenty years ago by artists with the explicit desire to reduce the auratic nature of the work of art by emphasizing its material objectness, appear now as the most spiritual ones. In fact, if you talk to the artists of that generation you will

often encounter their own involvement with the concept of the 'magic' in work of art. We have to admit that there is a sphere of social experience which has taken over the space of religion, and while it does not fulfill religion's communal functions it involves large segments of our society.

*B.B.:* It sounds as though you are arguing that the failure of artistic practices of the Sixties to emancipate art from ritual (what Walter Benjamin called its parasitical dependence), could now be compensated best by ritualizing these practices themselves. To mention an example: when Lothar Baumgarten set out in the late 1970's to visit tribal societies of the Amazon, which are now threatened with destruction, he operated in the manner of an amateur ethnographer. But he also operated from within a Modernist artistic tradition: to search and discover the values of exotic cultures in order to reconstitute the cult value of the work of art, its share in the ritualistic experience. Paradoxically, in doing so, artists of that tradition in Modernism have contributed to the conception of a highly problematic vision of the 'Other' in terms of 'primitivism'. I wonder whether this is not the model upon which your exhibition is based as well. Is that the reason why, in the course of the preparation of his contribution for your exhibition, you sent Lawrence Weiner to Papua New Guinea?

*J.-H.M.:* There are enormous prejudices in what you just said concerning our exhibition project. The basic idea during the elaboration of our exhibition was to question the relationship of our culture to other cultures of the world. Culture here is not an abstract generality but describes a set of relations that individuals have among each other and with which we interact. I wondered whether it would be possible to accelerate these relationships and the dialogue ensuing from them. That is the reason why I suggested that Lawrence Weiner should go to Papua New Guinea. Let me emphasize that first of all this exhibition wants to initiate dialogues. I oppose this idea that one can only look at another culture in order to exploit it. It is first of all a matter of exchange and dialogue, to understand

the others in order to understand what we do ourselves.

*B.B.:* Inevitably your project operates like an archaeology of the 'Other' and its authenticity. You are engaged in a quest for the original cultural practices (magic and the ritual), when in fact what you would find most often, I presume, are extremely hybridized cultural practices in their various stages of gradual or rapid disintegration and extinction as a result of their confrontation with Western industrial media and consumer culture. Are you going to 'distill' the original objects for the sake of an artificial purity, or are you going to exhibit the actual degree of contamination and decay within which these forms of cultural production actually exist?

*J.-H.M.:* On the contrary. I have never stopped saying that there is an original purity to be discovered elsewhere. The fact that earlier arts were 'without history', has produced too many myths. All the work shown will be the fruit of exchange influences and of changes derived from our civilisation or from others.

I think there is a real misunderstanding about my way of looking at these phenomena. I am in fact very interested in archaic practices (I would like to avoid the problematic term of the 'primitive'). I am really against the assumption (underlying in a way also Rubin's exhibition) that we have in fact destroyed all other cultures with Western technology. A text written by the Aboriginal artists of Australia participating in this exhibition has clarified this for me. They explain the problem of decontextualization perfectly well, only to continue by arguing that they commit their 'treason' for a particular purpose: to prove to the white world that their society is still alive and functioning. Exhibiting their cultural practices to the West is what they believe to be the best way to protect their traditions and their culture at this point in time.

*B.B.:* It sounds as though you are engaged in some kind of a reformist project, in search of residual magic cultures in the societies alien to ours, and in pursuit of revitalizing the magic potential of our own.

*J.-H.M.:* Obviously we live in a society where

we always speak from our position about the others and we judge their position from ours, and it is 'us' who think 'them' as still being involved in magic. It is an *a priori* upon which we naively rely, when it is actually infinitely more complicated than that and we have no idea how it really functions. In the same manner that we do not know how magic thought functions in our society, and obviously, there is a lot of it.

*B.B.*: Is your exhibition going to address the magic rituals of our society as well? You seem to be looking for an irrational power that drives artistic production in tribal societies, and you seem to argue that there is a need for our society to rediscover this power. By contrast, the actual mechanisms in which magic rituals are practiced in our society, in the fetishization of the sign, in spectacle culture and in commodity fetishism, do not seem to be of interest to you.

*J.-H.M.*: But I am also not in search of an original purity, even though there are cultures which still have had very little exposure to Western civilization and whose modes of thinking are utterly different from ours. It astonishes me more and more, the longer I have been working on this project, that even in serious studies the ideal of an archaic and authentic production is upheld, possibly even that of a collective production, when in fact the number of objects which would truly qualify for this category is rather small. We know that for the most part these practices have been compromised or destroyed altogether...But in the large cities of Asia and Africa, where the shocks resulting from the encounter between the local cultures and the Western industrial cultures still reverberate, one finds numerous manifestations that we would, once again, have to identify as works of art. And one finds examples from both spheres, objects of a traditional local high culture as much as objects of popular culture.

*B.B.*: Don't you think we have to differentiate between the residual forms of high culture and local popular culture on the one hand and the emerging forms of mass cultural consumption on the other?

*J.-H.M.*: No, I do not exclude the objects of mass culture, but I am really interested in finding the individual artist or artists that one can name and situate and that have actually produced objects. I refuse to show objects which claim to be the anonymous result of a cultural community. That to me seems precisely a typically perverted Western/European idea that I want to avoid at all cost. If fifty craftspeople produce more or less the same type of cult object, that does not interest me. I am looking for the one that is superior to all the others, more individual than the rest.

*B.B.*: You don't seem to mind that this approach re-introduces the most traditional conception of the privileged subject and the original object into a cultural context that might not even know these Western concepts, excluding from the beginning notions such as anonymous production or collective creation?

*J.-H.M.*: No, I will not exclude objects of collective production, in fact there are quite a few already included in the exhibition. But I do like the joke which argues that the only reason why we imagine Black African masks to be anonymous is because when they were first found in the various tribal communities the people who took them or collected them did not care to take down the names of their authors. It is a typical Western projection to fantasize that these communities live in a state of original collective bliss, therefore one does not want to credit them with having individual authors. Let me give you an example: the masks which are identified as *Geledes* are only worn once a year for a particular ritual. A recent study shows that the makers of these masks are specialists who make them for the various villages and communities who use them. Not only are they specialists of this type of masks and identify their works with their signatures on the inside, but they also originate from dynasties of mask-makers, and often these objects can be traced through two or more generations. Furthermore, what is peculiar about these *Geledes* masks is that they actually change over time — as opposed to our Western concept of a fixed and stable type — and over the last few decades they have incorporated more and more elements from industrial

culture. This proves to me the vivacity of that culture and its flexibility in responding to the contact with Western civilization. Certain ethnographers are distressed by this because they perceive these tribal communities as having lost their original purity. But I don't think that any society ever had this purity since they are all in constant flux and exchange with other societies. Admittedly, the Western world is, of course, a particularly powerful influence in these contacts.

*B.B.:* Let us discuss a concrete example. How did you approach the Algerian Republic, a Socialist state which was once a French colony? I am sure there are rather active Beaux Arts schools in Algiers and other cities, and I imagine, if you travel through the remote villages, you would probably find residual forms of artisanal popular culture and possibly even religious practices. At the same time I would imagine that there are emerging forms of a new Socialist culture. Which of the three domains is of primary interest to your exhibition project?

*J.-H.M.:* I would like to address the method of our work first of all. The particular needs of this exhibition require that a constant exchange takes place between theory and practice, and that both will constantly correct each other in the course of the preparation of this exhibition. It is not that discourse on intercultural relationships has been absent from French thought; what is missing are the pragmatic forms of putting this discourse into practice. That is what I am trying to develop. To answer your question, 'which of the three formations are of interest to us;' well, I want to show as much as possible, as many divergent phenomena as possible, even if that might make the exhibition heterogeneous at times.

*B.B.:* To invert my question: will your exhibition also present information on so-called minority cultures living inside the hegemonic Western societies? Will you show, for example, the particular forms of Black Modernism as it emerged in the United States since the turn of the century, or the cultural practices of African and Arabic minorities living in France at this point?

*J.-H.M.:* Obviously I have thought about this and often one is obliged to start from there. I have for example encountered a painter from the People's Republic of China who came to France about four years ago and who now lives in Paris. He is now part of a Chinese artistic community in France and he has given me a number of leads how to approach this phenomenon of Chinese emigrant artists as much as the art of his country. As far as your examples of Algeria or Morocco are concerned, I will approach these in a pragmatic manner, not a theoretical way. In these countries you will find a widespread tendency to harmonize traditional calligraphy with *École de Paris* painting. This transposition of calligraphy into a Western easel painting technique leaves me totally cold. I prefer to show a real calligrapher like the Iraqi Youssuf Thannoon.

I will first of all go by visual criteria alone, my vision and that of my colleagues with whom I prepare and discuss this project. If we encounter visually astonishing material we will go further and visit the artists and find out more about the history and the context of the work. I want to show *individual artists*, not movements or schools. In that sense I am trying to do exactly the opposite of what the Biennale de Paris has traditionally exhibited when it relied for its selections on the information provided by the cultural functionaries of the individual countries who were all more or less imitating mainstream culture of the Western world, the *École de Paris* or New York School painting.

*B.B.:* The central tool by which bourgeois hegemonic culture (white, male and Western) has traditionally excluded or marginalized all other cultural practices is the abstract concept of 'quality.' How will you avoid this most intricate of all problems in your selection criteria if you operate by 'visual' terms alone?

*J.-H.M.:* The term 'quality' has been eliminated from my vocabulary, since there is simply no convincing system to establish relative and binding criteria of quality when it comes to such a project. We know very well that even the directors of the great Western museums do not have any reliable criteria to establish a consensus on this question. But of course one

has to develop criteria; some are more tangible and rigorous than others. There are criteria to be derived from the physicality of the work, from the relationship between the maker of the object and the community which relates to that object, the socio-political and cultural context of that object.

*B.B.:* When exhibitions are organized in the United States from a critical perspective challenging mainstream hegemonic culture, the standard prejudicial response one always hears is: that is very interesting work indeed, but it lacks 'quality.'

*J.-H.M.:* Indeed that happens when one groups artists together by country or geo-political context. But that is not my approach: we select individual *artists* from a wide variety of contexts, and it is the individuality of these artists which guarantees the level of our exhibition. That brings us back to the criteria of 'quality'...

*B.B.:* But certain works (for example feminist artists) distinguish themselves by precisely challenging and criticizing that very notion of abstract quality, because the term itself is of course already invested with interest, privilege, control and exclusion.

*J.H.M.:* Certainly. We are going through a phase where all these concepts are transformed and re-evaluated and we are gradually moving on to different concepts. While this happens, first of all on the level of theory, we do not yet have any reliable means or any solid bases to articulate these changes on the level of exhibition practice. But that should not deter us from trying to develop them...

*B.B.:* In the course of the last ten years or so Western Modernism as a hegemonic culture has been criticized from the perspectives of other cultural practices as much as from the inside. It seemed generally no longer acceptable to treat Modernism as a universal international language and style, governing all countries of advanced industrial culture as much as the countries of the so-called Second and Third

World. This became particularly obvious in the increasing attacks on *International Style* in architecture and the recognition that it was necessary to take national and regional specificities and traditions much more into consideration than hegemonic Modernism had allowed. Does the project of your exhibition depart from similar critical perspectives?

*J.-H.M.:* Absolutely. That is precisely the reason why we want to build a truly international exhibition that transcends the traditional framework of contemporary Euro-American culture. Rather than showing that abstraction is a universal language, or that the return to figuration is now happening everywhere in the world, I want to show the real difference and the specificity of the different cultures.

*B.B.:* But what are the *real differences* between the different cultures at this point? Western hegemonic centres use Third World countries as providers of cheap labour (the hidden proletariats of the so-called post-industrialist societies), devastate their ecological resources and infrastructure, and use them as dumping grounds for their industrial waste. Don't you think that by excluding these political and economical aspects and by focussing exclusively on the cultural relationships between Western centres and developing nations, you will inevitably generate a neo-colonialist reading?

*J.-H.M.:* That implies that the visitors of the exhibition would be unable to recognize the relationships between the centres and the Third World. Our generation — and we were not the first — has denounced these phenomena, and things have after all developed at least a little bit. One cannot say that we live in a neo-colonialist period. Obviously the Western World maintains relationships of domination, but that should not prohibit us from communicating with the people of these nations by looking at their cultural practices.

*B.B.:* But isn't this precisely once again the worst ethnocentric fallacy: it communicates for *us*, therefore it is relevant for the exhibition. Worse yet: it smacks once again of cultural (and

political) imperialism to request that these cultures deliver their cultural products for our inspection and *our consumption*, instead of us making an attempt to dismantle the false centrality of this approach and to develop criteria from within the needs and conventions of these cultures.

*J.-H.M.*: I understand very well what you are trying to say, but how would you actually go about developing these immanent criteria? I have determined a number of them and applied them for the definition of the participants of the exhibition, but inevitably these criteria will be different in each case and eventually may generate considerable contradictions. I do not see how one can really avoid ethnocentric vision altogether. I have to accept it to some extent in spite of all the self-reflexive corrections which we tried to incorporate into our methods. What is important to recognize is that this will be the first truly international exhibition of worldwide contemporary art, but I do not pretend in any way that this is a complete survey of the planet, but rather it is a sampling that I have chosen according to more or less accurate and yet somewhat random criteria. I cannot select objects in the manner of ethnographers who chose the objects according to their importance and function inside the culture that they study, even if these objects 'mean' or 'communicate' very little or nothing to us. Inevitably there is an aesthetic judgement at work in the selection of my exhibition with all the inevitable arbitrariness that aesthetic selection entails.

*B.B.*: The other side of the ethnocentric fallacy is a cult of a presumed authenticity which would like to force other cultural practices to remain within the domain of what we consider the 'primitive' and the original 'Other.' In fact artists in these cultures very often claim, and rightfully so, to have developed their own forms of high culture corresponding to that of the Western world and its institutional values and linguistic conventions, and insist therefore to be looked at in terms of their own high cultural achievements, not in terms of our projection of authentic Otherness.

*J.-H.M.*: That is the reason why we have

conceived of the exhibition as a situation of dialogic relationships between the artists from the Western centres and those from the so-called geo-political margins. But the exhibition will also establish other types of cross-cultural relationships. For example, the manner in which the repetition of identical models functions in Tibetan *Tonka* painting and in the work of certain Western painters who consistently repeat the model which they established for themselves. After all, *Tonka* painting is still a living artistic practice, even though we only know it from ethnographic museums. To disturb this kind of absurdity is once again one of the goals of our exhibition. Let us not forget that many of the societies that we are looking at do not know or agree with Western divisions of culture between high and low, ancient and recent. The Australian Aboriginal culture does not separate high culture from popular culture at all. There is simply *one* traditional culture which they now deploy to defend their identity against the increasing onslaught of Western industrial culture. Even if they are called *Bushmen*, they obviously drive cars and have guns, but they teach their children how to use bow and arrow and how to pursue their cultural traditions as a form of political resistance against the violation by Western industrial culture. That is also the reason why they were eager to accept my invitation to show their work, outside of its original functional context so to speak, but nevertheless in its function to defend their aboriginal identity.

*B.B.*: That raises another problem. How will you avoid the total aestheticization of this, and all other exhibited forms of cultural manifestations emerging from non-western contexts, once they enter your museum or exhibition? How can you supply your visitors with sufficient visual and textual information to avoid this problem without strangling the actual experience of these objects?

*J.-H.M.*: Obviously I do not want to construct a didactic exhibition with an overwhelming amount of text panels. It is self-evident that all of the artists will receive the same treatment in both exhibition and catalogue. And the catalogue will, of course, provide the crucial

information as well as the didactic assistance needed for such an exhibition.

*B.B.:* Your restriction to 'aesthetic' criteria therefore depends also on merely pragmatic functions, to enable you to construct an exhibition from this heterogeneous mass of objects.

*J.-H.M.:* Obviously, I will work with an architect, and we already have numerous ideas about various forms of installation which convey to the viewers the complexity of the situation; that they are not looking at the traditional museum objects, but that they are confronted with objects from totally different contexts. But we have to keep in mind that this is an exhibition, not a discourse. I know that exhibitions cannot claim innocence from the discourse, and our exhibition will be critical and visual at the same time. What interests me in particular are the visual shocks that this exhibition can possibly produce and the reflections which it could provoke. But most of all I would like to see this exhibition operate as a catalyst for future projects and investigations.

*B.B.:* I could imagine that your project would provoke a lot of scepticism if not anger among those authorities in the art world whose role it is precisely to defend the rigorous divisions and criteria of hegemonic culture at all cost?

*J.-H.M.:* In the art world, yes, but not among artists, who have generally responded with great enthusiasm and interest.

*B.B.:* Even if this project threatens to displace them a little bit from their centrality in the reception of contemporary art?

*J.-H.M.:* I don't think they are worried about this, and they don't have to worry about it anyway. I believe that every creative individual is deeply interested in the activities of others in the world. After all, an element of curiosity and surprise is part of artistic experience in general, even though over the last few years, when it came to the big international group shows, you didn't even have to see the list of

participating artists in advance, you could pretty much tell beforehand who was going to be in these exhibitions. With our project, this is quite different. There will be many surprises and the artworld will not always like it, but they will certainly see things that they have never seen before. I am aiming at a much larger public. In fact I have already noticed when discussing the project with people from outside our little museum and gallery world, that this exhibition really has something to offer which goes way beyond the traditional boundaries of our usual conception of contemporary culture.

*B.B.:* Could one say that you also aim to decentre the social parameters traditional to the art public?

*J.-H.M.:* Absolutely. I want to show artists from the whole world, and to leave the ghetto of contemporary Western art where we have been shut up over these last decades. A larger public will certainly understand that, for once, this event will be much more accessible to it, and that it comes to an exhibition founded on totally different principles. If we do not try to make the effort at least to engage in this evolution, we risk serious blockages.

# SITUATION IN JAPAN

FUMIO NANJO

There are many differences between the Japanese art world and that of Western countries. Identifying these points of difference may prove to be revealing, not only in terms of trying to understand contemporary Japanese culture, but also the cultures of other non-European countries.

Taking an overview of the Japanese art world, three fairly distinct categories can be enumerated: *Nihon-ga*, painting on paper or silk using traditional water-soluble mineral pigments; *Yo-ga*, oil painting of European style introduced at the end of the 19th century, at the time of Japan's opening to the rest of the world; and thirdly, contemporary art, practiced by artists attempting to adopt the avant-garde attitudes of movements such as *Dada* and *L'Informal*. In terms of their position and awareness, these latter artists should be seen in the same artistic context as their counterparts in the West. Of the first two categories, *Nihon-ga* can be seen to establish a characteristic Oriental painting style, and is derived from *Suiboku-ga* (painting in Chinese ink) and *Yamato-e* (classical style of Japanese painting). The second, *Yo-ga*, often utilises a style reminiscent of Impressionism of *Ecole de Paris*. However, it is sometimes impossible to distinguish these two categories merely according to their styles, as the criteria for distinction are based only on a difference in materials.

Despite this, there is seldom any interchange between these disparate fields; artists from each group move in different circles and do not

communicate with one another, remaining ignorant of the activities of each other. To clarify the situation, it can be said that, instead of interaction between them, the different schools have their own hierarchical structures: like a pyramid, each school of *Nihon-ga* and *Yo-ga* is crowned by one or more masters similar to the *Iemotoseido* (masters of a particular artistic school or style) found in the traditional Japanese arts. Each of these schools builds strong relationships between its members and, in the same way as a political organisation, has a strong influence on the art world. Compared with these schools, artists involved in contemporary art are aware of the context which is more individualistic and international.

The structure of the gallery world, which supports such a situation, is very different from that of Western countries. It is said that there are around 500 galleries in Tokyo; more than half of these being rental galleries, where, for about £1,000 to £1,500 a week rent plus other expenses, an artist can exhibit his or her work. This system, peculiar to Japan, arises from circumstances such that, despite the lack of a domestic market for contemporary art, there are significant numbers of artists with strong ambitions. It is both a capitalistic and democratic system at the same time: artists with sufficient finances have the opportunity and space to exhibit their work.

However, one of the drawbacks of this system is that a large number of exhibitions flood the art world without any screening or

sifting of the artists. In fact, those who are involved in contemporary art find it difficult, when they visit Japan, to understand the position of each artist in relation to the whole situation; because both a Sunday painter and an avant-garde artist can rent the same gallery and exhibit their work in the same way.

There are probably less than one hundred art dealers who patronise particular artists and attempt to support and promote their work. Out of these galleries in Tokyo, only about ten are concerned solely with contemporary art. However, such a special interest has recently been developing among the rental galleries as well, and there are now 50 or so places which focus exclusively on contemporary art.

As for the state of museums in Japan, more than two hundred have been established in the last fifteen years, of which about fifty are public, founded by local self-governing bodies; the rest are private or small scale museums which display antiques, *Nihon-ga*, folk art or crafts. In the case of public museums, it is necessary for the directors to be in accord with public opinion and with the museum's governing body. Thus the public collections often come to include little contemporary art but many works by *Nihon-ga* and *Yo-ga* masters, as well as works by the major figures of late 19th and early 20th century European painting. The exhibitions held in public museums are similarly inclined towards those artists who are comprehensible to the general public. Curators have to collect and exhibit works from all the categories mentioned above, and it is therefore difficult for them to develop a particular artistic character for their museums. In the case of provincial museums, preference must be given to the local artists, and consequently there is an increasingly limited opportunity for the contemporary artist to exhibit in these museums. As can be seen, the situation of contemporary art in Japan is such that it is difficult for both artists and galleries to become truly professional.

There is a further important point which makes the situation in Japan different from Western countries: an important role is played by newspaper companies in organising art exhibitions in Japan. Newspaper companies had been occasionally sponsoring exhibitions in the department stores, but after the War this

led to a competition between four or five major newspapers to hold such exhibitions; as a result their number dramatically increased. The newspaper companies thus played an important role as sponsors of public art exhibitions. Until the '60s, when there were only a handful of museums, many exhibitions were sponsored and organised in department stores as promotional events by the newspapers. Such exhibition spaces — called 'museums' — still exist in some stores.

The following reasons provide an explanation for this situation: 1) newspaper companies are regarded as public organisations, or bodies, representing the interest of the public; 2) they have an affective power of (self)-publicity through the means of their own newspapers; 3) they use the exhibitions for their own promotional purposes, by the distribution of free tickets to readers prominent in cultural fields. They thus enlarge their share of the market and improve the newspaper's image.

These companies maintain a strong cultural leadership even today; and many public museums rely on their research and organisational skills, as well as finances, when organising the exhibitions. At first, this system appears to have a certain merit in that it frees cultural activities from the financial support of the government. But, at the same time, it is not without problems: when one of the newspaper companies organises an exhibition, the other newspapers do not cover or comment upon this exhibition, it is thus ignored due to the lack of debate or discussion about the work; 2) despite being specialists in their fields, the curators of public museums cannot always reflect their own positions and opinions in such exhibitions. With the rush to build new museums the result has over-reached itself: there are in fact not enough curators of ability and experience. Consequently, only a restricted number of museums are able to hold large-scale art exhibitions without the support of newspaper companies.

At this point, the background to artists' customary use of rental galleries should be clarified. In Japan there is a long tradition of *Gei-goto*, or artistic hobbies. From the Middle Ages, *Ikebana* (Flower Arrangement), *Sado* (Tea Ceremony), traditional music and the composition of *Haiku* poetry were popular

hobbies, and it was usual to learn them from a master, to whom a monthly fee was paid. Those who were less adept learned from a more skillful teacher; and the teachers themselves learned from one of higher rank and greater ability. Thus a hierarchical pyramid-like structure was formed, at the top of which the Master dominated as the leader of a particular style or school. Within such a structure, professionalism gradually declines from the summit downwards; with the lower levels reduced to amateurism. This is what is known as the *Iemotoseido*, or master system. This structure can be found in any of the traditional Japanese arts, and no clear distinction between professionalism and amateurism is made. The categories of *Nihon-ga* and *Yo-ga*, as referred to earlier, share this same structure and hierarchy. As a result of such a cultural situation it can be assumed that even experienced professional artists — accustomed to paying their superiors — have no qualms about renting the space for their exhibitions.

This peculiar system seems now to be gradually changing for the following reasons: 1) the contemporary art market is gradually increasing; 2) young gallery owners with international aspirations are beginning to open galleries dealing mainly in contemporary art; 3) young curators in museums are becoming more competent; 4) a critical response to art exhibitions held in department stores is now developing; 5) there is an increasing awareness about the negative aspects of exhibitions being sponsored by a single newspaper company; 6) the exchange of information and personal relations between Japan and other countries have developed to such an extent that Japan can no longer remain outside the international art scene; 7) artists are taking up a greater social role through cultural/commercial events and activities, which has increased their awareness for professionalism.

However, the public comprehension of contemporary art is not easy to develop. In Western countries contemporary art may also be the least popular form of art, but in Japan this problem is more serious. This is partly due to the historical differences between Japan and the West, particularly in the definition of art. Originally there was no concept of the fine arts in Japan, and when the foreign word 'art' was

introduced a little over 100 years ago, there was no term to correspond to it in the Japanese language: the word *Geijutsu* was thus coined as an equivalent.

Instinctively, Japanese people in general do not demarcate between art and craft, and have no clear awareness of the contemporary distinction. Western Modernism, however, has now established the following criteria in the definition of artistic value: 1) the subject of art is not technique, but the artist's own conception; 2) historical evolution of art is affected by artists of the avant-garde; 3) and therefore the avant-garde always contains new concepts; 4) the idea of a new concept is related to the artist's own individual identity. These criteria are not always clearly recognised by the general public in Japan, and sometimes not even by the specialists in art history.

In contrast to the Western view embodied in Modernism, it was fundamentally assumed in Oriental countries such as China, Japan and Korea, that the disciples of a master will preserve his style in a fixed form over the centuries; of course, if the style was considered to be worth preserving. Consequently, the imitation of styles and ideas of the preceding masters had been very important. If an artist were to create a unique style of his own, and thus deviated from a formal tradition, there would be an enormous resistance to it, both from the hierarchy of the art world as well as from the artist's own consciousness. Such a situation might have also existed in the practice of *artisanship* in Europe, but it is certainly not applicable to art today.

The artist's role in Japan has been different. He or she is still generally regarded as a person who, with the skill of an artisan, makes paintings or sculptures which are pleasing to the eye. The concept of the artist as a prophetic figure with the capacity to see truth and divine the future, is quite alien to the Japanese tradition. From the point of view of the artist as an individual creator, the difficulty of the situation in Japan is very clear. The problem is one of positioning: how and where is the Japanese artist placed today in relation to the complex issues of tradition, localism, internationalism, and Modernism? When a Japanese artist intends to create an original work of art, he or she is frequently in danger

of falling into the trap of an exotic *Japonisme*, for which *Ukiyo-e* were once praised in Europe. On the other hand, if the works produced were similar to Western contemporary art, they would run the risk of being regarded as imitations of Western artists. It seems difficult for Japanese artists to avoid such pitfalls and be accepted universally on the basis of the uniqueness of their work. This difficulty is in fact common to artists from all non-Western countries. The question however remains: how can artists from these countries produce works of art which are of an international and universal nature, without also losing their cultural and national identities?

Admittedly, I have adopted a Western manner to describe the situation. In Japan imitation is not a problem. Throughout its history, Japanese culture has always successfully absorbed elements from Chinese and Korean cultures, and it was thus not unusual that American culture should have had an overwhelming influence after the Second World War. The origin of this tendency is in fact discernable in the ancient history of Japan.

It may well be said that the notion of cultural identity itself has never existed in Japan. It may be asked whether one of the reasons for this is that, until the American occupation of Japan in 1945, Japan had been separated from other cultures by sea and had never been invaded from the outside. Consequently, Japan never experienced the critical moment of losing its native culture. These reasons aside, Japan has always imported elements of foreign cultures without any discrimination, selecting and adopting them only for practical purposes.

Thus Japanese culture, which is the result of an eclectic attitude, has a certain resemblance

to the phenomenon known today as Post-modernism: something which involves a juxtaposition or co-existence of things belonging to different styles and contexts, using quotations excessively or imitating other forms. However, Japanese culture does not have the sort of logic of its own which would sum up the whole, and hence there have been things or styles which were rejected because they went against its basic grain. Ultimately, it could be said that Japan did not experience Modernism; instead it moved directly from the premodern to the postmodern.

The question of how to produce a unique work of art, grounded in Japanese culture and history, remains a problem for the Japanese artist. It may be possible to offer a contemporary viewpoint, artistic or philosophical, through a method which explores its traditional roots. Or, to develop entirely new forms or styles which are rooted in the awareness of today's advance technology and information explosion. Its chaotic energy — especially in Tokyo — its pluralism, and its fondness for novelty, which have shaped the character of contemporary Japanese life, may offer a new potential for Japanese art today. Many foreigners involved in cultural activities are already aware of this, and they think something new is going to appear soon. I entertain similar expectations, but I'm also aware that there is no assurance that the present factors of Japanese culture will open a truly new and profound horizon onto contemporary culture. If this can happen, then it will be the outstanding achievement of a few geniuses, accomplished by artists, thinkers and intellectuals, not only Japanese, but also foreigners involved with Japanese culture.

# ABORIGINAL ART IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

JOHN MUNDINE

Aboriginal art in northern Australia exists in many ways between two extremes: art produced to serve the Aboriginal communities and art produced for external sale. There are today some twenty to thirty Aboriginal communities in what is called 'the top end' which produce art for commercial sale. Most communities in fact produce art for sale outside their own community. Despite this, their art originates in the context of ceremonies, which involve singing, dancing, construction of sculptural material, narratives, performance, mime, painting and so on. Sometimes ceremonial life is manifested in simple, local forms; sometimes in grand, complex social occasions. When ceremonies are organised in their most intense forms, they may involve thousands of people, drawn from over thousands of square miles, and may take place over a period of some years before they are fully concluded.

These ceremonies, the most important forms of art in the region, are rarely seen by outside people and are conducted for the immediate benefit of the communities concerned. Most of this art is very personal, event-oriented and temporary. It is art for a particular place and time, for a particular people and for particular religious and social purposes.

However, derived from this primarily religious art, is a more secular art that is developing new forms as it is produced for outside consumption. In some of the portable, static forms of art that are projected beyond the

communities through commercial sale, the imagery produced functions rather like 'static polaroids', as abbreviated records of the more complex ceremonies. Elements of the religious stories that are embodied in the communal ceremonies may be referred to in the secular, static works, but they are — and *must* be — summarised and transformed, in order to accommodate the important differences between religious and secular life that are vital to traditional Aboriginal culture.

Any material that belongs to the dimension of '*secret-sacred*' culture involves the strictest sanctions and cannot, by Aboriginal law, be communicated to non-initiated people, whether from within the community or beyond. To break such sanctions involves the gravest censure, even punishment. However the senior people of Aboriginal communities have come in recent years to see a value in communicating secularised forms of their culture to people beyond their communities, and especially to the wider world of human culture generally.

All of the static art produced for outside purposes is therefore intended for commercial sale, and this involves a change in status. However, its intended sale does not automatically mean that it is unimportant or materialistically motivated alone; for it is also seen as a medium of exchange, as an educational tool for white people and as a proof to the outside world of Aboriginal people's seriousness about their culture.

The financial exchange involved in the sale of Aboriginal art may be seen in a number of ways. First, there is the simple level of economic transaction: the production of cash that can be used to purchase useful things. Yet although people may exchange certain cultural goods for cash, the transaction may be regarded in a larger context of value that stretches beyond the most immediate circumstances; in this second, more continuing context, the money gained is not seen as a conclusive purchase, but more like the rental on a part of the producing culture — as a service to white people as much as an income source for the Aboriginal communities concerned. Regarded in this dimension, the economic exchange serves a larger purpose. It is as though Aboriginal people are saying, "We will show you something of our culture and you must make a small copyright payment in return for our showing you this culture."

At 'the top end' of Australia, the 20 or 30 Aboriginal communities in remote areas, generally off major highways, are still carrying on what has been designated a traditional life-style (hunting and gathering). This life-style enables them to continue their traditional religious practices, to observe their obligations to the land and to maintain their social customs. However, most of these communities also make use of white technology. For instance, they may use motor vehicles to travel to ceremonies, or even buses or trucks. They may even use planes to travel to ceremonies, which is something I have seen just recently — people arrived at a very *secret-sacred* ceremony some months ago in the north by small airplane. People may also introduce new materials into their art forms. They may use glue as a fixative in their paint or employ nylon to make string instead of traditional bark fibres. In whatever forms, the new technology may provide new tools and means, but still be employed to sustain traditional objectives, without necessarily dominating or subverting customary practices. The artists of the remote communities may live in small settlements scattered across a broad area, on traditional estates located in relation to individual artists' customary responsibilities for particular tracts of land. These settlements are referred to as 'outstations', many of them newly established

in recent years as people have moved away from the concentrated settlements created artificially by white administration. The 'outstation movement' as it has come to be regarded, represents an important aspect of increasing self-determination by Aboriginal people in the remoter areas of Australia. It has involved people moving back into proximity to their own traditional lands, where they pursue a more distinctive life with their own family and customary relatives. Against the backdrop of this broad movement, the role of artists and art works has been vitally interconnected with cultural regeneration.

Apart from early examples of collecting Aboriginal artifacts as anthropological curiosities, most of the traditional communities surviving today have only begun to produce 'art' in a white sense — for the outside world — in the last 50 years. During the first trade in artifacts, what might be termed art pieces from the very northern regions were noted in the 1930s, when people at Yirrakala made pieces of art for the mission superintendent, or Christian minister, who then marketed them further afield: to museums or collectors of curios in the south, and to others in the wider world outside Australia. Such beginnings of artifact collecting were quite modest, and it was not until much more recently — the late 1950s — that the market for artifacts really began to operate, creating for the first time something more like mass-production of certain types of work for sale, in comparison with the very modest output of earlier times.

There was nothing wrong with the production of works for marketing in any fundamental sense, as long as people were still telling their traditional stories, still caring about traditional religious beliefs and practices, and were trying to encapsulate aspects of this in art for the outside world.

A traditional religious ceremonial piece or performance art work is of course *not* transportable beyond its originating community and occasion. Moreover I would estimate that about half the works produced originally in the north were in materials that were very temporary, which disintegrated or degraded after creation. Some people have more recently adopted various devices to overcome the limitations of a particular medium or of the

original forms of production.

The Western Desert peoples, for instance, were not traditionally producers of 'paintings' for the outside world at all. Their art forms involved designs carried out on weapons, utensils and sacred objects, and on the ground (on a very large scale) in sand, ochre and spinifex grass, without any binders or fixatives to preserve the imagery. The large ground drawings, especially, were totally untransportable to the outside world, and quite outside any form of marketing or economic exchange.

What happened in the early 1970s to transform this situation in Central Australia is now widely known under the name of the 'Papunya movement': responding to the interest of a particular art teacher posted at the Papunya school (Geoffrey Bardon), various traditional Aboriginal men were stimulated to transfer some of their customary designs into mural decorations for parts of the school. Geoffrey Bardon was trying to bridge the gap between the European culture of the white art curriculum and the traditional culture of the local Aboriginal clan groups. What he touched upon in the process was that a lot of the people who were ceremonial leaders in the Aboriginal community had been reduced to a very menial status at the fringes of the white-organised school system. Men who were the guardians of some of the most important knowledge of Aboriginal traditions and training, were no more than the gardeners, cleaners and so on at the local school. One of the reasons for this dramatic inversion was that, in a white sense, they were unable to communicate anything of their important knowledge and social position to the outside world. However, it was, precisely, many of the *elders* of the Aboriginal community who became the key 'artists' of the new 'painting movement' that seemed to emerge astonishingly quickly from Papunya. Many men began to paint their customary designs, using acrylic paints, on a variety of boards and scrap or improvised materials, and eventually (after the Papunya Tula co-operative was formed to market their work) onto canvas.

At first, this was treated by the formal art world as some sort of inauthentic, *transitional art* — essentially hybrid, adapted and 'impure'. It was not regarded seriously as an expression

of Aboriginal culture, and for a while was ignored or even shunned by white art museums because it appeared to adopt what was regarded as an exclusively 'white medium' (acrylic painting on canvas). A kind of racist historical interpretation prevailed, whereby it was acceptable for white Australian artists to borrow from Aboriginal designs and nourish artistic tradition in the process, whereas Aboriginal borrowings of white means were automatically denigrated as a 'dilution'. In fact the Aboriginal adoption of acrylics and canvas involved a revitalization of traditional cultural awareness more than a cultural decentering, and the force of cultural assertion involved in the Western Desert paintings in a very few years had gained them an acceptance in the wider Australian art world, including the serious attention of art museums.

This efflorescence has been such that people are now conscious of a new 'wealth' of Aboriginal art and cultural capacity. This potential went unrecognised until it was 'discovered' by the outside world through an increase in visible activities in recent years. In reality, Aboriginal art of the present is strong not because it has gained some attention from white audiences in recent years, but because it arises from strong cultural traditions that have evolved over 40,000 years, and are still pursued today.

The continuous activity of reworking ancient traditions dispersed throughout Australia brings us directly to the vexed question of Aboriginal art's *contemporary* dimension. In the past, Aboriginal art's adherence to tradition caused it to be seen as a static, 'frozen' culture, and it was therefore not incorporated in any exhibition of *contemporary* art in general. This situation has changed only recently, but it has changed quite dramatically.

There are acute problems as to how to fit such a culture into western historical readings that have no place for it — as is the case for the vast amount of the third world cultures. The whole of the European-derived educational system precludes any recognition of these cultures, except as something totally alien or outside European descriptions.

At the Art Gallery of New South Wales there is a substantial collection of Aboriginal art that originates from a collection of bark paintings

which was commissioned in the late 1950s and early 1960s, for an exhibition that was being compiled for touring at that time. It showed considerable foresight — in comparison with general art museum attitudes of the time — to create such a collection through commissioning. Indeed most collections of Aboriginal art in Australia have originated through the collecting of *bark paintings*, which for a long time were popularly thought of as synonymous with 'Aboriginal art' itself — in comparison with the great range of forms, artifacts and expressions that more truly constituted 'Aboriginal culture' (unseen by the outside world).

However, since the beginnings of Aboriginal 'art' collections in *art museums* in Australia, dating from the 1950s, there have been major changes occurring in response to widening horizons on Aboriginal art within the Australian community at large, as well as the changes that have occurred within Aboriginal communities' production of culture for the external world — mentioned already in connection with the dramatic case of the painting 'movement' emanating from Papunya. Here, a 'pointillist' mode of painting, now celebrated as the 'dot-and-circle' style of Aboriginal art from the Western Desert, had some ready affinities with a Western style already well assimilated in modern art's history and aesthetics. Papunya painting's rapid rise and penetration into wider acceptance, in Australia and now much further afield, is in part a result of the ground being prepared in terms of aesthetic compatibility with Western art history. Nevertheless it has been part of a period that has witnessed a great opening up in aesthetics concerning Aboriginal art.

One major result of this change in aesthetic attitudes, is that some of the old stereotyped approaches to Aboriginal culture through certain artifacts and utensils — such as the boomerang and didjeridu, for instance — or even the profiling of Aboriginal art through concepts such as the 'X-ray style' in rock engravings and bark paintings from certain areas, have at last had to give way to a more complex analysis. There is consequently a great number of changes in the ways in which collections may be put together, and these changes are coming as a result of changed

consciousness imposed by Aboriginal people themselves, as they gain more influence and control over the interpretation of their culture by the outside world.

As Aboriginal people are forcibly bringing about changes in the consciousness of their culture, and *about* their culture, this may also be seen as part of a larger process of the opening up and change in the ways that Australians think about themselves, about their identity, history and future place in the world. Aboriginal people believe that they have a significant — and necessary — role to play in this process. It is of benefit not only to themselves directly, but can contribute important new awareness to the wider community as it discovers something about Aboriginal culture's aspirations and values through some acquaintance with Aboriginal art. What were previously regarded as utterly 'remote' places to Australia's white population of the southern capitals may now be selectively visited, and their history and geographical character be better understood and valued. Places like Broome, for instance, on the far north-west coast of Western Australia, may now be experienced for their unique character and cultural history, whereas previously many of the more inaccessible settlements of northern Australia were visited only by anthropologists, minerologists, miners and adventurers — all with selective interests in such areas.

This is a quite critical period of development in Australia's cultural history, where conservative forces may promote continued divisions within Australian society in order to continue to profit from development of Aboriginal resource areas and labour, without sufficient regard to long-term issues. Feeling under threat, conservative economic forces may continue to present a negative view of Aboriginal aspirations. There are critical political and social questions that directly interlock with the meanings of Aboriginal art, and they cannot be separated one from another.

It is not possible here to deal with the whole range of legal and political issues affecting Aboriginal people, but it is at least important to focus on organisations that directly affect arts production, development and promotion.

*The Aboriginal Arts Board* was one of the seven

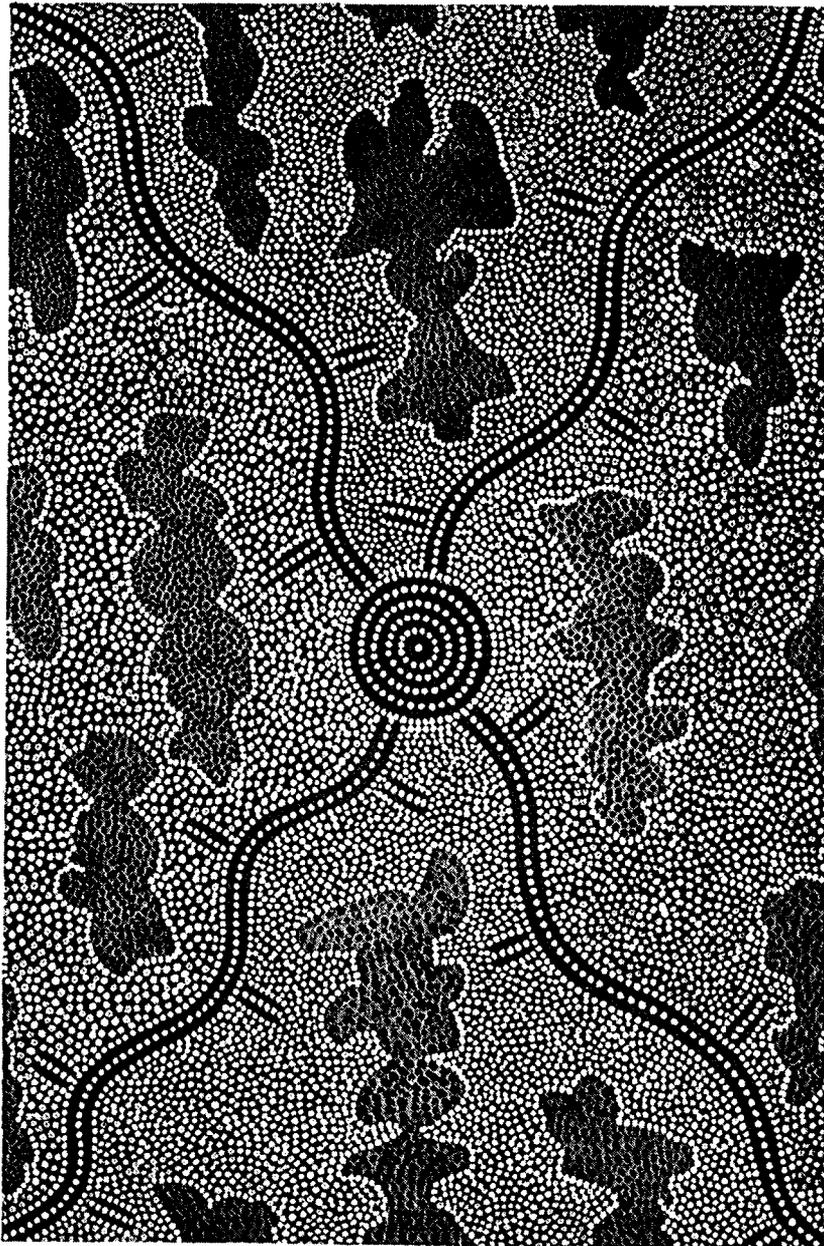


**TURKEY TOLSON TJUPURRULA** (Pintubi Tribe) *Brown Venomous Serpent*  
 © Papunya Tula Artists PTY Ltd and Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd.

boards created by the Whitlam Labour Government, under the umbrella of the Australian Council for the Arts (now the *Australia Council*), after it won power in the federal election of 1972. The broad spread of visual arts in Australia was placed under the responsibility of a separate *Visual Arts Board* within the Australia Council, alongside a Literature Board, Music Board, Performing Arts Board, and so on.

The separation of Aboriginal Arts from the whole spectrum of national arts activity, while it has in some ways continued the idea of Aboriginal cultural activity as distinctly *separate* from the rest of contemporary Australian culture, was at least a far-sighted step to have taken in the early 1970s. In contrast to previous governments' attitudes to Aboriginal cultural development, it represented a radical change. For the first time, Aboriginal cultural

CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI *Dreaming* (Luritja Tribe, Central Australia)  
(Central Mount Wedge,  
Australia). © Papunya Tula Artists PTY Ltd and Aboriginal Artists  
Agency Ltd.





YUENDUMU CEREMONIAL (Central Australia), Preparation for Earth Painting, 1988. (Photo: Peter McKenzie)

development was distinguished as important in its own right and was given its own separate budget. An all-Aboriginal Board was set up to consider and make judgments about funding of Aboriginal arts projects and the promotion of Aboriginal culture to the world. This did not produce change immediately, and the long struggle to put Aboriginal people more and more in control of all aspects of Aboriginal cultural organisation still goes on. However, the *Aboriginal Arts Board's* creation paved the

way for Aboriginal self-determination in arts affairs.

One of the critical initiatives taken by the *Aboriginal Arts Board* in the 1970s was to set up a series of positions for Art and Crafts Advisers, to locate people within the more traditional Aboriginal communities in the far north and centre of Australia. Their role was to foster Aboriginal art and guide it to the outside world — to the market place — and to make sure that people were not simply being 'ripped off' by

external interests as they had been in the past. They were to ensure that Aboriginal artists were not just selling works for a carton of beer or a busted-up truck and so on.

The Art and Craft Advisers have therefore been crucially involved in this important period of change over a decade or more: changes in the wider community's aesthetic approach to Aboriginal art, and changes in people's attitudes to Aboriginal people themselves in many ways. I consider that the Advisers provide a very important linking role, between the outside world and traditional communities, and in the chain of contacts that influence how and where Aboriginal art is dispersed.

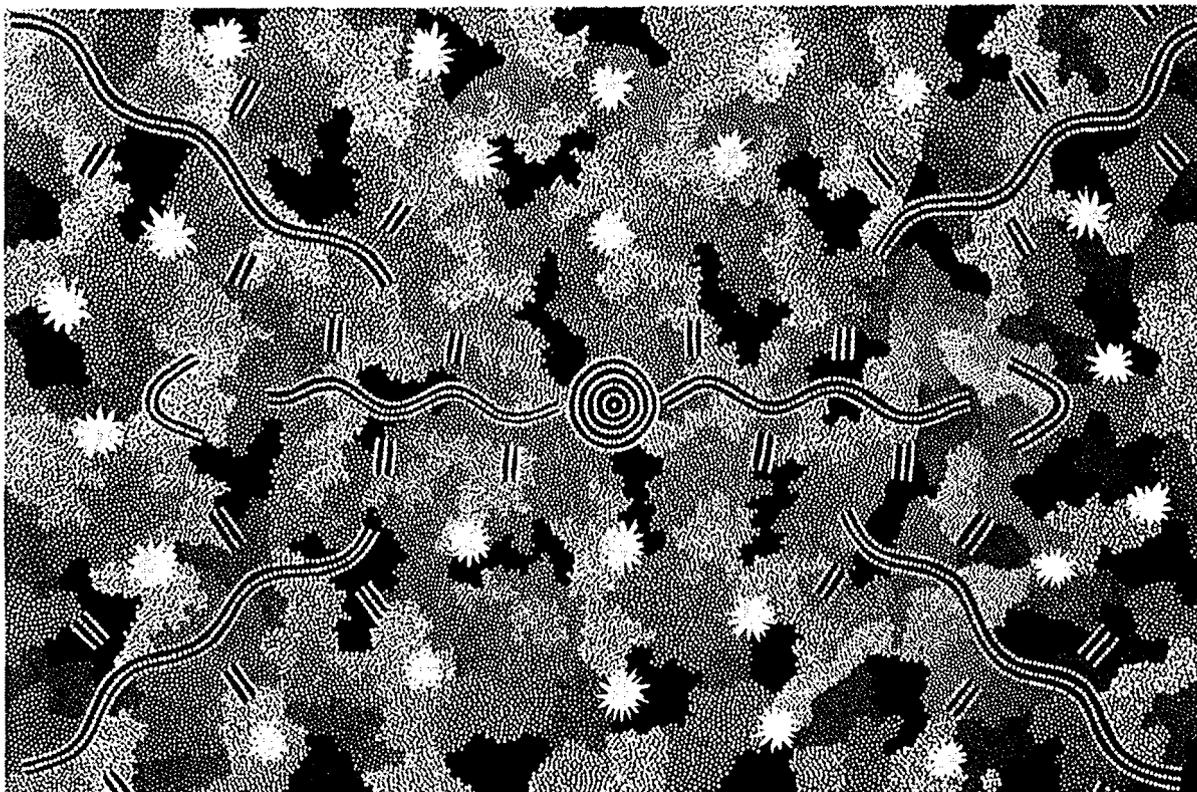
With the spread of advisers, and the growth of consciousness in urban Aboriginal art there has been a critical struggle going on in the last few years about the organisation of Aboriginal art's circulation. The Art and Crafts Advisers were under threat by the federal government, which had become interested in capitalising on Aboriginal art's increasing popularity, and decided to try to federalise and centralise its distribution and marketing through the capital cities directly. This new policy initiative threatened to circumvent the role of the Advisers working directly within and for the Aboriginal communities themselves, and to bring art's marketing under agencies controlled directly by government. Strong reactions were expressed in many places, particularly about the dangers of taking a short-term view and becoming dependent on a distant government agency. Policies under governments can easily change, leaving distant communities stranded when forms of economic support are suddenly cut. Moreover federal departments cannot readily deal with the diversity and reality of grass-roots Aboriginal opinion and wishes. As a result the Art and Crafts Advisers in the bulk of the Aboriginal communities banded together last last year and formed a joint body, called the *Association of Northern and Central Australian Aboriginal Artists*. The aims of the loose association are to make sure that the wishes of Aboriginal artists are a first priority, and to ensure that any statements made about Aboriginal art truly reflect their aspirations rather than those of government agencies.

In a similar manner to the formation of this association by artists in the north, a more recent

body has been formed in Sydney in 1988, call the *Boomali Artists Residents Ko-operative*. This has arisen through a group of artists from several states with a more urban background, who share similar feelings about controlling their work, the marketing and reading of it by the rest of the community. Quite recently they had a joint exhibition with the *Association of Northern and Central Australian Aboriginal Artists*, which was shown at the Boomali art space in Sydney.

In the Bicentennial year of 1988, however, many Aboriginal artists and many Aboriginal people in general ignored or protested the occasion, as the commemoration of 200 years of white occupation only dramatised the state of dispossession of the country's original owners. The federal enquiry into the extraordinary number of black deaths in custody was one of a number of far more burning issues for Aboriginal people in 1988, along with the infantile death rate, health care and land rights — all issues of black grievance as the Bicentenary proceeded throughout the year, causing a general boycott of any formal ceremonies of celebration.

Meanwhile the bicentennial occasion was the subject of some alternative constructions by Aboriginal people: the massive and effective protest march by representatives from communities right across Australia that represented the greatest and most diverse gathering of Aboriginal people since the European invasion, and the major Aboriginal group work that was made especially for the 1988 [Australian] *Biennale of Sydney*. The Biennale work of 200 memorial poles (a funerary pole for each year of settlement over two centuries) was created in the far north. It was drawn from the artists of Ramingining and several other Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory: from Maningrida, Milingimbi, Galiwinku, Barunga, Beswick and Bulman. The idea of taking part in this particular Biennale, with its emphasis on an Australian view-point ('A View from the Southern Cross', as it was sub-titled) was to create a representation that would be an authentic Aboriginal statement for 1988 — not joining any rhetoric of celebration, but presenting a collective Aboriginal work, in Aboriginal cultural forms, in the context of a



CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI *Lightning Dreaming* 1987  
Auckland City Art Gallery. (Photo: Yves Michaud)

survey of world contemporary art. If people truly accepted Aboriginal art, this was meant to say, they would also accept the larger statement of cultural integrity and rights that was being made through this work. They would receive the work in the variety of its dimensions and reflect upon its meanings.

What the artists had done was to create a forest of 200 burial poles, which was installed finally in sand at the large wharf site of the Biennale, one of the two Biennale sites in Sydney. The form of these poles has a specific meaning and functional context: they are hollow-log, *bone coffins*, ritually used in post-death ceremonies in Arnhem Land, and still made today as a part of communal cultural life. The particular log coffins for the Biennale,

however, while completely traditional in form and decoration, did not contain the bones of any actual deceased persons, nor had they been used in ceremonies. Their function in Sydney was intended to be entirely symbolic. They were to assist in the transformation of what would normally represent a disparate series of private graves into a collective public memorial and mourning for all the Aborigines who had died defending their own country as a result of the white invasion since 1788.

Though stated by many to be the most powerful piece of art in the Sydney Biennale for 1988, and judged by others to be one of the most important pieces of art ever created in Australia (for instance, by the Director of the Australian National Gallery in Canberra, whose

museum acquired the poles for its permanent collection, to be housed in a permanent display) the work is still seemingly a rather cumbersome or difficult piece for the public, and even most art writers, to come to grips with.

The 200 memorial poles, however, a work that I co-ordinated through my position as Art and Crafts Adviser at Ramingining in central Arnhem Land, is to me a statement that touches the crux of the question of black/white relations in Australia. Its acceptance or non-acceptance touches directly on the question of the readiness of white Australians to come to terms with a horrific past that needs to be addressed, reflected upon and remedied.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The variety of requests of the Arts and Crafts Advisers located within Aboriginal communities and primarily dedicated to their servicing is growing month by month. It is therefore sometimes difficult to accommodate formal requests from the outside world to provide essays and written information of a more broad-ranging kind, at the same time as there are often pressing issues to attend to that concern the ongoing cultural life of the communities themselves. I therefore was grateful for the back-up and practical assistance of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (formerly Power Gallery of Contemporary Art), when I needed to generate this text during a busy visit to Sydney on other matters. My thanks must go to Jennifer Storey for transcribing my original audio-taped version into a typescript for me to look over; and to Curator, Bernice Murphy, for giving editorial time to the technical matters of converting an audio-recording of my narrative into a suitable final version for printing in another language on another continent. Their efforts in assisting me during a very busy time are much appreciated.

# GANGA DEVI TRADITION AND EXPRESSION IN MADHUBANI PAINTING

JYOTINDRA JAIN

As in the case of most *Kayastha* women painters of Mithila of her generation, Ganga Devi's early artistic expressions confined to painting the walls of *Kohbar ghar* or the bride's wedding chamber, *aripan* or ritual floor paintings and the five sheets of paper for wrapping *sindur*, vermilion, sent to the bride by the bridegroom. The entire tradition of Madhubani painting, of which the finest and the most elaborate part is the *Kayastha* tradition, is basically rooted in these ritual paintings done on the walls, floors and wrappers. The whole outburst of 'Madhubani Painting' on paper is a later development. With the introduction of paper the artists of Madhubani, on the one hand continued to derive the very essence of their pictorial expression from the age-old cultural traditions, and, on the other, recognised an unprecedented freedom from the confines of pre-determined religious iconography and highly formalised geometric symbolism of their ritual wall and floor paintings. From this great upheaval, several individual painters emerged whose work showed signs of "a radical departure within the context of their own tradition". Ganga Devi is one these artists.

Ganga Devi's capability to transform experience into pictorial images — ritualistic, symbolic, iconographic or narrative — made her a painter who, so to say, appears 'traditional' in her 'modern' work and 'modern' in her 'traditional' work. In other words her painterly qualities are such that irrespective of the subject matter — traditional *Kohbar* of Madhubani or

her recent impressions of America — the level of image formation and pictorial transformation remains steady. Her concern is characterised by an effort to create a series of refined and conceptualised images, all filtered through her creative vision and sensibility. Her paintings possess a stylistic certitude which is undeterred by the varied nature of themes she chooses to paint. As we shall see, this purity of perception, conceptualisation and depiction makes her a great individual artist stemming from the collective tradition of Madhubani painting.

Ganga Devi's evolution as an artist is deeply connected with the socio-cultural norms of the *Kayastha* caste to which she belongs, but more important determinants of her artistic career were a series of agonising events in her personal life which led her to find solace in artistic expression. Like her personal life, her painting was shaped partly by the collective social norms of her caste, partly by her individual response to the latter and partly by her inherent character comprising of her response to inner beliefs and interests.

A few years after her marriage, and in the face of poverty and childlessness, her husband married another woman and virtually threw her out on the street. In order to earn her livelihood and to divert her attention from the painful event, she began to paint, only to be exploited by a fellow painter and childhood friend who marketed her paintings under her own name, and paid Ganga Devi nearly nothing for the large profit she herself earned

from them. By the strength of sheer quality of her work, she carved a niche for herself right at the top of the art world of India. In the course of time she earned much fame and some money, but before she could relish any of these she became a victim of cancer and is virtually counting her last days.

Each one of these very peculiar situations sharpened Ganga Devi's perception, and provided her with a profound understanding of the human world and its manifestations; and

above all, taught her to retreat, from time to time, to the world of her pictorial imagination concretised by her well-controlled line and a fine sense of spatial organisation. Her chaotic life and the neat and clean world of her painting are intrinsically related. In her personal life there was an all-round invasion and encroachment; but, as if to ward this off, in her painting each character, each image, is provided with its own breathing space. Her inner turmoil led her to create, at least one

*Ramayana* 1974 (detail)



canvas, a world full of peace and order.

Ganga Devi was born around 1928 in Chatra village of Madhubani district in the state of Bihar. Her father was a well-to-do petty landlord. Her mother was a deeply religious woman endowed with great talent for painting.

Ganga Devi's life centred around *panchanga*, the traditional lunar calendar of Mithila, comprising 12 months each of 30 days. The month, divided into two halves of 15 days, each beginning with the full moon and the new

moon respectively, was the basic unit of the annual ritual cycle. Two months formed a season. The year had six seasons. The ritual significance of each day, on account of the position of the moon, the movement of the sun and the planets, the cycle of seasons and the religious festivals, was described in minutest details in the *panchanga* calendar.

Among the *Kayasthas* it was customary for women to learn reading and writing from childhood. Ganga Devi learnt the alphabet so





*The Cycle of Life 1983-84 (detail)*

as to be able to read the *panchanga* calendar: "so that I could lead my life, by correct *achara* and *vichara* or purity of action and thought."

The women of Mithila kept *vratas* or vows and observed fasts on some of these ritually important days. Every month had at least one sacred day on which *aripana*, womens' ritual floor paintings, were done by using rice paste for pigment and a twig for brush. Specific floor paintings were also done on the occasion of important events of human life such as puberty, conception, birth, sixth day rites after birth, tonsure ceremony, initiation into learning, betrothal, marriage, etc., and to mark important days of the annual calendar.

The beginnings of Ganga Devi's paintings are rooted in these floor paintings. Her concern for ritual purity in everyday life was responsible for the iconographic perfection of her earlier work, and the symbolic overtones of her

imagery highly characteristic of her later paintings.

The word *aripana* stems from the Sanskrit word *alepana* which derives from the root *lip*, meaning to smear, and therefore basically refers to ritual smearing of the ground with cowdung and clay as is prescribed in most of the ancient ritual handbooks, and is practised by a large number of village and tribal communities of India even today.

Another important mode of pictorial expression that occupied Ganga Devi in her formative years was that of painting the cowdung plastered walls of the *kohbar ghar*, the bride's wedding chamber, where marriage is solemnised under the auspicious influence of the painted symbols of plenty and fertility. From her explanation of each motif and symbol of the collective *kohbar* painting, it becomes clear that she understands *kohbar* not as mere

'festive decoration', but as pictorial reconstruction and synthesis of the magico-religious world comprising painted images of deities, sacred trees, primordial creatures, ritual accessories, heavenly bodies, the male and the female, etc. with forms ranging from representational-narrative to purely abstract-symbolic to geometric-diagrammatic. The entire *kohbar* painting is understood by her as a magical edifice in which each image, each symbol is to be conceptualised with utmost purity of essence and form. As she once said "impure expression is tantamount to self-destruction." By "self-destruction" she means destruction due to magical ill-effect as much as the violation of her artistic self. In this context the 'magical' content cannot be separated from the 'artistic'.

These perceptions, which crystallised in the early stage of her career and in the context of ritual wall and floor paintings, continued to pervade through her later works even in the context of purely secular themes, as in her 'American series'. The concern for magical purity eventually got transformed into the purity of expression — the former not separable from the latter.

The second important phase of Ganga Devi's painting began when, discarded by her husband on the eve of his second marriage, painting appeared to be the only means of earning a livelihood. Around this time there was a drought in Bihar and the Government had been tackling the problem of providing occupation to the drought-stricken people of Mithila by encouraging them to paint on paper supplied to them for the purpose. The personal need for survival and the change of medium from wall to paper offered her a great challenge. Being a fine artist, she immediately realised the advantage of the smoother surface of paper over the rough plaster of the wall, for it allowed her to discover the potentiality of fine line especially for rendering narrative themes from the sacred legends of Rama and Krishna, the epic heroes.

The introduction of paper brought her a twofold liberation. She was no longer confined to painting *kohbar* and *aripan* with their limited vocabulary of symbols & images, and she could now investigate the unlimited possibility of drawing in fine line. One outcome of the

innovation was the series of paintings based on mythological subjects so far unconventional in her work.

As a devotee, she had known the story of Rama, and as a woman banished by her husband for no fault of her own, she had experienced the agony of Sita. But for the first time in her life, she attempted pictorial conceptualisation of the story of Rama and Sita.

In this new situation, which marks the second phase of her painting career, Ganga Devi was faced with handling the problems of perspective or depicting the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface, converting the temporal sequence of the narrative into a spatial situation and translating the mythical images into pictorial ones.

She solved the problems of perspective by eliminating the depth-dimension totally. Realising the true nature of painting to be two-dimensional she did not attempt to fake the third dimension by means of shading, or by overlapping images to indicate depth; each character, each object, each leaf, flower or blade of grass, was provided with its own free space. These aperspectival pictorial depictions make her work appear 'unfamiliar' and therefore her own. The vertical and horizontal sprawling of images in fathomless white spaces adds a sense of drama and surprise to her painting.

The problem of converting the temporal sequence of the legend into the spatial one, has been tackled by her in a rather simplistic manner, she divided the space into various square or rectangular compartments by means of cross-bands, in the manner of a comic strip, in which each compartment contained a complete painting reflecting tremendous pictorial narrative qualities. Spaces between the characters were filled up with flowers, branches and creepers, growing from nowhere. Ganga Devi eliminates all indication of sky or earth, time and space, instantaneously imparting a mythological quality to the painting. Each picture with its ornate frame, the characters focussed in action and dialogue, minimal indication of mountains, rivers or forests, looked more like a scene from Ramleela, the traditional folk theatre of Northern India which happened to be the main source of pictorial inspiration behind these paintings. Flimsy looking crowns, halos, bows and arrows, and

'cardboard' chariots with lotus-shaped wheels, further testify that this phase of her work derived much from the Ramleela theatre.

Ganga Devi's third significant phase of painting began in 1982 with her epic work entitled *The Cycle of Life*. With this painting she truly crossed the threshold of convention to excavate fresh grounds hitherto untouched by any painter from Madhubani tradition or by herself. The theme she chose to paint, *The Cycle of Life*, comprised a series of *Samskaras* or ritual events of initiation as practised in Madhubani. For the first time she painted a theme related to everyday life and the immediate human surrounding. This offered a departure and a challenge. This being unprecedented both in her work and in Madhubani tradition, she had to dive deep into the ocean of her imagination to find a new pictorial vocabulary. The results

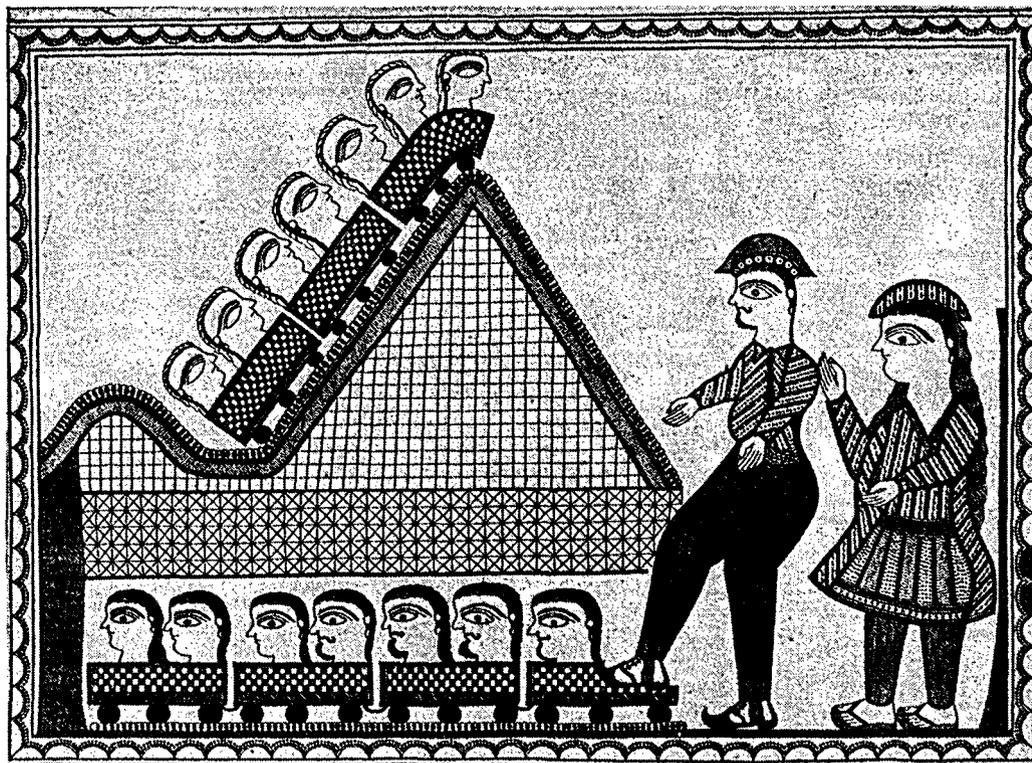
were startlingly fresh and original.

Her images in *Kohbar* and *aripan* floor paintings were constructed within the prescribed iconography of these magical paintings. Her Ramayana series derived its imagery heavily from scenes of the theatrical performances of Ramleela as well as from the popular local version of Ramchartimanas of Tulsidasa.

But in the case of *The Cycle of Life* she was faced with the problem of depicting the entire story of human life as a continuous narrative in which each image, each scene and each sequence, was conceived afresh without any reference to a pre-existing model in her own tradition. The painting was conceived on an epic scale, replete with rich cultural detail pertaining to social manners and customs, and religious beliefs and practices peculiar to epic

American Folk Festival, American Series, 1986





*Ride on a Roller Coaster, American Series, 1986*

style. Here she eliminated the compartmentalisation of scenes as in her earlier Ramayana series. The resultant effect was that of a universe teeming with millions of people, trees, birds, animals — all a part of a great celebration of life — from one birth to the next.

The entire cycle of life has been rendered by 24 scenes, each marking a significant event in the process of being born and growing up in Mithila. The single most striking feature of this painting is the highly individualistic conceptualisation of images and strict adherence to the ritual-symbolic conventions of the collective culture of Madhubani. These images owe very little to 'other pictures', but stem from a mind searching for a new vocabulary of self-expression to suit the challenging new subject matter. The human

images here are much more real and spontaneous than in her earlier mythological paintings of the Ramayana, reflecting on their faces and their postures earthy sentiments. The temporal dimension of *The Cycle of Life* unscrolls horizontally to encompass a multitude of images in a double interaction of time and space.

Ganga Devi's poetic imagery blends beautifully with a plethora of symbolic, magical and natural detail rendered in the interstices between the figures and scenes. A young woman, with flaming hairlocks and an ocean-like aura of fine streams of water, stands on a painted magical diagram representing the female organ smeared with menstrual blood, and being given a ritual bath on attainment of puberty; a pregnant mother lies on the ground

holding a bunch of mangoes to safeguard her fertility and the child inside her womb anxious to be born, and prays with folded hands: "O God, release me from this hell"; two women help to deliver and cut the umbilical cord, while the newly-born child lies on freshly-harvested paddy stocks and a pair of parrots make love in the air, indicating genesis. These are immortal images that could have stemmed only from Ganga Devi's great individual perceptions of her collective cultural tradition and her personal artistic capability, unique in the entire Madhubani tradition.

In 1985 Ganga Devi visited the United States of America to participate in an exhibition of Indian folk art and culture in Washington. She did not remain aloof to this *doosara hi duniya* (completely different world) but confronted it with a series of paintings based on her American experience which I shall call, her 'American Series'. She did these in the two years after her return from the USA. She recalled images from her memory of the visual experience of America. The images here were not as exuberant as those of *The Cycle of Life*, but were more in the nature of minimal graphic symbols. In her *Washington Monument*, for the first time using a narrative situation, she approached the canvas as a free pictorial space not dividing it up into linear compartments or rows in which sequences are chronologically organised. In the centre of the painting is the Washington Monument surrounded by American flags. The tower and the crossways leading to it automatically divide the painting into four rectangles. The scenes depicted are derived from her memory of the 'Festival of American Folk Life' celebrated annually at the Mall around the fourth of July. The imagery comprising multi-storeyed motor cars with lotus wheels (the latter resembling the wheels of chariots in her Ramayana series); a hand coming out of a window handing over a ticket to climb up the Monument; pedestrians carrying flowers and prominent shopping-bags; people wearing half-American, half-Indian costumes — all rendered in Madhubani style — gives the painting a surrealistic quality, as if an American dream painted on a celluloid sheet had been super-imposed upon a distant

Madhubani landscape.

Another painting of this series is based on her recollection of a ride in a roller-coaster in America. The gravity railroad, having a train with open cars that moves along a high, sharply winding trestle built with steep inclines producing sudden speedy plunges for thrill, must have been a unique experience to result into such a graphic pictorial expression. The neat drawing of the trestle, the way the heads of passengers rise above the open cars, the way two passengers try to balance while getting on to the train and the eyes of all the passengers in the train standing below and the contrast to the passengers in the train speedily climbing a steep slope above results from her great faculty of observation of detail and its pictorialization to minimum graphic images.

Ganga Devi had learnt to eliminate formal context in her mythological paintings based on Ramayana. She achieved this by avoiding any definite pictorial reference to wordly settings or a known landscape. Paintings of this series were twice removed from reality (suitable for mythological themes) — the first time because of her own interpretation and conceptualisation of the themes and images, and the second time due to inspiration from the visual aspects of the traditional theatrical performances of Ramleela which by themselves were visual conceptualisations of the narrative.

Thus, in the Ramayana painting, in a way, she 'mythologised' the mythology. But in her 'American Series' what she did was something even more brilliant — She mythologised the 'reality'. She attempted to transform the day-to-day images of motor cars, flags, ticket-booths, roller-coasters, people carrying shopping bags, into completely imaginary and 'fantastic' objects. She removed them again from any recognisable formal context and stripped them of all their 'familiarity' as common objects of everyday life.

What better course can the work of an Indian painter of Ganga Devi's calibre, truly rooted in the rich tradition of magic, ritual and mythology, take after a sudden exposure to a 'completely new world' if not come a full circle at another plane of artistic awareness!

# THROUGH THE EYES OF THE WHITE MAN

## FROM 'NEGRO ART' TO AFRICAN ARTS CLASSIFICATIONS AND METHODS

LOUIS PERROIS

It may seem strange that after several decades of survey and study of African plastic arts, controversies, indeed a whole polemic, are still developing as to the most 'legitimate' and appropriate manner in which to approach these arts which even now are too often described as 'primitive'. Instead of being concerned by this, should we not rather see it as the healthy symptom of a renewed interest in little known art and artists whose importance in the ensemble of cultures we instinctively feel make up today's world? There are, broadly speaking, two schools of thought in this field: those who privilege a universalist contemplation of a primarily aesthetic kind, with the intent of elevating African plastic arts, through this freeing of the eye and the mind, to the level of the major 'arts' of the West, and consequently dismissing as irrelevant or even as obstructive any contextual information relative to the objects of those arts; and those who consider that the environmental/anthropological approach furnishes an 'aesthetic' perception which, on the basis of the mutual respect of cultures, necessarily corresponds to a particular logic and perception which are the proper aims of this study in its fullest possible articulation.

Amongst all the most passionate connoisseurs one can note that there are *very few Africans*, indeed far too few; the very people who could, through a participatory approach and with an appropriate degree of sensitivity, strengthen the legitimacy accorded to African

arts. Must the White Man's way of seeing remain the point of reference for ever more, or will other ways of seeing be allowed?

With the impact of the Third World, the number of pure 'aestheticians', of exalters of 'Negro art' and of 'primitivism', is in decline, since the volume of information on the one hand, and the increasingly substantial presence in France of African cultures on the other (particularly in music), lead us to understand the objects as partaking of a whole *human context*, the real interest of which we are only beginning to see.

Nowadays these two schools of thought can be distinguished more by their methods of analysis and the way they deal with the people and 'field' of their enquiry than by positions of principle.

Personally speaking, as a trained professional ethnologist with long experience of African cultures in Africa itself, I cannot but align myself with the second group, not in order to deny or minimize the great 'aesthetic' value of the objects I study (some are quite clearly among the great masterpieces of world art), nor to reduce the activity which dreamt them up and gave them form to a sort of 'functional' craft, but out of a scrupulous concern for a *genuine reciprocity of cultures*.

These works of art are, for me, *objects and signs*; they first appeared in towns, villages, amongst families and secret societies, made up of living women and men who have a *history* and a *corpus of experience*, which, in the event,

seems unthinkable and totally unjust to neglect for the sake of economy. I therefore claim that a better cultural balance is necessary in order to understand the reality of these creations, to understand what they really are in their complexity and not merely what we want them to be, a result of having passed through the almost imperceptible filters of our taste and our modes of thought. We should not so readily forget past inequalities and the time when we spoke of 'Negro art' and the 'Art of the Savages'. We should, likewise, guard against a new and very contemporary manifestation of ethnocentrism.

With regard to these artists, what seems simply 'right' is to rehabilitate the legitimacy of these different cultures using their own value-systems, even if these are difficult for us to understand.

If one considers that, as research has shown, the plastic arts are, in fact, *languages* whose functions are to be used and to be understood, one can see that, beyond the mere vocabularies of form, motif and colour, there might be syntaxes, styles, and even a 'poetry' of form. This point of view is only radical in appearance, and because it is about objects with which the Western world, or at least a certain intelligentsia, has become infatuated.

Ethnology, the study of social structures, rites and, why not, arts, amongst other subjects, leads us not only to allow 'otherness', the right to be different, but, moreover, inevitably implies the attempt to put oneself 'inside the skin' of those others whom one wishes to get to know, while avoiding all preconceptions, however broad. Ethnocentrism is a trap which we easily fall into, especially when it comes to 'traditional' art.

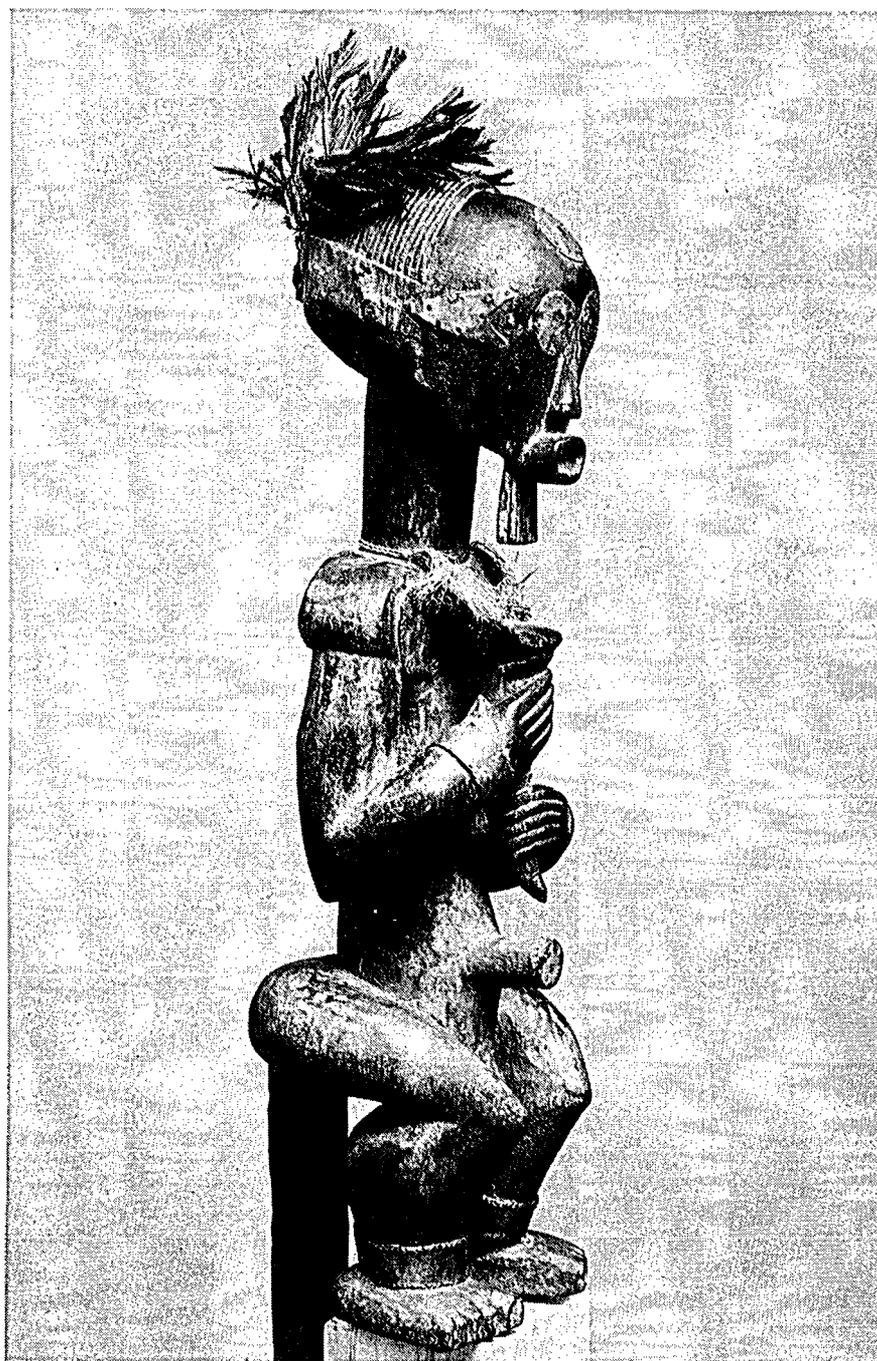
How then, in dealing with African arts, can we resolve this difficulty which consists in the fact that the notion of 'art' (our concept of 'art') cannot be perceived in the same isolated manner, but only as closely bound up with other elements of a spiritual and sometimes functional nature? Furthermore, how can we take in the great variety of works, the multiplicity of variations of styles, the apparent contradictions, in short the whole profusion of creativity in the African plastic arts? And lastly, how can we link these objects, which are poorly identified and often difficult if not impossible

to date, to a little-known social structure, to an indistinct historical framework and to an esoteric mode of thought?

Borrowing Michel Leiris' statement in the foreword to *Afrique Noire, la creation plastique* that it would be better to conceive of the overall approach to African arts less as primarily 'a history of arts and styles' and more as the search for, and the according of spatio-temporal form to 'the visible products of a certain society's history', I have, since 1964, undertaken a whole series of research projects in this field, first in connection with West Coast Equatorial Africa and later in connection with the Grassland of the Cameroons, and finally leaving the area to deal with objects in collections. This long immersion in coherent African contexts (on a regional scale very restricted in relation to the whole of Black Africa), whilst allowing me to build up a large body of information (and of impressions), has, over the years, made me increasingly modest and cautious in relation to the subject.

Let us start with the significance of those sets of objects considered, whether they be in museums or in private collections.

At the start of any research into African art, there are the *objects*. These constitute both the basis and the end of research, the principal centre of interest which potentially contains all that one might be looking for, but always in a veiled, indeed esoteric, manner. If everything is there, contained within the object, then nothing is either apparent or directly comprehensible to the layman. The objects seem beautiful, ugly, strange, extraordinary or uninteresting. This is, however, the only basic fact that we can obtain, an essential piece of information because of its fixity, a fixed expression, at a precise moment in time, of the inspiration and the creative capacity of a man who is both long gone and often forgotten. All the rest, the sense and quality of this *moulded message* has to be found in the more or less relevant archives, in often misleading museographical research, in a limited bibliography and in field-work that is always difficult at the heart of cultural and ethnic groups who are undergoing a constant change (the pace of which has increased since their independence) and who are often uninterested in their traditional arts.



**FANG NGUMBA** (South Cameroon) *An Ancestral Statue*  
Museum Für Volkerkunde, Berlin

A 'collection' is merely a set of objects, made up haphazardly of pieces which were available at a given moment in the field or on the market (galleries, other collections at auctions) and which are accorded with the tastes, and suited to the pocket of the collector. In museums this make-up will depend on the competence and the inclinations of the curatorial staff, on their taste and their financial constraints (or on their mission to collect, as was the case up until the 1960s and 70s). One must always remember that any known object, has, *de facto*, been through *several* selection processes.

If we consider the actual conditions of this 'collecting' in the field, we must remain very open to the possibility of progressively enriching the corpus. Most of the well-known 'Negro' art objects, the masterpieces which adorn our museums, were obtained on the spot by more or less violent methods (for example, the destruction of the capital of the *Oba* of Benin and the confiscation of the bronze plaques from the royal palace in 1897) or by more or less direct pressure from colonial administrations or the Church. No collecting has ever been carried out outside an unequal power relation, even when it is emphasized that villagers willingly (?) gave essential objects away to their visitors!

African objects have all therefore been *removed from their environment*. For the scientific researcher who wishes to carry out a study in the most objective manner possible, this constitutes a handicap that he should never ignore. Indeed, one may thus end up with an incomplete or even distorted image of an art. Amongst the Fang of Equatorial Africa for example, we are most familiar with the statues of ancestors and with two types of mask (the very long *ngil* and a white 'moon' mask); the Fang, made up of ten or so different groupings, have other artistic products: masks (the masks of the *Ngil* secret society in fibre and feathers; *Ngeul* polychrome wooden masks; *Ngontang* helmet-masks with three, four, or five faces; *Bikereu* or *Ekekek* demon-masks); gigantic painted earthen sculptures containing various objects which perform certain roles (bones, plants, shells etc.); sculpted architectural features (temple posts); decorated personal objects (implement-handles, weapons, stools, culinary utensils etc.); highly fashioned headwear (embellished with pearls, cowries,

brass tacks etc.); musical instruments with sculpted features (harps, drums etc.); various kinds of personal adornment (bracelets, necklaces, face-painting, etc).

All these objects clearly present us with a great number of variants which until recently nobody was either bothered or been able to *relate together*. This entails an enormous amount of work for each region of Africa, and it is clear that, despite various moves in the right direction, the task is far from being completed, especially as regards published work. Monographs, like 'catalogues raisonnés' do not make much money, because the buying public, and hence publishers, still prefer comfortable generalizations. Yet without these monographs and these systematic studies there is no way forward.

#### A METHOD<sup>1</sup> ADAPTED TO A PARTICULAR CASE:

#### AN ETHNOMORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SCULPTURE OF THE FANG OF EQUATORIAL AFRICA.

An objective scientific understanding of a traditional work of art demands a complex approach which starts with simple *contemplation* and finishes with the *analysis of the total environment* in which the work originated. It is the dialectical collation of objective and determinate data and the intrinsically *human* knowledge of a society that enables us to grasp the particular originality of African tribal art.<sup>2</sup>

The method of analysis of Fang statuary which will once again be used here draws its inspiration directly from the nature of the object to be analysed: the *Byeri* as well a sculpted object (an ancestor-statue) as a *belief*, a work of art and a mystical link with the world of ancestors. *The work of art is a mediation between the living and the dead*, the communication being made by means of the sculptural message expressed in the statue. Therefore we should consider Fang statues as *objects*, as *works of art*, as *objects used in ritual*, and lastly as an *institution* or, to be more exact, as the privileged mode of expression of an institution.

The aim of this method, the study of the correlation between the concrete (the sculpted forms) and the abstract (the imagination that gave them form), is to define the constant characteristics of 'styles', to help place them



FANG BETSI (Gabon) *An Ancestral Statue*  
Museum Für Volkskunde, Basle

historically and geographically and thereby to gain true access, albeit in a limited way, to the complex worlds of African thought, where social, religious, scientific and aesthetic elements combine as one. In this particular case the method was very carefully adapted to fit the specific problems posed by Fang statuary, which is thematically and morphologically homogeneous. Nevertheless, the fundamental principle of comparing the results of aesthetic analysis (museum-work) with the real-life environment in which the particular style flourished (field-work) is applicable to any other traditional style.

The object, taken on its own, removed or snatched from its proper context, and isolated in an artificial environment, will not reveal its secret straight away, whatever method is applied to it. The computer will help us to the extent that we shall, with its aid, be able to collect *all the variables* relevant to the object, whether they be morphological data or data concerning signification.

We can thus give an outline of the method:

- 1) a morphological analysis leading to the delineation of 'theoretical' styles;
- 2) a stylistic investigation carried out in the original context of the tradition in order to test and validate the theoretical styles (which will enable one to determine the relative relevance of each of the classifications obtained), to identify their place of origin and to study the reciprocal stylistic influences within a historical perspective.

#### *Morphological analysis*

Morphological analysis is the identification, classification and comparison of *forms*, the volumes and rhythms of statues, independent of all other considerations, particularly historical or ethnographic. This approach is based on the principle that all forms, in their internal organization of elements, are significant in themselves; the work of art, *qua* complex of forms or morphological elements, *is never fortuitous*. Therefore there is always an *order* to be found amongst the morphological elements, and this order reflects the concept of style as I defined it above. Morphological analysis provides us with these styles which are 'theoretical' because they are defined according

to the sole logical criteria of *our system of knowledge* and without reference either to their precise provenance or to the opinions of the interested parties (artists or native users). The classification into logical series requires no further criteria than those given by the distinguishing features of the work, but only the data obtained in the field can go on to give that classification real significance.

Whilst being theoretically applicable to the totality of traditional plastic arts, this method is, in practice, only manageable at a regional or epochal level. Documentary evidence therefore has to be pre-selected. One must first select a region or a coherent set of ethnic groups where one might hope to find stylistic affinities. (Which might consist in either a single style with significant variation or several related styles.)

We are straight away confronted with the problem of identifying the various pieces.<sup>3</sup> This is made harder by the intermixing of populations, migration and frequent exchanges (field-work comes up against this problem). The whole ensemble of African arts must therefore be studied, region by region, in a monographical form similar to that used in general ethnology.

When the region has been selected, we may start on the museographical investigation (the establishment of the collection to be referred to) and on the bibliographical research. The aim is to have a representative collection. We saw above the particular difficulties that one encounters in this respect. The minimum size would seem to be about 300 or 400 items for a fairly homogeneous style such as those of the Fang, Dogon, Bambara, Senufo, etc. When it comes to masks, that number must be at least doubled because of the very large number of variations. The number of items studied is important for the research because it serves as a *statistical validation* of the conclusions. A large number of pieces of the same sub-style will demonstrate the continuity, the consistency and the duration of the complex thereby defined. 'Atypical' sub-styles represented by only a few pieces may signify abandoned innovations or a fashion that petered out before developing into a true style.<sup>4</sup>

We can thereby create a museographical index card identifying the morphology of each

object which will serve to describe each piece in a detailed and standardized way.

First the object is *measured* (height, width, depth, axes, etc), then it is *taken apart or analysed*, feature by feature. In this respect the overall pattern of component elements in the object is subjected to scrutiny, for example, in the case of a statue: the balance and rhythm of the sculpted blocks, its proportions, how it fits its space, the dialectic of empty and full space, the relation between the different planes etc; the supplementary details of its morphology (its eyes, mouth, ears, etc); its decoration.

It should be noted that drawings permit a far better visual and manual understanding of sculptures than do photographs which one can only contemplate passively. Drawings enable one to understand the technical procedure employed by the artist. Moreover we should not forget that certain objects, especially masks, are made to be seen in a particular way.

Starting from the basic documentation we isolate each relevant morphological feature of the object and compare it to the homologous feature in every other piece in the collection; this splitting up into basic elements enables us to classify it in a particular typical category.

Let us look at, for example, the morphological features used in the study of Fang statuary.

I first tried to see if the *size* of different parts of the body (head, trunk, legs) had a particular significance. It was later found that, in Fang styles, the differences in these sizes were significant at the level of tribal differentiation. Nonetheless in the case of size one cannot make immediate generalizations, even when one applies it to the other styles of Gabon.<sup>5</sup> I next looked at the following: the height of the trunk in relation to the total height of the body (in terms of the total height); the relative height of the head and the legs (and in relation to the total height of the body): thus one might have, for example, as the typical associated features of the style 'very small head/very long legs' or 'very fat head/medium-sized legs', etc; the size of the neck (in relation to the total height of the body); the concavity of the face; the shapes of the head, face and profile; the hairstyle or the head-dress; the arms. In this case one must study how the sculptor was able to treat them (attached to the body in low or high relief, or

detached from the body; breasts and genitalia; the position of the legs (e.g. half-kneeling, sitting etc.); the mouth, the nose, the ears, the eyes, the navel, etc.

The detailed examination of this splitting up into distinct morphological features together with the specific characterization of each aims at an exhaustive survey of all the forms used for each sculptural detail in every statue in the collection in question.

For each of the features a set of mutually exclusive categories can be defined. For example, the 'eye' in Fang statues can be divided into seven different types: 1) mirror stuck on with resin; 2) 'coffee-bean'; 3) copper plaque fixed with a screw, nail or glue; 4) incision; 5) raised disc; 6) no eyes; 7) raised, rectangular.

As regards the 'eyes', each statue falls into one of these categories, and so on for each of the other features studied. We can thus code all the morphological variables and characterize each object by a formula (for example, a series of figures) which will summarize the description of its form in a standardized manner.

#### *The establishment of 'theoretical styles'*

Once each work has been studied separately in the most objective manner possible (albeit obviously in relation to our 'geometrical' Western vision), we must proceed to multivariable systematic comparison. This can be done either, as I did in 1970, by manual collation of all the figures pertaining to morphological identification (the descriptive formulae), or, as is possible nowadays, by computer-aided data analysis. This process, in both cases, boils down to *deriving a number of sets from works which have consistent and hence significant resemblances.*

In Fang statuary it can be seen that, despite an overall homogeneity, the statues are of *very different sizes*. Some are very long, thin and slender, others are squat and solid. It became apparent to me during the course of my museographical research and my field-work that, within the vast Fang complex, these sizes are related to a certain ethnic differentiation: taking into account the geographical spread of groups at the end of the nineteenth century,

long-form styles are generally from the north and short-form styles from the south of the region.

Nevertheless the distinguishing feature or features can be differentiated: according to J. Laude what distinguished Dogon statuary was the organization of volume in space and the technical freedom in relation to the materials; according to P. Vandenhoute for Dan/Guere masks the distinguishing features were related to the represented reality, a combination of idealized realism and primitive expressionism. A. Leroi-Gourhan thought that, for primitive art in general, the notion of distance was important, particularly the distance between the vital elements of the statue (eyes, mouth, navel, genitals, etc), and that defining these distances contributed to a geometrical understanding of 'sculptural rhythm'.

The results of the multivariable analysis allow us to determine the minimum measurable characteristic for each set, the latter having been identified and distinguished from one another by means of a statistical method.

Can we say that, now that these theoretical 'styles' have been established by means of our preliminary analysis, we have in fact completed our research and discovered the actual styles? We cannot do so, of course, but what we do have here is an outline containing all the elements which will enable us to carry out the anthro-stylistic research proper, which alone will enable us to see a reflection of that reality which is both a product of history and the lived experience of actual people. We must give depth to that rough canvas made up of lines and measurements by painting into it the depth of the real world, the fertility of imagination, and the individual inspiration of the artists which are the fruit of a continuous flourishing process of borrowing and exchanging styles.

#### *The anthro-stylistic research*

The first and most important point is to be aware of the absolute necessity of a thorough acquaintance with the social context in which one is working. Since traditional art is one of the privileged forms of expression of a society, it would seem impossible to picture it, to study it, to classify it, or to understand it whilst deliberately ignoring the civilization which gave

rise to it and used it, at least as long as one wishes to avoid the dangers of ethnocentrism.

P. Frascatel, J. Maquet and J. Laude have already outlined the various problems involved in discovering the relation between the work and the society, and in evaluating the role of the sculptor in his social group (his freedom of expression, his social and religious roles), which are all problems that can only be solved through field-work. This direct acquaintance will, at a regional level, also enable us to determine more precise locations for the styles, to validate the theoretical classifications, to study influences, to determine a historical order of development — in short, to study *in situ* the dynamism of the plastic arts.

#### *The modes of research in the field*

The field-work has two main aims: to delimit the spheres of influence of different sub-styles and to situate the *centres of particular styles*; and to become aware of the importance of the objects in ritual (their use) and the technical, artistic, and spiritual *conditions of their creation*.

The questions I asked about the statues of the Fang, by way of example, dealt with the problem of sculpture and with the general information on Fang customs which had been obtained from elsewhere (from books or from other visits to the region, for example). I tried to find *sculptors* and *initiates*, indeed anyone who was able to answer my questions, the majority of young people under thirty being unable to do so.

The subjects dealt with were as follows: famous sculptors; techniques involved in the making of these objects (the frequency and circumstances of their being made, the woods used, their selection, the way the trees were felled, the way the wood was treated, the way it was sculpted, the decoration); the meaning of the statues (representations of females and males, of animals, of mother and child, busts, heads), the meaning of the posture of the sculpted figures and of their size; the identification and sense of the head-dresses, tattoos, beards, jewels, etc; the relation between masks and statues. the definition of the *Byeri* (Fang ancestor-cult): their vocabulary, terminology, their re-modelled or painted skulls, the consultations given by the *Byeri*,

their sacrifices, their priests, their interdicts, the process of initiation and the role of relics and statues; the definition of the *Melan* (an initiatory society linked to the *Byeri*); the links between the *Byeri* and the *Melan*, rituals, frequency of rites, the nature of ceremonies, the role of twins; the gradual disappearance of the *Byeri* and the *Melan*: the reasons for the disappearance of rituals and statues and the reasons for the survival of certain masks.

After the questions, I carried out a test, based on a number of photographs, which consisted in identifying the *nature and origin* of objects characteristic of the theoretical sub-styles. In a set of eighteen photographs, I introduced reliquary figures foreign to the Fang (belonging to the *kota-mahongwe*, the *kota-obamba* and the *sango*), in order to determine to what extent sculptors could *recognize* works which were stylistically related to their own.

Field-work will always complicate the initial theoretical classification and demonstrate that human behaviour does not easily fit into strict categories and that reality is awkward. It is only with experience that one realize that direct contact with the area studied is absolutely necessary if one is to begin to get close to objective reality, even in the domain of the plastic arts. This contact may still be valid for a number of years for the study of ancient art, even though most of the sculptors have disappeared leaving no artistic heritage. Field-work will complete a deficient documentation and will provide it with the elements necessary for a genuine understanding of the question.

The analysis of the answers given to the questions and the results of the photo-test created new sub-divisions amongst the broader sets already defined. It was thereby possible to determine several typical sub-styles in the short-form set (with their significant details) which became apparent in the course of the field-work — for example, the three-shelled head-dress of the *Mvui*.

The history of peoples and their migration explain certain influences and the present form of the sub-styles. It was realised that there were transitional forms (medium-form) that could be taken apart and analysed.

The results of the two methods of enquiry can be collated as follows:

One can see that it is impossible to say, for

example, that all *Ntumu* statues are very long, or that all long-form statues are *Ntumu*. There are a considerable number of variations. Sub-styles are defined by a majority of objects (a general tendency towards a certain form) yet include various exceptions, which are however, recognizable through other details of sufficient

Analyse théorique	Hyperlongiforme	Longiforme	Equiforme	Bréviforme
Enquête de terrain	NGUMBA MABEA	NTUMU	BETSI-NZAMAN MVAI	OKAK

significance. It is only the extreme categories which do not overlap: *Ngumba* — very long form/*Mvai* — short form. On the other hand, the intermediate medium-form category splits into two sub-categories, either *Ntumu* or *Nzaman/Mvai/Betsi*. Hence, we can discern in the homogeneous Fang ensemble two quite distinct centres of production, the existence of which can be explained by the study of migration, which had two main waves: first, the *Betsi*, the conquerors, and second the *Ntumu*, who were able to exploit the land.

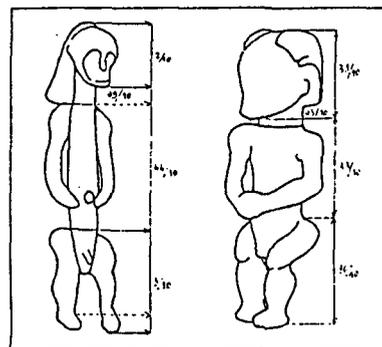
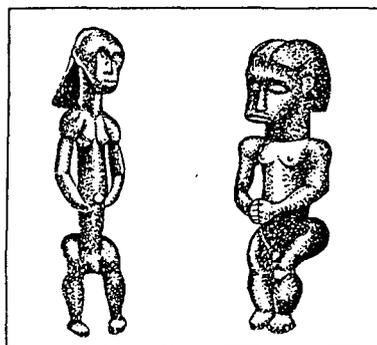
Also, through the study of all the patterns of artistic exchange in the area bounded by the Sanaga in the Cameroons and the Ogooue in Gabon, we end up with a dynamism of styles.

What is controversial about this method is to have dared, along with several others, to measure African art, to have observed it, scrutinized it, analysed it and codified a moment of its history. Despite all the precautions taken, this approach still has the ability to shock. How could we 'geometrize' the inspiration and the drives of pure creation?

Whilst being aware of the limits of a morphological approach, even one which is

STYLE DU NORD

STYLE DU SUD



LONGIFORME

BRÉVIFORME

dessins Domenico Terrana et Louis Perrois

carefully adapted and counterbalanced by corrective anthropological and historical coefficients, I believe that the creations of the plastic arts of Africa form a complex 'ensemble' of *specific orders* whose distinct and identifiable 'styles' are its formal indices. Africa, too, has a right to a logic of imagination. Its arts are conceived and constructed, and are never either instinctive or determined by external conditions.

These logical features lie behind the feeling of visual delight and the flights of imagination that the works spark off, that we should be uncovering and analysing, so that we may contribute to a greater cultural balance, the need for which we all feel, between Black Africa and the West.

#### NOTES

1. This method is derived from a whole number of different works, particularly those of F. Olbrechts, P. Vandenhoute, and A. Leroi-Gourhan (see L. Perrois, 'Statuaire fang, Gabon', ORSTOM, Paris, 1972, et 'Problemes d'analyses de la sculpture traditionnelle du Gabon', ORSTOM, Paris, 1977).
2. The very notion of 'tribality' (in the sense given by W. Fagg) should be used with caution to the extent that ethnic or 'tribal' space is very open to the outside world. In real life the ethnic group does not, therefore, have clearly defined and convenient boundaries.
3. Genuine articles, as far as it is possible to judge: in other words conceived and made by Africans for Africans.
4. Nevertheless an 'atypical' set can in due course be identified. (for example, the sub-style of the Mabea of the Cameroons).
5. J. Laude based his classification of Dogon works on the complexity of the sculpture in relation to the log from which it was carved.

# PRIMITIVISM WITHOUT APPROPRIATION BOAS, NEWMAN AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ART

CARLOS SEVERI

In September 1946, in a piece introducing an exhibition of North-West Coast Indian painting, Barnett Newman wrote:

It is becoming more and more apparent that to understand modern art, one must have an appreciation of the primitive arts, for just as modern art stands as an island of revolt in the stream of Western European aesthetics, the primitive art traditions stand apart as authentic aesthetic accomplishments that flourished without the benefit of European history.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst postulating a very close link between his painting and primitive art, Newman here proposes an aesthetics whose primitivist reference is not restricted to direct appropriation of forms.

The great New York painter invokes the idea of a *ritualistic will*<sup>2</sup> to create, which he attributes to Amerindian artists (*The first man was an artist* is the title of a piece he wrote at that time), and at the same time engages in formal artistic research free of all imitation. He has no desire to borrow visual themes from primitive art but refers to it as if it were a parallel field of research. This attitude was not unique in 1940's New York. Newman shared it with other artists including Gottlieb, Still, Rothko and Kline.<sup>3</sup> This approach, animated by a strong feeling of affinity with primitive artists ("to be an artist is to make, is to *be just that*", Newman seems to be saying in his presentation of Kwakiutl painting), is that of one of the great currents in twentieth century primitivism, one which Rubin and his fellow

researchers least explored.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps also the approach which is still alive today in the work of painters and sculptors like Beuys and Twombly. This feeling of solidarity, almost of brotherhood, that Newman has towards Amerindian artists challenges another distinction: that between the work of contemporary artists and anthropological research into the art of so-called primitive societies.

Elsewhere I have attempted to give a definition of the field of study of the anthropology of art, which whilst allowing us to understand the history of Western interpretation of primitive art, can be applied to *all* works of art.<sup>5</sup> In this essay I should like to show how, from the same angle, one might formulate that link which exists between supposedly primitive art and certain contemporary research.

The Latin word 'ars' has had for centuries two distinct senses, which nowadays seem quite remote from one another. On the one hand — writes Panofsky (1987, first published 1943) — 'ars' designates the conscious and intentional capacity of man "to produce objects in the same manner as nature produces phenomena." In this sense "the activities of an architect, a painter or a sculptor could, even at the height of the Renaissance, be described as 'ars' in the same way as those of a weaver or a bee-keeper". On the other hand, the term 'ars' also designated — in a use of the word which has almost disappeared nowadays — a set of rules, or of techniques, that thought must

use in order to represent the real. Thus not only were the rules of logical argument an 'ars' for sophists and stoics, but also what we now call astronomy could, for centuries, describe itself as the "art des étoiles".

Taking as a starting point the double meaning of this concept, which has almost disappeared from our own tradition, we can say that *the study of the link that each culture establishes between these two aspects of the notion of art — between certain forms of knowledge and certain techniques of conception and production of images — constitutes the object of anthropology of art.* The task of the anthropologist is, then to compare, in each and any work of art, the functions of technique and thought.

In actual fact, in this meeting of Newman's artistic research and the work of Kwakiutl artists — an attitude of revolt against Western tradition facing the art-products of societies which have always been foreign to our own — the problematic notion is precisely that of *technique*.

According to Boas' earliest research — which is part of a tradition going back to Reigl<sup>6</sup> and Semper<sup>7</sup> — the products of the plastic arts of primitive societies acquired the status of works of art precisely because of a reflection on technique:

"The intuitive feeling for form must be present," writes Boas. "So far as our knowledge of the works of art of primitive people extends the feeling for form is inextricably bound up with technical experience."<sup>8</sup>

The criterion which guides him in his analyses of the art of the North-West coast is clear: art exists where the absolute mastery of a technique culminates in a *perfect form*. This form can then transcend the simple function of the utilitarian object and become the model for a style. This depends as much on the particular organization of a culture as on the constraints inherent in all representation of space. According to Boas, there are only two ways of representing space: one refers directly to vision and, imitating the eye, represents objects in a unifocal perspective. The other represents objects not as they present themselves to vision, but rather as they are represented by the mind. Hence a North-West coast sculptor can multiply perspectives and

represent an animal from several points of view simultaneously, or even combine the *dissecta membra* of a male dolphin and a female seal to show us the monstrous fruit of their metamorphosis.

Primitive art is then neither naive nor rudimentary: in fact in choosing a specific *variation* of mental organization of space, it constructs a complexity where our eyes are used to simplifying. When we look at a picture drawn in an illusionist perspective we expect a simplified representation of the object in order to *imagine* the complex totality of features which constitute it. Primitive art moves in the opposite direction: the tendency is towards a complex representation of the features of an object so that we can mentally construct its real presence: so that we can *imagine* it more completely than can the mere eye. This type of representation — when it reaches that state of perfection that Boas describes — generates such a tension between verisimilitude and the invisible that it produces the illusion of an unreal space: the coordinates that determine this space are not those of vision.

We have seen that the discovery of this concept of space in Kwakiutl art was for Boas the result of a reflection on technical experience. If we turn our attention to the texts written by the artists of the New York School, this notion seems to have disappeared from the very definition of art: "Art is defined not by its technique of production, manual or other, but by the inner shape of the society in which it appears," wrote Harold Rosenberg in a 1971 piece devoted to the work of Marcel Duchamp.<sup>9</sup> Here as elsewhere in Rosenberg's writing, the attempt to understand the artist's thought comes up against a reflection on the public (indeed political) nature of art. "Today, art itself is the critic", he wrote in a more recent piece: to conceive and interpret forms is to question the place of art (and, through art, *invention*) in society.

It is of course not by chance that these thoughts spring from a reflection on Duchamp. Amongst the great discoverers of the century, Duchamp has, perhaps, most clearly shown that before even being a form for the eye to behold, the work of art is an *act*, and that no form can be understood without analysing the sequence of acts through which the artist

realises mental space, amongst which the work of art is merely the end product or a fragment; Rosenberg points this out in connection with Mondrian in *Art on the Edge* (1983).

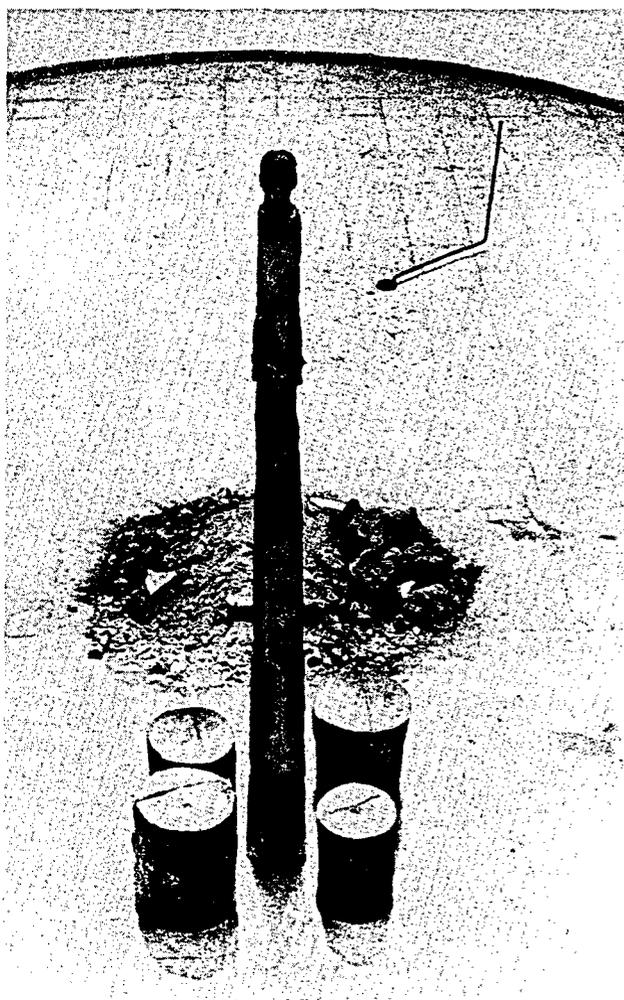
The ordering of this sequence should in no way be confused with technical procedure. This word, Rosenberg seems to think, is too full of traps. It should be carefully redefined when applied to modern art:

In the changed relation between art and history, the automations involved in the application of craft skills have been replaced by acts of the mind occurring *at the very beginning of the making of a work*. . . Their effect is to remove art from the realm of habit, manual dexterity, and traditional taste into that of philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

This view, which is perhaps excessively intellectualist, of the abstract painter's work should not make us forget that this preliminary sequence of acts by the artist "which occurs at the very beginning of the making of a work" and which defines the work's style and thought, is directed above all at the definition of a space. The work of a painter free from any primitivist tendency like the early De Chirico clearly illustrates this point. In his first paintings — which, after surrealism and via Duchamp, had a profound influence on the New York School — the intensity of the images never results from the objects that appear in the paintings nor, as has too often been claimed from their incongruous placement. The power of some of the *Places d'Italie* and some of the *Autoportraits* comes from the fact that the coordinates of the painted space are so unbearable to the eye that they end up showing us a physically impossible space: a space that the eye can never entirely grasp.

What is abolished in these scenes is the horizon against which the objects — and the beholder — are inscribed. If we look at various urban landscapes from the Ferrarese period, we can see that no town, no landscape, can have such a close horizon. The painter's dizzying foreshortening shows a point in space that cannot exist. Yet the space is there, silent. A train passes by behind the arcades, the shadow of a girl is glimpsed. She has a toy in her hand. The imagery seems oneiric, because the space in which it appears cannot exist in the world we know. This unreal cutting up of space is

JOSEPH BEUYS *Tram Stop 1*, 1976  
© BEUYS VG-BILDKUNST, 1987



aimed, as De Chirico later wrote, at reflecting the very mechanism of thinking.<sup>11</sup>

Before the avant-gardists the technical task of a painter (his craft skills, as Rosenberg put it) had as its *initial* goal the reproduction of a unique and verisimilar spatial model. For twentieth century painting, or at least for those painters who, like Mondrian, considered that "the surface of natural things is beautiful, but its imitation is dead matter",<sup>12</sup> the construction of a *physically impossible* space is the first act of the technical procedure. In this act of defining space, which precedes any occurrence of image, the contemporary artist identifies the *ars* of thought with the *ars* of technique. Opting for radical abstraction thus coincides with an imaginary exploration of the origins of pictorial representation. What the Kwakiutl artist demonstrates to Newman is the possibility of conceiving a space where the realm of thought can be made in age ("the I, terrible and constant, is in my eyes the subject of painting" he declared in 1985); a place where the abstract forms of geometry can definitely disengage themselves from all reference to the everyday experience of vision in order to become "a language of passion".<sup>13</sup> From that point on, technical innovation becomes ever more closely identified with development of thought.

Today, through the work of other artists, the definition of space remains very close to this vision of primitive art. Let us look at a last sample: *Tram Stop*, which Beuys first showed in the 1976 Venice Biennale. In this sculpture, all the elements of the image (the tumulus of rubble, the four rounds of wood around the image of a man, the tram cable and the length of piping which sketch a perspective in a place which cannot but suggest the apse of a small chapel) aim at defining the space of an altar. The traditional coordinates of the place of ritual are, however, completely absent. Instead of an icon surrounded by offerings in the half-light of a chapel, we see the apparently randomly scattered traces of a private cult whose beliefs we shall never know. In this case, as in American Indian art, the work becomes the place where a tension between the realistic and the invisible is generated. For Newman as for Beuys, primitive art does not constitute a repertory of terms to imitate. Through the

aesthetic ideal in their work, the identification of the *ars* of technique and the *ars* of thought, primitive art at one and the same time offers them the model of a non-illusionist space and a series of techniques of mental representation. It is in the space defined by these techniques — techniques which no longer follow the eye, but the mind — that each form will henceforth seek its perfect state.

## NOTES

1. H. Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, New York, Abrams, 1978, p.241.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Rosenberg explains Newman's attitude towards European painting of that time as follows: "Newman put forward the concept of an ideal art without visual references as a development for which American artists were particularly fit. Even in its most abstract modes, Newman contended, European art remained wedded to its 'sensual nature'; the geometrical forms of 'purists', such as Kandinsky and Mondrian, were actually equivalents of trees and horizons. Against the naturalism inherent in the European sensibility, a new group of American painters, Newman asserted, were creating a 'truly abstract world'. For those artists (Gottlieb, Rothko, Still and himself), he claimed an art entirely liberated from residues of things seen, a virtually clean state of the imagination. The American abstractionists were 'at home in the world of the pure idea', as the Europeans were at home among the objective correlatives of sensations." (op.cit., p.37-38)
4. See Varnedoe's study 'Abstract Expressionism' in W. Rubin (ed), *Primitivism in XXth Century Art*, exhibition catalogue, Museum Of Modern Art, New York, 1986.
5. C. Severi, 'Anthropologie de L'Art', to be published in *Dictionnaire de L'Ethnologie et de L'Anthropologie*, Paris PUF.
6. A. Riegl, *Stilfragen*, Berlin, 1923 (2 ed.).
7. G. Semper, 'London Lecture: November 11, 1853', in *Res-Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 6, 1983, and (London Lecture: December 1853), in *Res-Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 9, 1985.
8. Should read p.11.
9. H. Rosenberg, *Art on the Edge*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1983, p.4.
10. *Ibid.*, p.136.
11. On De Chirico's thought, see P. Fossati, *La Pittura Metafisica*, Turin, Einaudi, 1988, and G. De Chirico, *Il Meccanismo del Pensiero*, Turin, Einaudi, 1987.
12. "For the surface of things is beautiful, but its imitation is dead matter. Things give us everything, but their representation no longer gives us anything." (Mondrian, *Diaries 1914*, cit. in M. Seuphor, *Piet Mondrian*, Paris, Flammarion, 1956, p.116).
13. H. Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*, op. cit., p.37.

# OTHERS ART — OUR ART

## SALLY PRICE

In a few years' time the Western world will be celebrating the discovery of America without, however, noticing that what it is celebrating is not *the* discovery, but *its* discovery of that continent. Obviously, for those who were already living there, the 'New World' was not so new as it was for the Europeans of that time.

An identical distinction should be made about the discovery of 'primitive art' during this century.<sup>1</sup> In the following pages I shall be examining the proprietorial roles that Westerners have bestowed upon themselves when it comes to others' art. As a starting-point I shall take Pierre Bourdieu's observation that "the games that artists and aesthetes play and their battles for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy are less innocent than they appear".<sup>2</sup> For, if this remark can be applied to the heart of a single society, then it takes on a far greater significance when applied to a dominant society which both judges and controls the artistic output of others.

I shall first make some basic points about the traditional study of fine art. It is not difficult to see that art-historians take, as their main subject of enquiry, the life and works of certain individuals and the historical unfolding of distinct artistic movements. As with the history of music, of literature or of theatre, the history of art is seen as a mosaic of contributions made by individuals whose names we know, whose works can be distinguished, and whose

personal lives and the way they related to their age are worthy of our attention. There is, however, one single exception to this definition of the study of art which is centred on individual creativity and historical chronology. In this predominant Western conception, a work of art originating outside the 'world traditions' is considered to be the product of a nameless person who is representative of his whole community and who unreflectively obeys the precepts of a time-honoured tradition.

Before examining this composite person more closely, it will be useful to take a brief look back over the places accorded to individual creativity and to authority in the tradition of ethnological literature.

On the one hand, a great number of descriptions of 'primitive' societies are written in the timeless tense described as the 'ethnographic present' — a mode of expression which has the effect of removing cultural expression from its historical dimension and hence of amalgamating individuals and even whole generations in order to create a single figure who is representative of his society's past and present. Malinowski's 'Trobriand Island native' and Evan-Pritchard's 'Nuer priest' were constructed with the aim of showing us the cultural norms and general customs of their societies rather than to explore the different characters of the individuals or to enable us to

understand chronological developments more clearly.<sup>3</sup> This kind of approach survives to this day, virtually untouched by the current debate about the role of history in the lives of peoples who have no writing.

On the other hand, there have always been ethnologists who advocate paying greater attention to the role of creativity, of innovation and of historical change, in other societies. Franz Boas, for example, whilst affirming the conservatism of 'primitive art' and the powerful influence of the traditions that form the basis of that art, radically altered the study of 'other' art when he replaced the work of art by the artist himself as the main object of his enquiry. He emphasized the importance of research which penetrated the vision of people in a particular society and of a kind of study that is attentive to the role of virtuosity, to the artistic process, and to what he called the "game of the imagination" in the creation of artistic form.<sup>4</sup> His students, who came to represent a whole generation of American anthropology, went on to develop this view in their own fieldwork by defining the relation between tradition and creativity (and hence their relative weight) as a question to be carefully explored in each society rather than as a generalizable feature common to all the 'primitive' world. Their observations began to show to what extent non-Western artists made choices in their work (albeit within the framework of a specific formative tradition) — choices which showed an awareness of the aesthetic options open to them and which sometimes represented important innovations. Consequently, the readers of a study of Pueblo pottery by Ruth Bunzel became acquainted, not only with the characteristics of Zuni, Acoma, Hopi and San Ildefonso pottery, but also with the more specific attributes of the work of certain potters such as Maria Martinez and Nampeyo.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, in Britain, Raymond Firth — the aim of whose work was a better understanding of how an individual's freedom is manifested within the framework of his society's prescriptive norms — was focusing on "the position of the creative faculty in the indigenous artist in relation to his conformity to local style".<sup>6</sup> Referring in his work to specific individuals whose lives had contributed

to his knowledge of a society, Firth cleared the way for the use of proper names in ethnological descriptions.

If we now turn our attention away from ethnology to history of art, we can see that 'primitive art' has often been used to bolster the notion of Western art as champion of the artist's individuality. Seen in the light of this comparison, the indigenous artists of Africa, Oceania and America were often merely given the role of passive servants of a tradition, faithfully following the rules inherited from their ancestors. Yet amongst today's art historians, as amongst contemporary ethnologists, a general reassessment of these ideas has already started; there is at present an increasing number of researchers (albeit still a minority) who apply their training in history of art to the serious study of 'primitive art' (especially in Africa), paying particular attention to individual artists' biographical details, chronicling changes over the years, and refining stylistic categories which enable us to identify the source and date of their works of art. In the United States, Roy Sieber and Robert Farris Thompson were among the first to lay stress on the dynamism of African art, to emphasize the creative faculty of African artists and to demand that we judge them in the same way as we judge Western artists.<sup>7</sup> The results of this research are beginning to manifest themselves in major changes of emphasis in the Western image of 'primitive art', even among the most conservative art historians. William Rubin is not the only historian of modern art to admit (even whilst claiming that "tribal art expresses a collective rather than individual feeling") that "the sculptors enjoy a greater freedom than many commentators imagine".<sup>8</sup> Amongst art historians, then, as well as amongst ethnologists, there is a new and increasing awareness of the roles performed by the individuality and the creativity of artists working outside Western society.

Having noted this awareness, we can now focus on views of those students and collectors of 'primitive art' who still form a majority and who still have a less refined picture of the influence of tradition and the role of collective will among the 'Primitives'. Take, for example, the views of Herschel B. Chipp, a distinguished specialist in modern art who has also written

on what he calls "the artistic styles of primitive cultures". Amongst the Maoris Chipp describes

a radical narrowing of the field to which the personal inventiveness of the artist is restricted. The committing of an error of a technical nature — a fault committed by a sculptor in the exercise of traditional work-methods — would jeopardize or even destroy the customary channels of communication with the spirit world, and could only be expiated by severe penalties, including death.<sup>9</sup>

The denial of individual creativity is sometimes expressed in somewhat bold generalizations. Henri Kamer, for example, declares that in Africa

there are no individual creative artists. . . (The African artist) produces masks and fetishes according to the needs of the moment, always by order of tribal elders and never on impulse as would any conventional artist.<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective any given artist's identity loses its value, because his relation to the production of art is the same as the worker's relation to the assembly-line. A conceptual leap is made from his lack of individual creativity to his lack of creativity full stop. The artist becomes 'anonymous'.

A large number of 'primitive art' lovers seems to have taken on board this idea of anonymity. One occasionally comes across a cultural explanation of the phenomenon:

The identity of the individual African sculptor has tended to become obscured, because he is manipulating forces which exist outside himself, so that once he has caused those forces to enter into the sculpture, he sinks into anonymity.<sup>11</sup>

This use of the singular in referring to 'primitive' artists is a common convention whose effect is to suggest their undifferentiated nature — that is, their anonymity — not only within their own societies, but also in the broader context of the activity of their fellows all over the world. It is partly through this grammatical convention that it has been possible to make global generalizations about the work (and even the character) of artists from all over the world — like, for example, the statement made by Douglas Newton that "the primitive artist can move unself-consciously from naturalism to abstraction".<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to ask *for whom* these artists are anonymous, since sometimes one is led to believe that anonymity is an inherent trait of 'primitive art' and not a construction imposed from outside. Take, for example, a newspaper review of the *Center for African Art* in New York, which says, "In our name-oriented Western culture, it boggles the mind that such works as these are anonymous."<sup>13</sup>

Should it really boggle our minds, foreign to the artist's society as we are, not to have learnt his name? No, for what such a statement implies is that the suppression of each artist's identity takes place in his own society, and that we, despite our preoccupation with names, are the innocent inheritors of this 'primitive' 'insouciance'. The idea that we shall never know the artists' names makes it easier to uphold the notion of the communal character of 'primitive art'. One commentator has suggested, rather nonchalantly: "Since we know very few African artists' names, a work is generally considered as being the product of a culture".<sup>14</sup>

Even those who are completely aware of the role of the individual artist express themselves in a manner which gently invites the reader to see anonymity as an inherent characteristic of primitive societies: Paul Wingert, for example, writes that "the anonymity of the artist" is one of "the features common to the arts of all primitive areas", without ever suggesting that he is in fact speaking about a phenomenon outside those 'primitive areas'.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, George Rodrigues' declaration that African art is "with very few exceptions, anonymous", in the same way fails to point out the Western origin of this anonymity.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever its origins, anonymity plays an important role in the Western image of 'primitive art'. A Parisian art dealer with whom I have discussed this phenomenon summed it up neatly: "If the artist isn't anonymous, then the art isn't primitive."

This image of 'primitive' artists as a mixture of people lacking both identity and artistic individuality, as passive servants of their time-honoured traditions, is derived from the use of 'primitive' societies for legitimizing Western society. To characterize this use as 'racist' or 'patronizing' is probably an over-simplification, but we can quite categorically state that

anonymity, (and its corollary, the absence of historical development) attributed to 'primitive art' owes much to the desire on the part of the commentators to believe that their society is clearly superior to others, that their society represents a higher level in the unilinear evolution of civilization. An article by Jacques Darriulat in *Réalités* shows what some of the results of such an attitude might be. Darriulat suggests that the suppression of individuality for the benefit of a homogeneous communal ideology is common to all African and Oceanic societies, and that this feature of these societies is expressed by means of artistic traditions where personal identity is not preserved:

The art of Africa is anonymous. . . The reason for this lies in the nature of the civilizations that created them (its products). They reflect communal societies, where the individual exists only as part of a group. In Africa and Oceania, art is public, it has to offer the community mirror images in which it can recognize itself. . . art is the cement that holds the community together; but for it the tribe would die.<sup>17</sup>

In another article in the same edition of *Réalités*, René Huyghe takes up this theme, explaining the absence of individuality by means of an evolutionist schema the racist implications of which are hardly disguised by his statement that "African and Oceanic art is in no way inferior to Western art".<sup>18</sup> Huyghe declares that in these societies "little value is set on individuality, which in more developed societies plays an increasingly important role", and that this phenomenon can only be understood by distinguishing the language of words ("connected to thought-processes which take place in the upper brain") from the language of images (which originate in those areas of the brain where the drives, instincts and emotions are based"). Linking this latter kind of language to what he terms "less developed peoples. . . where words are less clearly bound to the intellectual process than to the imagination", Huyghe lends his authority as a member of the Académie Française to the idea that "in these societies art is a complete communal language". He continues:

There is no room for individual expression in art of this kind. Forms can be reduced to their primary geometric state, because they are governed by a

psychological law, which is itself the reflection of the universal biological principle of the conservation of energy. Straight lines involve the least expenditure of energy, and the easiest way to remember any given feature of the real world is to reduce it to geometric shapes, which are basic and universal. African and Oceanic art is geometric because its creators are instinctively imitating the ways of nature. It is not in any way the result of sophisticated and concerted research, as modern Western art is, but of an innate way of looking at the world.<sup>19</sup>

For those who, like Huyghe, think that African and Oceanic art is created by *anonymous* artists who are expressing *communal* thoughts by means of *instinctive* processes that take place in the *lower part of the brain*, it only requires one further step to arrive at the belief that this art has no history. The homogenization of people and generations is made more complete; as one commentator puts it: "These anonymous artists feel they are a link in an unending chain of generations."<sup>20</sup>

Even those who try to respect the history of 'primitive art' have a certain difficulty in getting rid of the notion of its absence. Claude Roy, for example, opens his book *Arts Sauvages* with the observation that there do exist, contrary to popular opinion, "primitive societies that possess both writing and a history", but straight away undermines the effect of that statement by saying: "These are not peoples with a memory, but simply peoples with a poor memory."<sup>21</sup>

A sequence of events that took place in Australia serves to illustrate the consequences of this tendency to homogenize 'primitive' artists and to exclude them from the passage of time.<sup>22</sup> It started in 1963 when a Hungarian collector bought a bark painting by an Arnhem Land artist called Malangi in order to donate it to the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts in Paris; in the course of the same year photos of several paintings by the same artist were sent to the director of the committee in charge of Australian currency decimalization, who, in turn, sent them on to designers working on the new bank-notes. In this indirect way, one of Malangi's paintings ended up on every Australian dollar bill, but, in the confusion, the identity of the artist was forgotten. Thanks to the efforts of a journalist and a school teacher who recognized Malangi's hand and discreetly mentioned the possibility of legal proceedings,

the government admitted its error and proposed not only financial compensation, but also giving him an engraved medal in recognition of his artistic contribution. When asked about the reason for its initial negligence, the governor of the Bank of Australia replied — and this is the revealing point for our present discussion — that all those who had seen the painting had automatically and unreflectively assumed that it was the work of “some traditional Aboriginal artist, long since dead.” The way we distance ourselves from ‘primitive art’, placing it in a remote and anonymous past — can be of tangible importance in the lives of those who produce such art; Malangi’s story is not unique.

What are the alternatives to this view of the artist who cannot be differentiated from his fellow artists past and present? Here and there current research is beginning to suggest some. Bill Holm’s research, for example, combats the notion of anonymity in the artists of the Canadian North-West coast, particularly with reference to the Kwakiutl artist Willie Seaweed. Holm makes the following remarks:

The indigenous artists of the North-West coast have, like the ‘primitive artists’ of other cultures, been rendered anonymous in our time. Moreover, when modern man (the product of a society which attaches great importance to names, to fame and to individual actions) sees a collection of masks or other works of art from an exotic culture, he does not tend to think of an individualized human creator behind each object. Only infrequently do the labels he reads help him to give personal characteristics to the faceless artists. Sometimes an object is identified as coming from ‘the North-West coast’ or from ‘Alaska’ or from ‘British Columbia’. At best a tribal identification is suggested (although the likelihood of error is quite considerable.) The idea that each object represents the creative activity of a specific human being, who lived and worked at a given place and time, whose artistic career had a beginning, a middle and an end, and whose work influenced and was influenced by the work of other artists, does not readily spring to mind.<sup>23</sup>

Other researchers also started to penetrate the mists that envelop the artists of the North-West coast. Robin K. Wright gives us the histories of individual works by Haida artists like Charles Edenshaw, John Robson, John Cross, Tom Price, Gwaitehl and others.<sup>24</sup> In the case of objects made in the early or mid nineteenth century he shows how stylistic

analysis can help distinguish the work of a given artist. Similar progress is being made in other parts of the world. In a study of the arts of the Igbo in Nigeria, for example, Herbert M. Cole and Chike C. Aniakor state:

Individual hands are recognisable in Igbo sculpture, as in African art in general, and the artists have been, and continue to be, well-known in the areas in which they live.<sup>25</sup>

Given the fact that when an example of ‘primitive art’ appears on the scene in the Western world, it is more often through the intermediary of a dealer or a collector than of an ethnologist or an art historian, it is essential to examine those people’s commonly-held beliefs, attitudes and experiences if we are to understand the clash that this appearance generates. These few pages will not be able to throw light on all those aspects. Let us, then, just take the question of ‘anonymity’ to highlight how Western personal and cultural interests determine our view of ‘primitive artists’, and reflect upon the role that an art without signatures might have within the context of the Western art market.

When taken away from the society in which it was produced, the ‘primitive’ art object loses, in most cases, its identity. When placed in ours it gains a new one. This replacement of a foreign passport by a domestic identify-card serves to facilitate the introduction of the object into a system which centres around Western aesthetics and large sums of money. When we erase the object’s ‘signature’ so that it might have Western ‘pedigree’, we transfer the responsibility of artistic paternity.<sup>26</sup>

It is not uncommon to hear collectors of African and Oceanic art saying that the artist’s ‘anonymity’ adds greatly to their enthusiasm. One of these collectors, with whom I talked one afternoon in Paris, became very excited when speaking of this aspect of his passion. “It thoroughly enchants me”, he said. “It gives me great pleasure not to know the artist’s name. Once you have found out the artist’s name, the object ceases to be primitive art.” The actor Vincent Price (who is also an avid collector) expressed the same feeling:

The anonymity of the creator actually increases the value of the work of art. . . . it is our lack of knowledge

about these men that provides part of the mystery of their creation.<sup>27</sup>

Over several years I have brought up this alleged question of anonymity with numerous 'primitive art' lovers. Their opinions can be divided into two groups. One group claims that only a gifted and qualified connoisseur (by definition, a member of Western society) can recognize the aesthetic excellence of a masterpiece. One collector went to great lengths to tell me of the keenness of the connoisseur's eye, describing in detail the nature of the aesthetic considerations he makes, the role of subjectivity, etc.. When he had finished talking, I asked him whether, in his opinion, the creator of a 'primitive' work of art might, on occasions, be aware of the things he had just pointed out. His response was immediate and categorical: "Certainly not!" "The creator of this sort of object", he said, "will only be interested in the way it is crafted and in its conformity to communal standards; he will not be able to appreciate its artistic merit, the discovery of which depends on its being seen by a Western connoisseur." Or, in the words of Henri Kamer, "the *object* made in Africa... only becomes an *object of art* on its arrival in Europe."<sup>28</sup> When the matter is seen from this perspective, there is no point in seeking to establish the identity of the person who made a 'primitive' object (called *artist*, but it would make more sense to call him *artisan*", according to Kamer) because he was neither aware of, nor responsible for, its aesthetic qualities. According to the people that take this view, the Western connoisseur does for African masks (to take but one example) what Marcel Duchamp did for urinals.

The second group of opinions mentions neither the artist's intentions nor his aesthetic awareness, but claims that all clues to his identity are, sadly, lost for ever. According to this point of view, the custom of putting the name of the collector, but not that of the artist, on an exhibition case (or, as in a case like Malangi's, of paying the Western collector and not the Aboriginal artist... , or even to give African and other indigenous sculptures the names of distinguished collectors, so that we can speak, for example, of the 'Brummer Head') simply comes from the impossibility of

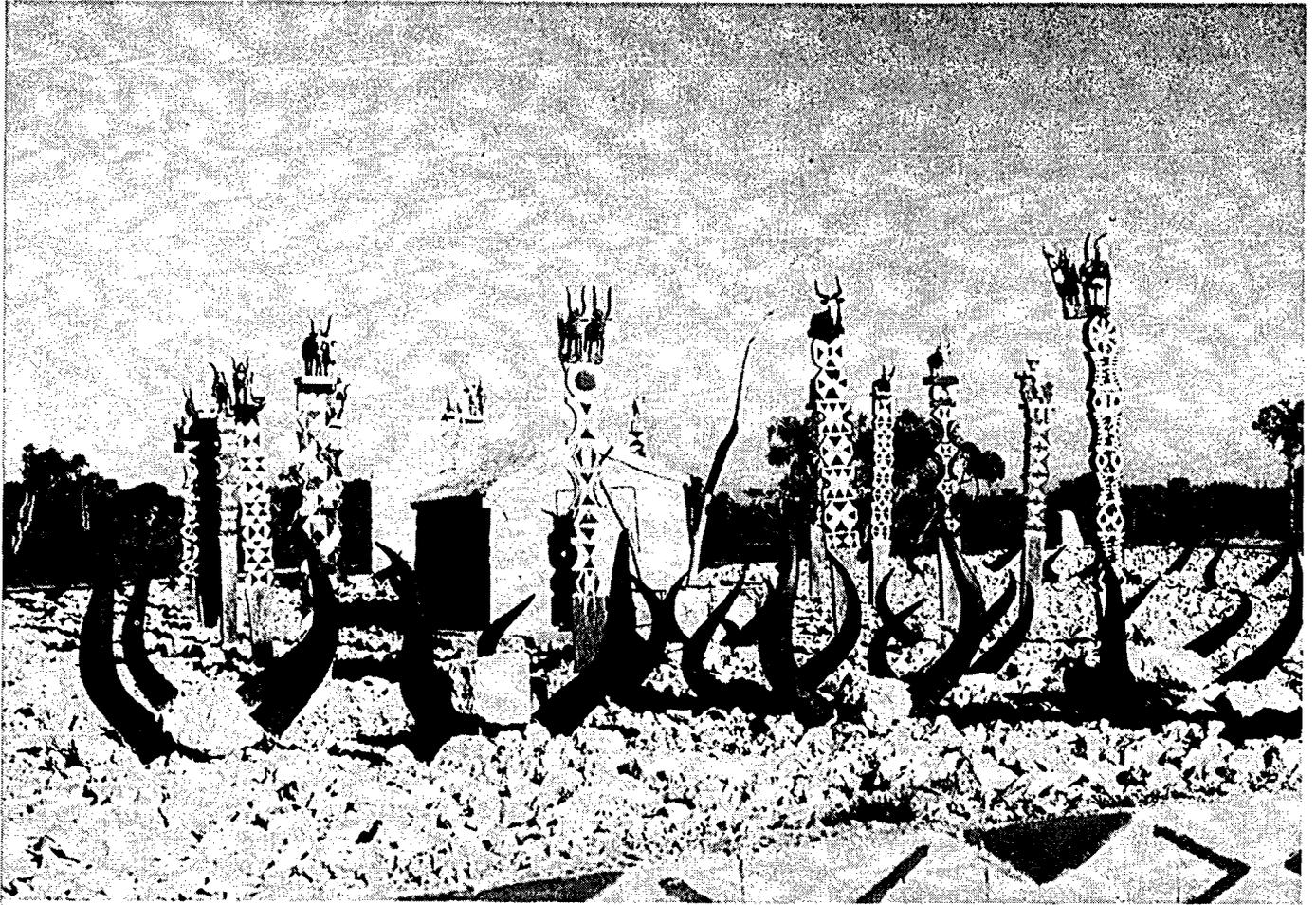
tracing the object's movements before its arrival in Western society — this impossibility being bound up in the communal nature of its origins, of the absence of the written word in the 'primitive' world and in the carelessness of those explorers of another era who obtained them in the first place.

We must recognize, of course, that a large proportion of Western art objects carry 'signatures' of the kind that are lacking in most objects of 'primitive art'. That said, the slightest reflection is enough to abolish the illusion that a signature can easily and incontestably establish the artistic paternity of an object. Indeed there have been a large number of which have served as a basis for complex discussions and wide-ranging debates between experts — not only about great masterpieces, but also about all that belongs to the artistic heritage of Western civilization. Let us take a single example: the 'forgery' called 'the Cellini cup', which provoked a perfectly erudite discussion over one hundred pages of the *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, which in turn inspired a second, equally erudite, discussion by Joseph Alsop, a distinguished authority on the history of Western art.<sup>29</sup> Research into the identity of this object extended over three decades, occupying all the researcher's working-hours, not to mention (as did one of the participants in this debate<sup>30</sup>) all the sleepless nights it induced.

Partly because of the traditional segregation of the disciplines of ethnology and history of art, we find it difficult to imagine that a comparable amount of energy as that spent on, for example, the Cellini cup, could produce significant results outside the domain of Western art. Yet this idea, which is beginning to take root in the minds of some contemporary researchers, could help to uproot the cultural ethnocentrism which has been so firmly embedded in the Western study of art. Like the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, this idea reminds us that the distinction between 'centre' and 'periphery' is a structure determined by the observer and that it often works as an impediment to human understanding. In finally giving up the view of the study of art as a private reserve, this exhibition clears the way for an appreciation of 'other' art which is as deep as that of our own.

## NOTES

1. For a critical discussion of the notion of 'primitive art', see S. Price, 'Primitive Art: Civilised Views, *Gradhiva*, VOL IV, 1988, p 18-27, and *Primitive Art in Civilised Places*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989.
2. P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, editions de Minuit, Paris, 1979, p 60.
3. 'First of all, it has to be established that we have to study here stereotyped manner of thinking and feeling. As sociologists, we are not interested in what A or B may feel *qua* individuals, in the accidental course of their own personal experiences — we are interested only in what they feel and think *qua* members of a given community.' B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922, p 23.
4. F. Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, The Free Press, New York, 1940, p 589.
5. R. Brunzel, *The Pueblo Potter: a Study of Creative Imagination in Primitive Art*, Dover, New York, 1972 (original edition 1929).
6. R. Firth, *Art and Life in New Guinea*, AMS Press, New York, 1979 (original edition 1936).
7. In order to appreciate this new attention to history in the study of 'primitive art', we must start by giving up certain prejudices which are all too easily attached to societies which do not possess the written word. The fact that the history of art in such a society displays an interested and selective memory (strongly influenced by a cultural ideology that deals with politics, kinship, the roles of men and women, the relationship between gods and mortals, etc.) should only underline its resemblance to history of art in the Western world; see S. Price, 'Sexism and the Construction of Reality', *American Ethnologist*, Vol 10, 1982, p 460-476, and 'L'esthetique et la temps', *Ethnologie*, Vol LXXXII, 1986, p 215-225.
8. W. Rubin (ed.), 'Primitivism' in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984.
9. H.B. Chipp, 'Formal and Symbolic Factors in the Art Styles of Primitive Cultures', in *Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies: an Anthology* (C.F. Jopling, ed.), E.P. Dutton, New York, 1971, p 168.
10. H. Kamer, 'The Authenticity of African Sculptures', *Arts d'Afrique Noir*, Vol XII, 1974, p 168.
11. D. Duerden, *African Art*, Feltham/Middlesex, Paul Hamlyn, 1968, p. 16.
12. D. Newton, *The Art of Africa, the Pacific Island, and the Americas*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1981, p 16.
13. G. Glueck, 'Show from France opens new Centre for African Art', *New York Times*, 21 September 1984, p C1, C28.
14. L. Sigel, 'A Private Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago', *African Arts*, Vol 5, 1971, p 50-53.
15. P. Wingert, *Primitive Art: its Traditions and Styles*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1962, p 377.
16. G. Rodrigues, 'Evolution et psychologie des collectionneurs d'art africain', *Antologia di Bella Arte*, Vol XVII/XVIII, 1981, p.23.
17. J. Darriulat, 'African Art and its Impact on the Western World', *Réalités* (English edition), No 273, p 42, 45.
18. R. Huyghe, 'African and Oceanic Art: how it looks from the West', *Réalités* (English edition), No 273, 1973, p 67.
19. *Ibid.*, p 67.
20. O. Bihalji-Merin, 'Art as a Universal Phenomenon', in *World Cultures and Modern Art* (Siegfried Wichmann, ed.), Bruckmann Publishers, Munich, 1972, p 7.
21. C. Roy, *Arts Sauvages*, Delpire, Paris, 1957, p 7.
22. D.H. Bennett, 'Malangi: the man who was forgotten before he was remembered', *Aboriginal History*, Vol IV, No 1, 1980, p 42-47.
23. B. Holm, 'The Art of Willie Seaweed: a Kwakiutl master', in *The Human Mirror* (Miles Richardson, ed.), Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1974, p 60.
24. R.K. Wright, 'Anonymous Attributions', in *The Box of Daylight* (B Holm, ed.), Seattle Art Museum and University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1983, p 139-142.
25. H.M. Cole and C.C. Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: community and cosmos*, Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 1984, p 24.
26. As a Parisian art dealer said to me: 'Pedigree is worth a signature'.
27. 'The Vincent Price Collection', *African Arts*, Vol V, No 2, 1972, p 22-23.
28. H. Kamer, *op cit.*, p 33.
29. J. Aslop, 'The Faker's Art', *New York Review*, 23 October 1986, p 25-26, 28-31.
30. S.E. Lee, 'Reply to Alsop 1986', *New York Review*, 18 December 1986, p 76.



The Tomb of Mahafel & Alouals (South-East Madagascar)  
(Photo: A. Magnin)

# THE OTHERS BEYOND THE 'SALVAGE' PARADIGM

JAMES CLIFFORD

The subtitle of this essay, *Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm*, may seem cryptic. To some of you it will recall early twentieth century anthropology, the 'salvage ethnography' of Franz Boas' generation; A.L. Kroeber and his Berkeley colleagues recording the languages and lore of 'disappearing' California Indians, or Bronislaw Malinowski suggesting that authentic Trobriand Island culture (saved in his texts) was not long for this earth.

In academic anthropology 'the salvage paradigm' has an old-fashioned ring about it. Still, many ethnographies and travel accounts continue to be written in the style of *après moi le déluge*, with the exotic culture in question inevitably undergoing 'fatal' changes. We still regularly encounter 'the last traditional Indian beadworker', or the last 'stone age people'. The salvage paradigm, reflecting a desire to rescue something 'authentic' out of destructive historical changes, is alive and well. It is found in ethnographic writing, in the connoisseurship and collections of the art world, in a range of familiar nostalgias.

My essay's subtitle names a geo-political, historical paradigm that has organized Western practices I'd like to call 'art — and culture — collecting'. Seen in this light, it denotes a pervasive ideological complex. I'll sketch some of the paradigm's underlying conceptions of *history* and *authenticity*, conceptions that need to be cleared away if we are to account for the multiple *histories* and *inventions* at work in the late twentieth-century. What's at issue is a

particular global arrangement of time and space.

*TIME/space*. The dominant temporal sense is historical, assumed to be linear and non-repeatable. There is no going back, no return, at least in the realm of the real. Endless imaginary redemptions — religious, pastoral, retro/nostalgic — are produced; archives, museums and collections preserve (construct) an authentic past; a selective domain of value is maintained in a present relentlessly careering forward.

*SPACE/time*. A dominant 'theatre of memory' organizing the world's diversities and destinies has been described in Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, 1984. Speaking very schematically, in the global vision of nineteenth-century evolutionism the world's societies were ordered in linear sequence (the standard progression from savage to barbarian to civilized, with various, now arcane, complications). In the twentieth century, relativist anthropology — our current 'common sense' — emerged. Human differences would be redistributed as separate, functioning 'cultures'. The most 'primitive' or 'tribal' groups (the bottom rungs of the evolutionary ladder) could now be given a special, ambiguous, temporal status: call it the 'ethnographic present'.

In Western taxonomy and memory the various non-Western 'ethnographic presents' are actually pasts. They represent culturally distinct times ('tradition') always about to

undergo the impact of disruptive changes associated with the influence of trade, media, missionaries, commodities, ethnographers, tourists, the exotic art market, the 'world system', etc. A relatively recent period of authenticity is repeatedly followed by a deluge of corruption, transformation, modernization.

This historical scenario, replayed with local variations, generally falls within the 'pastoral' structure anatomized by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. A 'good country' is perpetually ruined and lamented by each successive period, producing an unbroken chain of losses leading ultimately to...Eden.

In a salvage/pastoral set-up, most non-Western peoples are marginal to the advancing world-system. Authenticity in culture or art exists just prior to the present (but not so distant or eroded as to make collection or salvage impossible). Marginal, non-Western groups constantly, as the saying goes, 'enter the modern world'. And whether this entry is celebrated or lamented, the price is always that local, distinctive paths through modernity vanish. These historicities are swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically-advanced socialisms. What's *different* about peoples seen to be moving out of 'tradition' into 'the modern world' remains tied to inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.

In American anthropology a growing body of recent work has begun to unravel the assumptions about tradition, history, and authenticity that underlie 'the salvage paradigm'. The result has been to displace global dichotomies long 'orienting' geopolitical visions in the Occident. One of these dichotomies sorts the world's societies into people *with* or *without* history. The inheritors of Thucydides, Gibbon, Marx, Darwin, etc., are endowed with 'historical consciousness', others have 'mythic consciousness'. This dichotomy is reinforced by other oppositions: literate/non-literate; developed/underdeveloped; hot/cold. The last pair, coined by Levi-Strauss, assumed that, for good or ill, Western societies are dynamic and oriented toward change, whereas non-Western societies seek equilibrium and the reproduction of inherited forms. Whatever truth this sort of

general contrast may contain, it becomes rigid and oppressive when ranges of difference — both within and between societies — become frozen as essential oppositions. The history of anthropology is littered with such oppositions: 'we' have history, 'they' have myth, etc..

Anthropologists now challenge the assumption that non-Western (even small-scale 'tribal') peoples are without historical consciousness, that their cultures have scant resources for processing and innovating historical change. I'll quickly list a few important recent works. In *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974*, Renato Rosaldo, 1980, discovers a distinctive historical idiom among nonliterate Philippine highlanders, a concrete way of narrating real past events and of using the landscape as a kind of archive. Richard Price's *First Time: the Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, 1983, probes an elaborate local historical memory and discourse among the descendents of escaped slaves in Surinam. A strong historical sense is crucial to the group's identity and its continuing resistance to outside powers. In *Islands of History*, 1985, Marshall Sahlins argues that 18th century Hawaiian mythic and ritual structures, far from being timeless and unchanging, were concrete forms through which forces of historical change (like the arrival of Captain Cook) could be locally processed. Work by sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu has introduced an increased awareness of process and inventive agency into formerly synchronic and holistic theories of culture. A seminal work of mid-1970s by Roy Wagner, a work deeply influenced by Melanesian processual styles, gives its title to a whole new perspective: *The Invention of Culture*.

Of course, I'm painting with a broom here, glossing over a number of important debates. Suffice it to say that, for me, the importance of the new anthropological attention to historical process has been to reconceive 'cultures' as arenas not merely of structural order and symbolic pattern but also of conflict, disorder and emergence. Several of the essentializing, global dichotomies I've mentioned are complicated. For example, Sahlins has spoken of 'hot' and 'cold' sectors within specific societies: people may, in fact, be willing rapidly to discard or change whole

areas of traditional life, while guarding and reproducing others.

Another dichotomy is displaced by Trinh T. Minh-ha in the special issue of the review *Discourse* she has edited (No. 8, Fall-Winter 1987: *She, the Inappropriate/d Other*). She writes in her Introduction: "There is a Third World in every First World, and vice versa." (A walk in many neighbourhoods of Greater New York easily confirms the first part of her statement!) Old geo-political oppositions are transformed into sectors within Western and non-Western societies. Hot/cold, historical/mythic, modern/traditional, literate/oral, country/city, centre/periphery, first/third,...are subject to local mix and match, contextual/tactical shifting, syncretic recombination, import-export. Culture is migration as well as rooting — within and between groups, within and between individual persons.

A significant provocation for these changes of orientation has clearly been the emergence of non-Western and feminist subjects whose works and discourses are different, strong, and complex, but clearly not 'authentic' in conventional ways. These emergent subjects can no longer be marginalized. They speak not only for endangered 'traditions', but also for crucial human futures. New definitions of authenticity (cultural, personal, artistic) are making themselves felt, definitions no longer centred on a salvaged past. Rather, authenticity is reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming-future. Non-Western cultural and artistic works are implicated by an interconnected world cultural system without necessarily being swamped by it. Local structures produce *histories* rather than simply yielding to *History*.

What kinds of cultural and artistic histories are being produced? I'll end with a few examples drawn from the ongoing invention of Native American culture and art.

Anne Vitart-Fardoulis, a curator at the Musée de l'Homme, recently published a sensitive account of the aesthetic, historical, and cultural discourses routinely used to explicate individual museum objects. (See the new journal *Gradhiva*, No. 1, 1986, published by the Archives Division of the Musée de l'Homme.) Vitart-Fardoulis discusses a famous, intricately painted animal skin (its present name: M.H.

34.33.5), probably originating among the Fox Indians of North America. The skin turned up in Western collecting systems some time ago in a Cabinet of Curiosities; it was used to educate aristocratic children and was much admired for its aesthetic qualities. Vitart-Fardoulis tells us that now the skin can be decoded ethnographically in terms of its combined 'masculine' and 'feminine' graphic styles and understood in the context of a probable role in specific ceremonies. But the meaningful contexts are not exhausted. The story takes a new turn:

The grandson of one of the Indians who came to Paris with Buffalo Bill was searching for the [painted skin] tunic his Grandfather had been forced to sell to pay his way back to the United States when the circus collapsed. I showed him all the tunics in our collection, and he paused before one of them. Controlling his emotion he spoke. He told the meaning of this lock of hair, of that design, why this color had been used, the meaning of that feather...And this garment, formerly beautiful and interesting but passive and indifferent, little by little became meaningful, active testimony to a living moment through the mediation of someone who did not observe and analyze but who lived the object and for whom the object lived. It scarcely matters whether the tunic is really his grandfather's.

I don't know what's going on in this encounter. But I'm pretty sure two things are *not* happening: 1) The grandson is not replacing the object in its original or 'authentic' cultural context. That is long past. His encounter with the painted skin is part of a modern recollection. 2) The painted tunic is not being appreciated as art, an aesthetic object. The encounter is too specific, too enmeshed in family history and ethnic memory. Some aspects of 'cultural' and 'aesthetic' appropriation are certainly at work. But they occur within a current tribal history, a different temporality (and authenticity) from that governed by 'the salvage paradigm'. The old painted tunic becomes *newly, traditionally*, meaningful in the context of a present-becoming-future.

This currency of 'tribal' artifacts is becoming increasingly visible to non-Indians. Many new tribal recognition claims are pending at the Bureau of the Interior. And whether or not they are formally successful matters less than what they make manifest: the historical and political

reality of Indian survival and resurgence, a force that impinges on Western art-and-culture collections. The 'proper' place of many objects in museums is now subject to contest. The Zuni who prevented the loan of a War God from Berlin to the Museum of Modern Art in 1984 were challenging the dominant art-culture system. For in traditional Zuni belief, War God figures are sacred and dangerous. They are not ethnographic artifacts, and they are certainly not 'art'. Zuni claims on these objects specifically reject their 'promotion' (in all senses of the term) to the status of aesthetic or scientific treasures.

I'm not arguing that the only true home for the objects in question is in 'the tribe' — a location that, in many cases, is far from obvious. My point is only that the dominant, interlocking contexts of art and anthropology are no longer self-evident and uncontested. There are other contexts, histories, and futures in which non-Western objects and cultural records may 'belong'. The rare Maori artifacts that recently toured museums in the United States normally reside in New Zealand Museums. But they are controlled by the traditional Maori authorities whose permission was required for them to leave the country. Here and elsewhere the circulation of museum collections is significantly influenced by resurgent indigenous communities.

This current disturbance of Western collecting systems is reflected in a new book by Ralph Coe, *Lost and Found Traditions, Native American Art: 1965-1985*, 1986. It is a coffee-table book: we have not transcended collecting or appropriation. And once again, a White authority 'discovers' true tribal art — but this time with significant differences. The hundreds of photographs in Coe's collection document recent works, some made for local use, some for sale to Indians or White outsiders. Beautiful objects — many formerly classified as 'curios', 'folk art' or 'tourist art' — are located in ongoing, inventive traditions. Coe effectively questions the widespread assumption that fine tribal work is disappearing. And he throws doubt on common criteria for judging purity and authenticity. In his collection, among recognizably traditional katchinas, totem poles, blankets, and plaited baskets we find skillfully beaded tennis shoes and baseball caps, articles

developed for the curio trade, quilts, and decorated leather cases (peyote kits modeled on old-fashioned toolboxes).

Since the Native American Church, in whose ceremonies the peyote kits are used, did not exist in the nineteenth-century, their claim to traditional status cannot be based on age. A stronger historical claim can, in fact, be made for many productions of the 'curio trade', for the beaded 'fancies' (hanging birds, mirror frames) made by Matilda Hill, a Tuscarora who sells at Niagara Falls:

"Just try telling Matilda Hill that her 'fancies' are tourist curios," said Mohawk Rick Hill, author of an unpublished paper on the subject. "The Tuscarora have been able to trade pieces like that bird or beaded frame at Niagara since the end of the war of 1812, when they were granted exclusive rights, and she wouldn't take kindly to anyone slighting her culture!"

"Surely," Coe adds, "a trade privilege established at Niagara Falls in 1816 should be acceptable as tradition by now."

Coe does not hesitate to commission new 'traditional' works. And he spends considerable time eliciting the specific meaning of objects, as individual possessions and as tribal art. We see and hear particular artists; the coexistence of spiritual, aesthetic, and commercial forces is always visible. Overall, Coe's collecting project represents and advocates ongoing art forms that are both related to and separate from dominant systems of aesthetic-ethnographic value. In *Lost and Found Traditions* authenticity is something produced not salvaged. Coe's collection, for all its love of the past, gathers future.

A long chapter on 'tradition' resists summary. For the diverse statements quoted from practicing Native American artists, old and young, do not reproduce prevailing Western definitions. Let me end with a few quotations. They suggest to me a concrete, nonlinear sense of history — forms of memory and invention, re-collection and emergence, that offer a different temporality for art — and cultural collecting.

Whites think of our experience as the past. We know it is right here with us.

We always begin our summer dances with a song that

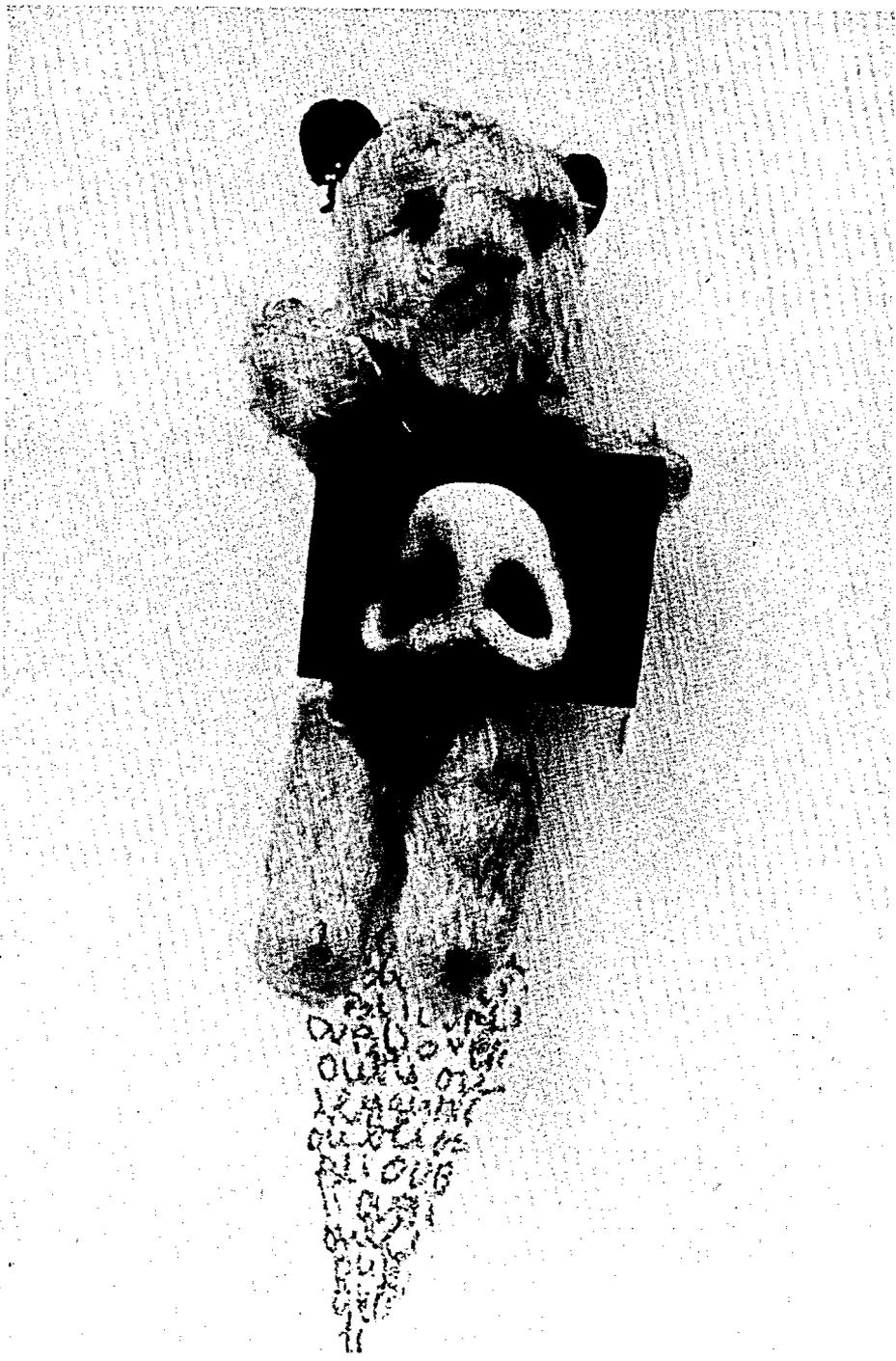
repeats only four words, over and over. They don't mean much of anything in English, "young chiefs stand up." To us those words demonstrate our pride in our lineage and our happiness in always remembering it. It is a happy song. Tradition is not something you gab about...It's in the doing...

Your tradition is 'there' always. You're flexible enough to make of it what you want. It's always with you. I pray to the old pots at the ruins and dream about making pottery. I tell them I want to learn it. We live for today, but never forget the past...

Our job as artists is to go beyond, which implies a love of change, [always accomplished with] traditions in mind, by talking to the elders of the tribe and by being with your grandparents. The stories they tell are just amazing. When you become exposed to them, everything becomes a reflection of those events. There's a great deal of satisfaction being an artist of traditions.

We've always had charms; everything that's new is old with us.

A slightly longer version of this article was published in English in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, No. 1, Ed. Hal Foster, Dia Art Foundation, Bay Press, New York & Seattle, 1987.



# OTHER CARTOGRAPHIES

JEAN FISHER

He reaches the *unknown*, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard of and unnameable things.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Rimbaud

Are we capable now of leaping through “unheard of and unnameable things”, of responding to the demands of the other who is the other side of consciousness, the Outside that is always interior to our thoughts? We might hope that this is what is augured by *Magiciens de la Terre*; but why do we hesitate, throw doubt upon the authenticity of this project? The recent interest shown by our cultural institutions in creative work outside the paradigms of modernism raises the suspicion that, as so often in the past, the West is turning to other worlds to revitalize itself in the face of a spiritual and sociopolitical bankruptcy. The crisis of modernity, according to postmodern debates, involves not only a loss of ethical and historical consciousness to the vacuous signs of mass consumerism — a paralysis of the will, but a loss of the world to the voracious geopolitical machine of multinational capitalism. In *Magiciens de la Terre*, the conjunction of multi-ethnicity with an invocation of spirituality does not allay fears that another chapter in the narrative of global annexation is in process. The West’s traditionally anthropocentric search for lost utopias has never resulted in an equal exchange with others; and the racial, ideological, historical and physical

cartographies by which Eurocentric societies secured their economic dominance of the world remain largely in place. Current liberal or ‘New Age’ enthusiasm for what it calls native ‘spirituality’ or ‘mysticism’ not only obfuscates the nature of different belief structures, but works to conceal a political relation between metropolitan capitalist enclaves and the rest of the world. In effect, it perpetuates native disempowerment. To recognise the spiritual and ecological failure of the capitalist enterprise, or to acknowledge the validity of non-European belief structures, does not reinstate the legitimacy of others still subjugated by alien forces. Our language continues to map a landscape of fictive identities from the fragments of history and fantasy in the interests of Western power structures.

That cultural and academic institutions are complicit in these structures, despite their claims to neutrality, has been well argued by Edward Said, who maintains that “political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions — in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility.”<sup>2</sup> Within the field of art, objects have simply been relocated from the trading-post to the museum, and remapped according to Western codes of aesthetic pleasure. This ahistorical homogenising process is antagonistic to the human rights agendas of indigenous populations seeking self-empowerment and

identity from among the fragments of traditional values adrift in the murky wake of colonialism. The question here is not how do we make the artefacts of others 'fit' our institutions, what universalizing principles can we invent to incorporate them into our exhibitions, but how do we interrogate and dismantle the assumptions upon which our institutions are based.

Foremost on the agendas of indigenous peoples is the struggle for land rights. For many, it is the earth that legitimizes cultural identity; and creative acts are the events which map an intimate bonding of bodies — earth, community, self. This hardly constitutes a mystical, superstitious or supernatural relation to the world. Rather, it concerns what is intrinsic to nature perceived as a material or concrete reality. If we have imposed a terminology of fear and superstition on the artefacts and ceremonials of others it is because our own language is inadequate to describe what is outside a narrowly interpreted Judeo-Christian tradition that has lost touch with the real, with nature as the embodiment of life-force. When, for instance, a Native American elder states that he has 'swum with the fishes' he indicates that it is in his relation to the natural world that he comes to understand himself and his place within it. Metaphor here functions not as a rhetorical trope but as a literal truth in a conceptualization of the world that the West has not only poorly understood but has too often actively held in contempt. Can we seriously, and without cynicism, still believe 'of the earth' to be a matter of aesthetics or 'spirituality' without acknowledging that for others, suffering the consequences of Western barbarism, it is fundamentally a *political* issue? The legacy of the West's assault on the territorial bodies of others is a topography of ambivalent and often paradoxical signs, a mutilated body across which a coherent identity can no longer be mapped. Not surprisingly, cultural bricolage has become a common strategy among cultural workers trying to make sense of the paradoxes of their own experience; and if there is a role for a 'magician' here, it is to 'conjure' a critical space in which cultural difference may be comprehended and nurtured in all its heterogeneity and ambiguity.

This is what I feel to be the productive intention of a short film, *Harold of Orange*, 1984,<sup>3</sup> scripted by the Anishinabe writer, Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor is by no means representative of a Native American point of view; there is no such homogeneous constituency outside a shared experience of colonialism. Vizenor's perspective is drawn perhaps from the borderlands of a dual cultural experience, that of urbanised and educated Native Americans and *métis*. But while it is a perspective that particularly concerns us here, it must be said that it does not necessarily find approval from those who strongly believe that the only 'authentic' Native American voice can come from the reservation. This internal debate between the pastoral and the metropolitan, with all its complex ramifications, remains largely unresolvable as a result of the divisive policies of government agencies who have crippled those structures by which indigenous people traditionally conducted their debates. But since the repression of the American Indian Movement, and in the absence of an effective juridical or political platform, cultural activism (whether it takes the form of a regeneration of tribal ceremonial or an engagement with contemporary forms of communication) has acquired a double task: to fight against national indifference to the economic-political situation of indigenous Americans; and to mobilise the peoples themselves to fight against what Asiba Tupahache has astutely argued to be a tragic internalisation of the "victim-perpetrator-facilitator" cycle of abuse against ethnic minorities.<sup>4</sup>

*Harold of Orange* is a satirical tale of cultural terrorism which explores the possibility of remapping native identities in and against a 'no-man's land' of untenable cultural signs. The storyteller and major protagonist, Harold Sinseer, presents the Warriors of Orange whose veiled war of attrition deploys the psychological strategies of Indian warfare (doubling back, laying false trails, and setting decoys) to confuse the enemy. The Warriors are "tribal tricksters" who, "word-driven" from the land, are now "returning in mythic time to reclaim their estate from the white man."

The action takes place in and around a reservation that might be somewhere in Minnesota. It is assumed that the audience is

aware that reservations, controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, typically have the highest mortality rate, poverty, unemployment and alcoholism in the USA. This form of control is not fortuitous. The reservation was instituted as the site of cultural difference: the non-place assigned to the Indian body — a body removed from its homeland, enclosed, domesticated, observed, robbed of its cultural memory, and reinscribed with non-threatening signs of 'Indianness'.

The Warriors' School of Acupuncture is dedicated to tapping into the resources of a liberal American foundation that funds worthy projects on the reservation, and it has no compunction about manipulating white guilt and ignorance, pious charity, or taste for the exotic. Seeking imaginative ways to secure a foundation grant, the Warriors have devised a fictitious scheme to grow 'pinch' beans and to install coffee houses on the reservation in a parody of white gentility. The winning card in their game is that coffee will assist in the 'sober revolution' to eradicate alcoholism. To support their proposal the Warriors invite the grant approval committee on a tour of 'Indian sites' and 'tribal ceremonies', which include such 'traditions' as eating Indian fry-bread in a car-park (it is not uncommon to find such facilities built on sacred sites); giving 'Indian' names; visiting an anthropological museum (the inaccessible repository of tribal heritage); and playing soft-ball where each team wears the other's colours while Harold, as the polymorphous instigator of this charade, wears both.<sup>5</sup>

The Warriors' scheme almost fails when the committee's adviser, Fanny, who has prior experience of Harold's trickery, threatens to withdraw her support from the project unless he repays a financial debt incurred during their earlier encounter. After several unsuccessful attempts, Harold wheedles a cheque from the foundation director using the same deception he used earlier with Fanny — that he needed money to bury his grandmother. This cheque is reluctantly handed over to Fanny.

It is in the implications of this sub-plot that the satirical mask shifts beyond the verbal play on Anglo racism to reveal something of the real issues at stake. Vizenor's text describes a number of exchanges of property — possession

and loss — that circulate around the recurrence of a debt. There is the smug account by one committee member of his family's 'acquisition' of tribal artefacts: as the people were 'word-driven' from the land, so they were cheated out of their past. There is the Warriors' 'giving' of 'Indian' names — place names, representing a roguish return of another 'property' belonging to the history of native dispossession. In Harold's previous association with Fanny, we are told, he assisted her research into oral literature. There is a resonance here of the Indian 'gift', an economy of sharing wealth, wholly incompatible, if not thoroughly incomprehensible, to individual capital accumulation upon which Western economy is based. Then, finally, there is the passage of the cheque itself — the flow of capital as it maps the relations of power.

Emerging from this web of im-proper exchanges is the recounting of a debt that repeatedly produces the absent figure of the *unburied grandmother*. What precisely is called forth here? The colonised body is a vampirised body; it arises as a debt — a depletion of blood, of identity — and it cannot be settled or buried since it perpetuates an inexhaustible demand. If we consider the symbolic function of the grandmother in relation to this draining of colonised communities, then she appears as the site of recollection: of the recounting of stories that are the bearers of beliefs and values. She is the sign of continuity: a genealogy, a line back to cultural memory. Hence in *Harold of Orange* what otherwise refuses to be laid to rest, what constantly appears, is tradition — tradition, not in the sense of nostalgia for what once was, but as a production of meaning. The debt, the circulating residue in the exchange between disparate cultural entities, is the constant production of otherness.

It is here that the figure of trickster (whom we will call 'he' but our gender distinctions are probably inappropriate) takes on a particular resonance. Harold's trickster-warriors mean to reclaim their 'estate' from the white man. Vizenor, whose use of the English language is uncommonly subtle, means, I imagine, more than a simple reclamation of territory or landed property (a white man's concept). In any case, in the present political climate such an aspiration is at best a fantasy, and trickster is

too canny to dream the present-impossible. No, what trickster means to reclaim as his 'e-state' is his right to difference, his right to map his identity according to the myriad of traces that have constituted him as the product of a historical process. Bewildered, he has seen his visions, and understands well that the more he undermines and disseminates confusion in the language of the Other, the more he produces difference. And in difference he can dream other cartographies of the self.

Is trickster a magician? Perhaps. But he is more certainly 'of the earth'. A pragmatist, a cultural terrorist, a dice-thrower and manipulator of the main chance, not a conjuror of the supernatural. His self-appointed role as *sauvage savant* is a masquerade designed to fulfil a more serious purpose. Trickster is not, and never was, an anthropocentric subject possessing mastery of his world; rather, he exists in a dialogical relation with it. In oral tradition he often appears as a transformer, harmonizing (but by no means eradicating) the contradictions of life. Most importantly, he seems to be a figure who refuses inertia; one who acts, not always to his own advantage, upon the circumstances in which he finds himself. As such, one might speculate that trickster's resurrection in contemporary indigenous American art and literature is symptomatic of the collectivity of selves that constitutes 'Indian subjectivity' as an effect of Anglo-Indian history, and of a renewed demand for positive action.

Trickster is everywhere in the world,

wherever the West has made reservations of repression, although we may not always recognise him. And his disguises may not always be benign. But whenever we tremble at the sound of a diabolical and savage laughter we will know he is close by. He is in the obduracy of Nelson Mandela, the blood sacrifice of the IRA, the merry laughter of African women as they invent the 'traditional' stories to accompany their tourist baskets: wherever a piece of life, a handful of earth, a thought, is snatched from the all-consuming vampiric machine of capitalism and its supporting institutions. Trickster does not always win his game; but then, as the earth fragments before the onslaught of unrestrained abuses, we also shall lose.

#### Footnotes

1. Arthur Rimbaud, 'Lettre au Voyant', in *Completed Works and Selected Letters*, ed. W. Fowlie, University of Chicago Press, 1966, p.307.
2. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1978.
3. *Harold of Orange*, 1984, 16mm colour film, 30min. duration. Directed by Richard Weise, scripted by Gerald Vizenor, and starring the Native American actor and comedian, Charlie Hill. Distributed by Film in the Cities, Minneapolis.
4. Asiba Tupahache, *Taking Another Look*, Spirit of January, Great Neck, NY, 1986.
5. The game is played to the strains of the William Tell Overture which, as some of us may remember, was adopted as the signature tune of the TV cowboy Lone Ranger whose side-kick was the polite and trusty savage, Tonto.

# DOCTOR EXPLORER CHIEF CURATOR

YVES MICHAUD

We need exhibitions that question the boundaries of art and of the art world, an influx of truly indigestible 'outside' artifacts. The relations of power whereby one portion of humanity can select, value, and collect the pure products of others need to be criticized and transformed. This is no small task. In the mean time one can at least imagine shows that feature the impure, 'inauthentic' productions of past and present tribal life; exhibitions radically heterogeneous in their global mix of styles; exhibitions that locate themselves in specific multicultural junctures; exhibitions whose principles of incorporation are openly questionable.<sup>1</sup>

In any case an exhibition such as *Magiciens de la terre* will have some positive aspects. Whatever reservations one might have had or might continue to have about its title, about the spirit of the project, about the selection of artists and goodness knows what else, it will have the one initial healthy effect of undermining various received truths about art. The twentieth century will be seen as the century that questioned aesthetic norms and academic codes.<sup>2</sup> This questioning must be continued. Frenchmen, Frenchwomen, the revolution still has some way to go! The next step will be to place high art and popular art on the same level, to challenge the sacrosanct distinction between 'avant-garde' and 'kitsch'. From this point of view *Magiciens de la terre* continues that process of de-defining art and has already started that next step, because much of what is exhibited here is both art *and* kitsch, both fine art *and* decorative art, both high art *and* popular art, kitsch *and* not avant-garde — art *and* not art.

It is not that it is particularly inherently exciting to break rules,<sup>3</sup> but, once started, one should not stop half way. If anything can be art, a signature, a telegram, a safe, a bit of ochre, a smile or a piece of tent-canvas, if the central maxim of aesthetic anarchism is just the same as that of epistemological anarchism, if 'anything goes', if all is difference and fragmented discourse, why should we hold back by granting a certain dignity or giving our particular blessing to the great white (and preferably Anglo-American) magicians whilst ignoring the magicians of the periphery?<sup>4</sup> Why do we always have to make fetishes of those awards made by white (and preferably Anglo-American) intellectuals which sanctify the very market they perpetuate?

In short, we should continue to break down all distinctions — and, to ensure that they disappear for good, we should exhibit not only the work of the sorcerers of the slums and of the 'beaux quartiers' side by side, but, alongside them, the work of those stakhanovites who churn out the paintings in hotel corridors, of retired railway employees and of producers of Virgin Mary statuettes. If all is art, then let's go all the way and let Lourdes meet the Aborigines, let everyone indulge in his or her own dream. If we take one further step then perhaps explorers will cross the bocage of the Vendée on their way to New Guinea. After all, the place where Levi-Strauss felt most at home as an explorer was New York. This really isn't a joke.

Centre and periphery. It is also one of the strong points of the exhibition that it exposes this false distinction and tackles it head on. The generation that saw the triumph of art as a cultural phenomenon has also witnessed first the polarization of the two superpowers, followed by the further polarization of industrialized countries and Third World. We failed to notice what was already right under our noses, the fact that the Third World is also here with us, within virtual spitting distance, on the edge of our cities, in our high-rise blocks of flats. Neither did we notice that the Third World will not always be the Third World, that it sells us not only the obvious raw materials, tourism and immigrant labour, but also T-shirts and televisions, gadgets and computers. Surely, the centre will always exist: it will be just where we are, a simple indicator of subjectivity. Yet this clearly shows that we can never really tell where it is amongst the multiplicity of levels of activity, tension and stimulation. There are cross exchanges like multiple circuits, few of which are regulated and few of which are organized, and even fewer that occur in a way that we would choose if we could control them. This much is, of course, already known. We know about borrowing in art; we know that Pergamon's sculpture borrowed from Hindu sculpture, that Roman art borrowed from Greek art, we know about the recycling of Italian Renaissance architecture, neoclassicism, orientalism, japonism, primitivism etc. It is essential to realize, though — and *Magiciens de la terre* will help us in this — that these exchanges are not just one-way. Culture, to use the title of James Clifford's book, is a predicament.<sup>5</sup> Adapting the first line of a William Carlos Williams poem, he says "The pure products of culture have gone crazy." The apparently pure products probably never were. In any case nowadays there is certainly not on the one hand a lost world, whether spoiled or authentic, and on the other a glorious or ruined future. The notion of two equally pure identities is just a fantasy. Our roots are not pure and they will be even less so in the future. Everywhere new identities are under construction. This does not happen painlessly and, in any case, these constructions will be composite. As Clifford says, "if authenticity is relational, there can be

no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactic."<sup>6</sup> The exotic is within striking distance, not only by a charter-flight to the other side of the world, but right here, in our midst. We are just as exotic to others as they are to us.

Whether one likes it or not, the merit of *Magiciens de la terre* will be to show this cross-fertilization and this generalization and this general reciprocity. In his excellent article on the exhibition 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), Thomas McEvilley expressed this reciprocity of 'borrowing' in a memorable phrase: "our garbage is their art, their garbage is our art".<sup>7</sup> For his part Clifford sees surrealism from the point of view of an ethnology of "Cultural impurity and disruptive syncretisms."<sup>8</sup> He speaks of a surrealist moment in ethnography, "that moment when the possibility of comparison shoots up in an immediate tension with the pure and simple incongruity."<sup>9</sup> *Magiciens de la terre* should produce that surrealist moment of incongruity found in contemporary art, and in a considerably more striking manner than do ready-mades artily arranged amongst paintings; that, after all, is still our world. Needless to say, in the two exhibition sites, some compartmentalization has taken place; the architects have made their own arrangements, everything is managed so that no feelings are hurt, but that will not affect the "pure and simple incongruity". Those who have no stomach for the surreal, the polylogical, the Bakhtinian "carnavalesque" will not like it — starting with those artists who earnestly trace their own career and artistic roots in a past that they do not authentically despise.

Despite the cautious words and intentions of the organizers, the exhibition's effects will be beyond their control. Indeed the actual effect of the exhibition never quite matches the organizers' aims: many visitors are ignorant or unobservant, display-cases are badly lit, works have had to be transported from God knows where or when in space and time, or the museum director has just failed to make himself understood.

Yet here the scale of disorientation changes. The organizers of the exhibition present us with

a collection of objects for which either we have no criteria for perception, or for which we have confused criteria, or for which we have no relevant criteria. Do we actually have any criteria by which to perceive an Australian Aborigine *dreaming*? For most of us it is the same infantile and elementary criteria which attract us to multicoloured bead necklaces and small glass objects.<sup>10</sup> By what criteria can we judge Cheri Samba? Might not these be the same as those by which we perceive Jeff Wall or Cucchi? Conversely, are we so certain about what there is to be seen when we look at Buren or Polke? Disorientation works in all directions: it is what we feel before an 'exotic' work, also the feeling which is produced when we look at the exotic from much closer to home.

A fascinating feeling of otherness will follow, as long as it is accepted as a disorientating force and not channelled into a conventional aesthetic discourse. It is on this point that I have, I confess, had reservations about the organizers' aesthetic discourse.

They claim not to have included in the exhibition those works "which completely escape all our aesthetic categories and criteria", nor to have included those which depend too heavily on their context. They also claim to have privileged the value of intrinsically visual communication in objects. I must confess to being unable to understand in what the value of intrinsically visual communication might consist, especially if what is meant is something analogous to the 'natural' or immediate meaning of a gesture, a posture or an appearance. The analyses of philosophers like Wittgenstein or Davidson have more than amply demonstrated the presence of convention in what seems completely natural and obvious. If a gesture has immediate meaning, it is because we decide "charitably" — that is to say in virtue of what Davidson calls a "charity principle" — to give it the meaning that we give it in our tribe. That is the only way to start a process of interpretation, so that, by degrees, we can see that we are wrong, or, more bizarrely, that something does not 'fit' without us really knowing why. Without touching on philosophical considerations, Badandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, shows that there is nothing

transparent in the interpretation of gestures, behaviour or belief, that is to say, in the interpretation of works of art. We must accept that when we perceive aesthetically, we are using clearly defined criteria.<sup>11</sup> For Buren we possess some of these criteria, derived in particular from the recent history of this sort of artistic activity, for Jeff Wall a few as well, and as for Chéri Samba we can at least believe we have them. For the Aboriginal artists we could always read John Mundine's article in this edition of *Cahiers*, and so on. In fact, uncertainty, far from disappearing, snowballs, and in addition to all these heterogenous uncertainties is the effect caused by this melting-pot of different items, this Tower of Babel of different places. You'd have to be pretty smart even to begin to imagine you could master all these effects. *Magiciens de la terre* will make people think, strike them dumb or bewilder them; the exhibition is in no danger of giving any clues as to "the general contemporary tendencies in world art". As we could tell, the exhibition will be the ruin of those experts currently in fashion.

But for all that, it is not the aesthetes who will win the day. The exhibition will also be the downfall of taste, since there will be no norm except what is socially determined by the public. It will trigger off deep-rooted desires, fantasies, whims; those strange motives at the heart of both the desire to collect and the pleasure derived from curiosity. Everyone will be confronted by himself or herself and each work will become part of a personal mythology. The whole thing will be a lovely mess.

That is probably not the way the organizers see it. They have adopted a universalizing aesthetic — an aesthetic that is articulated in the very title: *Magiciens de la terre*. I do not wish to go into detail about what Jean-Hubert Martin said in his interview with Benjamin Buchloh, but merely to note the key points of this aesthetic since it plays a major role in the whole project.

It is a matter of the individual creator's confidence, the radical energy of his work, his sense of adventure or of danger, of the work's originality in its cultural context, its inventiveness, of the degree of adequation between the man and his creation and of the value of resistance and opposition to its

environment. To which we might add that these are generally the criteria by which we judge contemporary art.<sup>12</sup>

One can make all kinds of criticisms of such criteria. I shall set aside the fact that they are overtly ethnocentric, which contrasts both with the stated desire not to be ethnocentric, and with the general spirit of the project itself. I wish rather to concentrate on what I believe to be an essential flaw: the vague, and indeed *functionally vague* character of all these criteria.

After all, what exactly do we mean when we say that a work is inventive or original in its cultural context, or that we can see an adequation of man and work? We could mean so many things that a whole range of artists could be represented in *Magiciens de la terre*. Personally I am not sure whether artists such as Buren, Oldenburg, Cucchi, Kirkeby or even Haacke can really meet these kinds of criteria.

As I write I cannot be sure whether my doubts apply to the artists of the 'periphery' or not, but whether or not one has used two 'aesthetic' yardsticks is not really what matters. What has happened is that *either* one has used two aesthetic yardsticks, each appropriate to a particular cultural domain, in doing which one has, in effect, allowed any number of yardsticks: judgements will then have been made individually and empirically, and, at the end of the day, the result arrived at (which will be no bad thing) will be that Teshigahara is, as they say, 'worth exhibiting'. Or what it means is that one has applied the same criteria and it is just the same kind of art. These criteria are, however, so vague that they can perform any function: their whole point is that they can either be presented as 'the same criteria' which can perform a proper function in every case, or as variable criteria which are adaptable to particular situations and flexible enough to cope with the whole diversity of specific cases. It is here that, paradoxically, universalization meets casuistry.

How can we fail to see that these criteria are not criteria at all? Since, these days, the admission of an arbitrary, rhapsodic or subjective choice is just not the done thing, we feel obliged to foreground criteria, an aesthetic, which may be no more than a sham, but which cover anything we want them to. To put it another way, hyper-empiricism has no need of

any kind of criteria, except when the explorer wishes to give the impression of being learned and of having a mission, that he is not doing all he does for fun, or because he is uncertain about his own identity.

What is this mission?

Two ways of describing it can be identified.

First of all, it is a humanist mission. When one reads the different accounts of the *Magiciens de la terre* project and the emphasis placed on remarkable men, magicians, creators, those who endow objects with a spiritual value, one cannot help but hear faint echoes of Malraux's aesthetics in that celebration of the exemplary individual, that conception of art as questioning of the world, that affirmation of the permanent value of the creative act.<sup>13</sup> My remarks are not intended as a criticism for one very simple reason, that it is very difficult, once one has started down the road of general aesthetics, to avoid two kinds of equally seductive and equally illusory discourses, Malraux's brand of humanism and Greenberg's brand of formalism, two discourses which are, in spirit, very closely related. In 1984, *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art* depended on a formalist universalism. The very universalism of *Magiciens de la terre* almost inevitably, it seems to me, leads it to adopt the humanist version of this universalism. This first interpretation is certainly what comes to mind if one takes the organizers' stated aesthetic criteria seriously.

A second interpretation, however, both complements and extends the scope of the first. One is led to ask if this opening up of our ways of seeing might not in fact be characteristically postmodern. By postmodern I obviously do not mean the name that might be given to a style — which, except in the domain of banal architecture and, moreover, taking into account the fact that degeneration of the postmodern into banality and kitsch is already fairly well advanced, would be rather difficult to identify — but rather a way of looking, a sort of approach, which is fundamentally empiricist, and, as I have already said, hyper-empiricist.

In this respect, one must bear in mind that postmodernism has a conceptual history that largely overlaps the domain of aesthetics. Feyerabend's first pieces defending an epistemological anarchism and prefiguring the main slogan of *Against Method* ("Anything

goes"), were written in 1963. They asserted nothing but the right to be "a good empiricist" in the philosophy of science, in other words a radical opening up of our way of looking at scientists' actual procedure and approach. Nothing here was open to criticism, except possibly that a little more reflection on relativism was needed. I do not believe that, in what followed, the postmodern position has ever wandered far from this constant calling into question, in the name of hyper-empiricism, of canonical accounts in any field. The trouble is that if one commits oneself to a method that is anti-authoritarian, anti-obscurantist, anti-monological, anti-nomological, anti-dogmatic, anti-anything, one soon ends up either in undifferentiated darkness, like Hegel's night where all the cows are black, or in what I shall call 'dogmatic tolerance'. What I mean by this is that starting from a pluralist, tolerant, open-minded position, which is as yet quite flexible and unarticulated, one naturally goes on to make a universalized representation in terms of partial accounts, of differences, of local ways of understanding, to *proclaim* the reality of a world where all is possible, where all is interesting and all has a certain merit, just because our criteria make us see the world in that way. We cannot escape this new trap set by ethnocentrism, this trap set by a mild and creeping form of ethnocentrism. Tolerance is of course present, because one is so open to so many things, but dogmatism is present too, because it is still in fact our point of view that legislates on the world. There is no great crime in this — except perhaps that it might be the case that things just do not happen like this.

To come to the point, what is that which corresponds, in the domain of art, to what I have just described? A representation of a world of art where the artists are, each in his or her own manner and in his or her own field and genre, interesting, creative, innovative: a representation of a world of art where there is a plurality of criteria founded on a bedrock of aesthetic value. Yet whose words are these? They belong to those who have both found that world and chosen that world. In the case of *Magiciens de la terre*, since it is hardly a Biennale and even less of a world fair, the choice of national selection committees was challenged (and rightly so) in order to avoid the

phenomenon of official selections and the trap of official art. But what at root does all of this mean? That they wanted to avoid the phenomenon of displays that are only officially representative? Isn't that easier said than done? And in any case, who is representing what?

They wanted to avoid the machinery of making official nominations ("You will represent us"), and also avoid the effects of any fixed idea that official committees might have developed about how a country should be properly represented ("You will be representative"). In this last sense, it is clear that many countries will consider themselves to be badly represented, or not to be represented by good artists, these being the official artists, and, moreover, the presentable and representative artists — one just cannot get away from this vocabulary of representation. But just suppose we have already succeeded in doing so. Buren and Boltanski do not, in that case, represent France at the *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition any more than the Yuendumu community represents Aboriginal Australians. Yet this last sentence straight away betrays its own obvious impossibility. The Aborigines remain Australian Aborigines, and Buren and Boltanski become what they are: French Aborigines, or European Aborigines, or Western Aborigines.

Finally, if one asks what the exhibition is representative of, one is forced to admit that it actually gives a representation of the state of creation, in the strong sense of the word, as it is seen by members of commissions and their assistants who are entrusted with the task of bureaucratizing the universal. It does not matter that these bureaucrats will admit that they are fallible, that they did not see everything, that they were unable to show everything, that they had to pick and choose and so forth; it is their very open-mindedness, their empiricist spirit, which represents both the best and the worst of their enterprise. They open our eyes to the diversity they have found. Thank you. And I mean that most sincerely. The explorer has completed his mission; he comes to confirm and to strengthen our belief in the power and diversity of creation: as doctor explorer chief curator, as the title of my article suggests. He is explorer of the world in order to be curator of our vision of the world, to look

after it, to strengthen it. But perhaps even though this is what interests *us*, it is not this that really matters; perhaps what is of local interest to people is a different matter, and it would have been better to side not with a world which came to us because we brought it here (who us?), but with a world where, here and now, people are deeply engaged in political, social and creative acts which cannot be torn from their context and whose aesthetic significance is not universalizable, with a world which remains immovably there, where it belongs, even when it is brought here, to us. I do not know how one could show a world as it is, where it is. Perhaps we should simply align ourselves, committedly, with certain forms of expression in just the same way those who produce them do.

I do not want to make unfair criticisms of the organizers, for their exhibition will, in any case, for the reasons I have given, be a success. I simply wish to ask the question as to whether artistic — *and not aesthetic* — values are local or global. And to add that, for my part, I am convinced they are local, that I am convinced that, to borrow a title of a book by Guy Brett, it is always a matter of seeing “*through our own eyes*”, which is to say, *through their own eyes*. And to add, moreover, that it makes me sad to believe that there is really no centre except there, where we just provisionally happen to be, where provisionally they happen to be, *every one of them*. The world Magicians then run the danger of being either very, very close to us, or very, very far away.

#### NOTES

1. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p.213.
2. These codes were never quite so strict. I feel we have invented a standardized past, a world where standards were clear and respected in a similar way to the way we dream of a supposedly lost world, where values were respected, where things made sense, where things could just be what they were.

This is just one of the artifices of self-definition. In any case the standards and principles that we both dream up and call into question, that we probably dream up in order to question, have only served to cover up a considerable diversity of kinds of art: high art, popular art, decorative art, art as fetish, religious art, secular art.

3. Because, in the final analysis, one ends up by seeing nothing: in that night where all the cows are black . . . I shall come back to this in the course of the article.

4. Despite a considerable effort to give them a larger role than usual, the relatively low number of women artists is regrettable: there are clearly more magicians than *magiciennes*. Perhaps, though, the feminine of ‘magician’ is ‘witch’ . . .

5. James Clifford, *op. cit.*

6. *Ibid.*, p.12.

7. Thomas McEvelley ‘Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief’ *Artforum*, November 1984, p.59. The title of my article is obviously inspired by McEvelley’s work.

8. James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p.131.

9. *Ibid.*, p.146.

10. Which ironically inverts the situation of the savage being fascinated by our glass beads.

11. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford, 1972. The whole book is an exercise in identifying and reconstructing the criteria in a specific case in order to learn to see what the Italians saw, to enter into their vision of the world and in particular their vision of the artistic world.

12. See the exhibition’s official press statement, p.6.

13. “Though always tied up with history, the creative act has never changed its nature from the far-off days of Sumer to those of the School of Paris, but has vouched throughout the ages for a conquest as old as man. Though a Byzantine mosaic, a Rubens, a work by Rembrandt and by Cézanne display a mastery distinct in its kind, each imbued in its own manner with that which has been mastered, all unite with the paintings of the Magdalenian epoch in speaking the immemorial language of Man the conqueror, though the territory conquered was not the same. The lesson of the Nara Buddha and of the Sivaic Death Dancers is not a lesson of Buddhism or Hinduism, and our Museum Without Walls opens up a field of infinite possibilities bequeathed us by the past, revealing long-forgotten vestiges of that unflagging creative drive which affirms man’s victorious presence.” (A. Malraux, *Voices of Silence*, trans. S. Gilbert, St. Albans 1974, p.639). Take away the proper names and one is left with something very similar to the declared aims of the *Magiciens de la terre* project.

# EARTH AND MUSEUM — LOCAL AND GLOBAL?

GUY BRETT

The title of the proposed Paris exhibition, as one of the few pieces of information available in advance, inevitably made one ask oneself: who is speaking, and to whom?

*Magiciens.* To describe any Western artist today as a magician (Picasso, say) would probably be found only in advertising copy. In current art discourse it would be considered trite, paradoxically a dis-empowering word that would weaken the relationship between the aesthetic and social dimensions in an artist's practice. 'Magician' appears in the title as a way of cementing links which the exhibition apparently intends to make between metropolitan artists and those working in religious contexts in certain African, Asian and Latin American societies. But in doing so the term rebounds, and inexorably reveals its nature as a 'primitivist projection'.

*De la Terre.* In its close association with Magician as a message/massage of evocative words, the word 'land' (*terre*) has obviously been used here with a double meaning: *terre* as the physical substance, signifying the elemental, the basic; and *terre* as the world, the planet. But as these two meanings begin to diverge, the one standing for the concrete, the particular, the local (or in art-language the 'site specific'), the other for a general concept of totality, of overview — a gulf appears between two different kinds of experience. The first associates *terre* with a desperate struggle, a 'land-rights' struggle, either to regain appropriated land or simply for a place to live,

a place from which to speak, and the second is detached: the *terre* of privilege, of power, which with every passing day seems to become more abstract, mobile, and in fact harder to 'localise'.

The terms move quickly to a polarized antithesis. At one end of the scale is the experience of peoples who traditionally have "a concept of self as an integral part of the social body whose history and knowledge are inscribed across a particular body of land", as Jean Fisher has described for Native Americans. In this view "territory is a living entity to be nurtured and respected as the literal body of the self".<sup>1</sup> The other end of the scale is at an extreme of technological overdevelopment, revealingly expressed by Jean Baudrillard in terms of the pilot's or driver's perception, radically alienated from the earth as also from the body.<sup>2</sup>

These antagonisms, in their extreme form, seem to enter into the very definition of art. In the world today indigenous peoples — aboriginal groups in Australia, Maori in New Zealand, Native Americans in North and South America — are engaged in a continuous effort to maintain the association of their cultural legacy with their present predicament, especially their struggle for land rights. At the same time certain institutions — museums and more recently the giant corporations which sponsor museum exhibitions — are trying equally hard to disassociate these two realities. Canada has recently been the scene of some

clear examples. At the 1986 World Fair, the authorities decided they could not allow the native peoples themselves to control a space in the projected 'Indians of Canada' pavilion because they would use it to draw attention to their present-day struggles, especially land struggles. And last year, an exhibition of historical Native American artefacts at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, associated with the Winter Olympics, was boycotted by the Lubicon Cree Indians. Oil companies involved in sponsoring the show operate in the area of Northern Alberta where the Lubicon Cree live, and where they have been fighting a bitter land claim dispute with the federal and provincial government for 50 years.

The Calgary exhibition's title, *The Spirit Sings*, contrasted strangely with the words of Bernard Omniak, the Lubicon Cree Chief: "What's happening now is that our people are slowly being killed. I think a lot of times our people would be far better off if someone came up to them and got rid of them instantly. Anything so we wouldn't be dying a slow death." And he himself pointed out the glaring contradiction: "Our culture is being glorified by the same people who are doing the damage to the Native people in our area."<sup>3</sup> The oil companies are deeply implicated in the local, but their appeal is to the general, universal space of 'culture' which corresponds to their own abstract and global power. The Native Americans on the other hand have to move from the universal to the local: from our celebration of their artefacts as masterpieces of 'world art' to what is actually happening in their territory. Naturally the big corporations show their 'dependency' — on an artistic vitality and beauty they could not produce themselves and to which their logo is quite superfluous and marginal. But they have clearly realized that they can make use of the way our culture creates an aesthetic centered on the object and its contemplation, isolated from the rest of reality.<sup>4</sup> Their real power lies in the narrow specialization they count on in their public: our refusal to take responsibility for the whole. We begin to read the verbal message of the Calgary's exhibition's title, not as uplifting, but as almost sinister: a sign that we are being duped.

In this process the colonized group, and the

metropolitan exhibition-goer, are in fact both being duped by the same corporate power which, as it grows, integrates the production plant, the museum, the state and the media in a single hegemony (the underlying meaning of 'corporate sponsorship of the arts'). The threat of this power at a local level, as well as its ever-widening circles, can be vividly felt in an illuminating short book by Eric Michaels about the efforts of an aboriginal group in central Australia — the Warlpiri — to set up a local TV station.<sup>5</sup> The Warlpiri were implicated not only in a power struggle — to transmit autonomously their own programmes in the face of the official national media — but also a cultural struggle, to articulate alternative 'aboriginalities' to the standardized and ethnicised images of themselves issuing from the same centralized sources. Michaels describes how, in assisting the Warlpiri video-maker Francis Jupurrurla Kelly to make tapes, he realised that aboriginal history is intimately related to land and place: "Any story comes from a particular place, and travels from there to here, forging links which define the tracks over which people and ceremonies travel."<sup>6</sup>

Contradictions immediately arise, and indeed Michaels reports that Francis Jupurrurla Kelly and the Warlpiri themselves see TV as a two-edged sword, both a blessing and a curse. They wish to "identify their art and describe it to the rest of the world", but at the same time to avoid losing control of it in the process of reproduction and circulation which video makes possible. Will it remain a cultural experience based in material history or be swallowed up

in a particular named future whose characteristics are implied by that remarkable word 'Lifestyle'? This term now substitutes everywhere for the term culture to indicate the latter's demise in a period of ultra-merchandise...Lifestyles are...assemblages of commodified symbols, operating in concert as packages which can be bought, sold, traded or lost...Warlpiri people, when projected into this lifestyle future, cease to be Warlpiri: they are subsumed as 'Aborigines', in an effort to invent them as a sort of special ethnic group able to be inserted into the fragile fantasies of contemporary Australian multiculturalism.<sup>7</sup>

It is not difficult to recognize in this 'lifestyle future', the same process, mediated perhaps

by the same transnational corporations, at work in 'our own' culture. For have not the subversive and emancipatory projects of the 20th century avant-garde — from the surrealists at one pole, with their proposals to 'liberate desire', to the constructivists at the other, with their plans to transform the environment — been reduced, first by the art market and then by the wider market of lifestyle, to the same bland range of designer-commodities? And has this not necessitated new strategies by artists which resist, or at least reflect on, exactly this process in order to regain the social value and efficacy of art which the earlier generations had searched for? The 'ethnic' package and the 'modernist' package are side by side on the shelf.

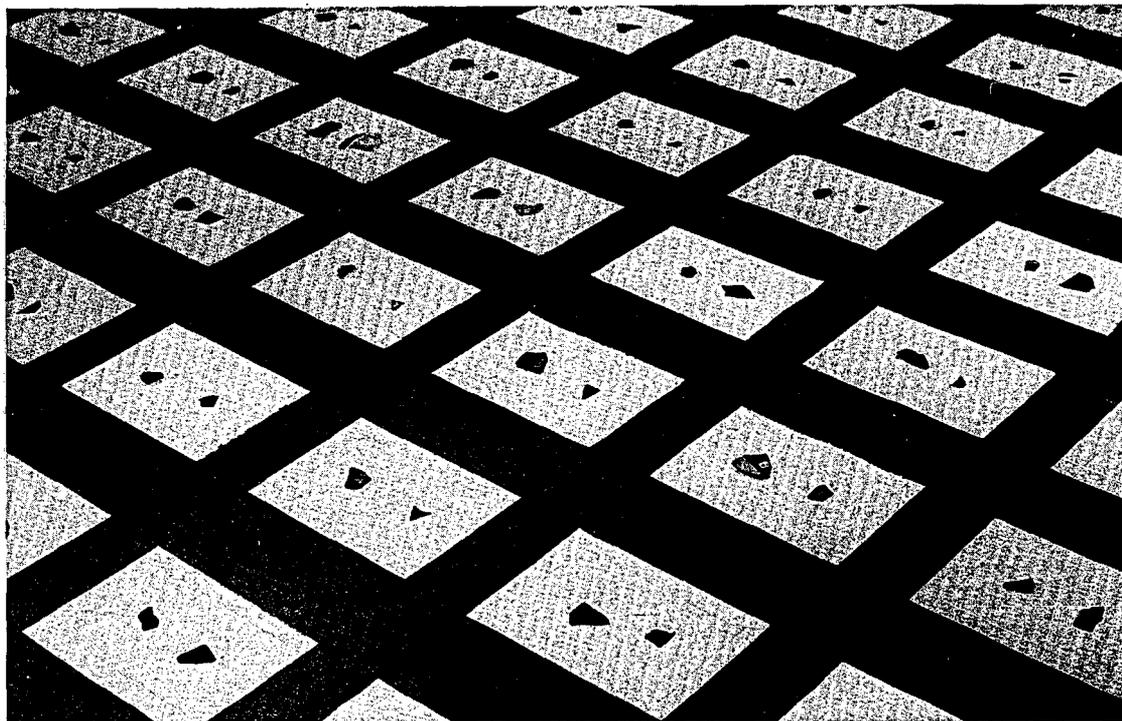
This fact, I think, has not been lost on a number of artists of the avant-garde in the last 20 years. Their explorations of the "relationship between cultures" (one of the stated themes of the Paris exhibit) has been inseparable from an attack on the inherited bourgeois concept of art (which is so entwined with the modern forms of colonialism and oppressive power). Whether the Paris exhibit will bring such work to light, or will treat the whole subject as an 'instant' phenomenon, remains to be seen. It is important to grasp the historical moment and social context of its first appearance, and the problematics in which it intervened. Not that we are merely talking here about points in a debate, or about single issues. The characteristic of art is to search for complexity and depth of metaphor.

I would like here, in the space available, to draw attention to such complex metaphors in the work of three artists of different origins, who have viewed the "relationship between cultures" from different positions: Hélio Oiticica, a Brazilian who died in 1980 at the age of 43 and who positioned himself audaciously between the avant-garde, Brazilian popular culture, the realities of 'underdevelopment' and '60s radicalism; the American artist Susan Hiller, who was perhaps the first to incorporate an ironical anthropological critique as a visual art practice, in a criss-crossing network of themes she is still developing, and the Filipino artist David Medalla, who over 25 years has continually re-invented the terms of an experimental dialogue between art and life.

Hélio Oiticica's work was in the mid-'60s at the forefront of modernity. At the Sao Paulo Biennale of 1965 he had exhibited some mysteriously beautiful works which were like no other objects around at that time: glass containers, or flasks, filled with red earth or a mass of brilliant pigment around a core of flame-like gauze and cloth, Oiticica's generic

HELIO OITICICA *Mosquito of Mangueira*  
wearing Cape 6, 1965





SUSAN HILLER *Fragments* (Installation detail) 1978  
 Courtesy PAT HEARN GALLERY, New York

in Portuguese) conceived of the object, not in terms of formal relationships, but as an 'energy centre' which draws spectators close ('like a fire', as he once remarked) and invites manipulation.

Oiticica had participated in the concrete and neo-concrete movements of the 1950s, when Brazil had received a first-hand exposure to the inter-war European avant-garde (the work of Mondrian, Klee, the Bauhaus, de Stijl, the Dadaists and Futurists was seen in depth at the early Sao Paulo Biennales). He had begun with a Mondrian-like formal analysis of the pictorial order: the plane, figure/ground relationships,

the frame. His early experiments were to move from that plane to the environmental space, and from a purely optical to a 'bodily' sensation of colour. From then on, his acute analysis of the new art movements in Europe and North America became closely bound up with his self-exposure to Brazil's popular culture, and to the powerful contradictions in the social reality of Rio de Janeiro. Crossing class barriers and living for periods in Manueira (one of Rio's *favelas*, or shanty-towns), becoming accepted and making friends there (a near-impossibility in Brazil), joining the *Escola de Samba* and rising to the level of *passista* (one of the leading dancers in the Carnival parade) issued in new

work concepts. Among these, *Parangolé* is perhaps the most daring.

Although *Parangolé* took the physical form of 'capes', and sometimes banners and 'standards', the word stood for a mode of creative-expressive behaviour rather than objects as such. The Brazilian critic Frederico Morais called it "a programme, a vision of the world, an ethic".<sup>8</sup> Here, in a hybrid, he brought together his refined assimilation of European constructivism, his advanced notions of spectator-participation (that creation is a dialogue and the object has no status outside its 'relational' role), Brazil's popular culture of the body, and the exaltations and sufferings of the mass of people as he had intuited them. The Capes (incorporating cloth, plastic, earth, words and so on) are internal-external, and individual-collective, dialogues. Wearing them, running or dancing in them, reveals things to the wearer, at the same time as it projects messages to those around, as a kind of 'clothing-utterance'.

I think the implications of Oiticica's work are many. Here was an advanced avant-garde art, rooted in the culture and reality of Brazil but which had thrown off colonial mimicry and dependence. No doubt there was an element of 'romance' in his exaltation of Manguera and the marginal, but Oiticica's was no 'aesthetics of poverty'. Manguera signified revolt against oppressive authority, and for Oiticica it mirrored his own artistic revolt against the philistinism and consumerism of the Brazilian bourgeoisie. Manguera was also for him a symbol of a communal creativity and festivity. His work, however, is not 'populist'. It always kept an abstract, 'model', quality. For him this was a necessary defence against the folkloric, the 'tropical', and other packageable images; abstraction signified an "open condition", and "the living potentiality of a culture which is being formed".<sup>9</sup>

My first sight of Susan Hiller's work *Fragments* (in 1978, at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford) was similarly a revelation, though of a rather different kind. In a startling *mise-en-scène*, hundreds of small broken pieces of Native American Pueblo pottery were laid out on low platforms in a large space. They were accompanied by painted versions of the individual pieces, while on the wall were

pinned various charts and documents, including hand-written transcripts of reflections on their work by Pueblo women potters which brought out their imaginative freedoms and restrictions within their traditions. Spatially, materially, the installation seemed to mock, or to release one from, the imposition of mastered 'wholes': either of a sculptural or of an archaeological/anthropological kind. The material appropriated from another culture was not used in order to build up either autonomous 'primitive-looking' art objects, or the 'scientific' displays of ethnographic museums. It remained in fragments: a moving assertion of knowledge both as incomplete and as shared.

There was also another level to *Fragments*, underlined by the inclusion of two photographs. One taken from an old National Geographic Magazine was of a white woman at a camp table, with a caption underneath running something like: "Here Mrs....patiently sorts the pieces of pottery of the archaeological expeditions led by her husband." The other photo was of Susan Hiller sorting the pieces as an artist. These images linked with the statements of the potters to establish a struggle by women to be seen as "primary makers of meaning".<sup>10</sup> In this sense the work was a collaboration. As Caryn Faure-Walker wrote at the time, the shards "function as analogous cross-references to broader notions of culture in which we ourselves are involved".<sup>11</sup> And indeed the work of Susan Hiller as a whole would hold up to question the notion of an exhibition dealing with the West's relationship to other cultures, unless it was dialectically related to an 'anthropology' of our own society. The view of another culture is taken from inside one's own culture. Both 'at home and abroad', perceptions are concealed and marginalised by the patriarchal law and official voice.

One of the ways Susan Hiller has examined the patriarchal law and official voice 'at home' has been in a subtle questioning of the conventional boundaries between the public and domestic domains. Her installation *Monument*, 19 refers to a tradition of public, official culture, though in an unexpected, off-centered way: the photographed inscriptions which form its basis — Victorian memorials to people who died saving or trying to save the



DAVID MEDALLA in front of *Eskimo Carver*, Installation at Artists for Democracy, 1977

lives of others — tell of unknown lives which became public and heroic in an instant. Hiller tries to recover their lost voices and their lives outside the official discourse of the monument in her own taped reverie which is part of the work. Her more recent series *Home Truths* moves right into the domestic enclave, to its skin so to speak, via the appropriation of mass-produced childrens' wallpapers which she uses as a painting ground. Has anyone paid much attention to these leisure products before? Hiller proffers them as evidence of the growing importance of the home as the place where ideology is imbibed. She has sorted out a

gender-based indoctrination of values by appeal to ancient themes: language (ABCs), love (Pierrot Lunaires, hearts and cosmetic colours for girls), and death (guns, robots and war scenes for boys). Her own superimposed painting both accentuates and scrambles up the mechanical stereotypes. In a subtle artistic strategy, beauty transfigures a kitsch expression at the same time as it testifies to the social power of this kitsch and thus ridicules a response of mere aesthetic delectation.

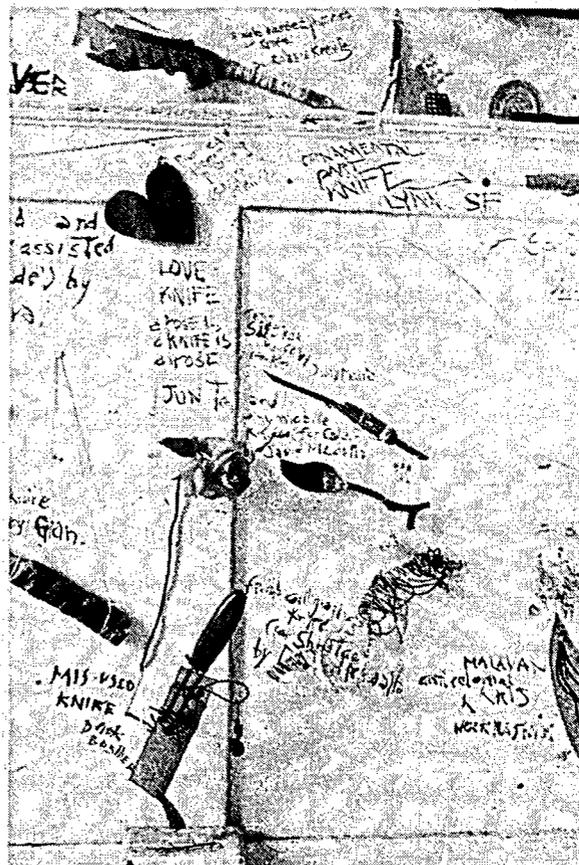
David Medalla's *Eskimo Carver* first appeared in London in 1977, in the immediate context of Artists for Democracy, which was an artists'

group and exhibition space active at the time in providing "material and cultural support to liberation struggles throughout the world". *Eskimo Carver* was an event in three parts; an exhibit of Medalla's drawings and transcriptions of Eskimo poetry, a performance — "Alaska Pipeline" — based on the superpower incursions into the Arctic as mediated by the English 'gutter press', and a 'participation-production' piece in which visitors were invited to make knives out of a pile of waste and refuse collected in the neighbourhood. Each person's 'knife' was titled and pinned to the wall in a playful parody of ethnographic museums.

Madalla's kinetic sculptures of the 1960s, using foam, mud, sand and so on, had been one of the most radical and poetic explorations

of the whole problematic of matter, energy, the ephemeral, the random and the relationship between the machine and nature. In the '70s he translated his concern with movement and change from an 'elemental' to a 'social' field of metaphor. The mechanical sculpture which grew and changed outside the direct control of the artist became the participatory proposition which, based on the artist's idea, took an unpredictable form from the contributions of many people, and thereby threatened to burst the protocols of the museological concept of art: "I could easily inundate, say, the Tate Gallery...", as Medalla said of *Eskimo Carver*, "there is no end to people coming in and making knives."<sup>12</sup>

The invitation to make knives in *Eskimo Carver* paralleled the Eskimo practice of composing



DAVID MEDALLA *Eskimo Carver* (detail) 1977

poetry, which traditionally is democratic and participatory (although it is considered very difficult to produce a good new song). The sheer diversity of contributions it produced, ranging from the literal to the fantastic and poetic was a revelation. In fact the model of creativity proposed in this piece wittily challenged our museum culture in two of its guises simultaneously; showing up on the one hand the bourgeois notion of the isolated genius and the sanctification of art objects in 'museums of modern art', and on the other the 'objective' representation of other cultures made in ethnographic museums! The intelligence of this dual strategy becomes all the more pertinent when you compare it with other, more one-sided positions; for example the later sculpture of a formalist kind made from industrial fragments by artists like Tony Cragg or Bill Woodrow, or Eduardo Paolozzi's 1986 exhibit at the Museum of Mankind in London, combining pieces of his own sculpture with items from the British Museum's ethnographic collections — where he effectively 'museumified' even his own work.

The theme of the relationship between cultures did not disappear from Medalla's work after *Eskimo Carver*, but it was posed in a new way. From participatory propositions for 'others', he moved towards himself and his place in the world. His long series of performances and photoworks of the 1980s have been a kind of masquerade using objects and even the environment itself to make visible the "the infinity of traces"<sup>13</sup> which constitute identity. Its witty and incongruous 'conflation' of cultures, and of the exalted and kitsch, seemed designed to rescue a notion of creativity from all forms of essentializing, cloning and finalizing discourse; whether of academic art history, of the art market and bureaucracy, of ideas, or of lifestyle.

The Paris exhibition is being organized in the midst of a wave of artistic neo-primitivism; the appropriation of spaces, images, motifs, from faraway, which is closely connected with reviving the myth of the artist's unique and singular identity, and of art's autonomy within the social field as a whole. The 'local' in time and space again becomes the 'global' of Western taste. Here we have drawn attention

to work which refuses simple oppositions (we-they, self-other, artist-public) and proposes a dynamic complexity for understanding and acting in the world. These differences would seem to be the stuff of conflict rather than the dubious unity of Magicians.

#### NOTES

1. Jean Fisher, *Jimmie Durham*, 'The ground has been covered', *Artforum*, Summer 1988. p.102.
2. "...each person sees himself at the controls of a hypothetical machine, isolated in a position of perfect and remote sovereignty, at an infinite distance from his universe of origin...our body appears simply superfluous, basically useless in its extension, in the multiplicity and complexity of its organs, its tissues and functions, since today everything is concentrated in the brain and in genetic codes, which alone sum up the operational centre of being. The countryside, the immense geographic countryside, seems to be a deserted body whose expanse and dimensions appear arbitrary (and which is boring to cross even if one leaves the main highways)...etc, etc. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' in Hal Foster (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 1985, p.128, 129.
3. Quoted in *Last Issue*, Alberta, Autumn 1987.
4. It is revealing to see that CANAL +, one of the sponsors of *Magiciens de la terre*, despite the rhetoric of the "abolition of all frontiers", can still, in its promotion material, remain wedded to a distinctly Western bourgeois concept of art: "A tous ses abonnés, CANAL + a choisi de dédier ce plaisir unique qui s'attache à la possession des objets d'art et de leur offrir cette jouissance extrême qui naît de leur contemplation".
5. Eric Michaels, *For a Cultural Future — Francis Jupurrurla Kelly makes TV at Yuendumu*, "Art & Criticism Monograph Series, vol 3. Melbourne: Artspace, 1987.
6. *Ibid*, p.49.
7. *Ibid*, p.71.
8. Frederico Morais, *Pequeno roteiro cronológico das invenções de Hélio Oiticica*. Rio de Janeiro, 1986, p.2.
9. Hélio Oiticica, 'Crelazer', in *Aspiro Ao Grande Labirinto* (selected essays by Oiticica), ed, Luciano Figueiredo, Lygia Pape and Waly Salomão, Rio de Janeiro; Rocco 1986, p.116.
10. Susan Hiller, Interview with Paul Buck, *Centrefold*, (Toronto), November, 1979.
11. Caryn Faure-Walker, 'Fragments', in *Susan Hiller: Recent Works*, exhibition catalogue, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p.25.
12. David Medalla, Interview with Steve Thorn, 1977 [unpublished].
13. The phrase is Antonio Gramsci's, from his *Prison Notebooks*.