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WELCOMING REMARKS

Manuel J. Borja-Villel, President of CIMAM

Never in history, at least in modern history, has art been more popular than it is today. The number of biennials, art fairs, and museums continues to grow, as do the number of people visiting them. And while each year major museums set new attendance records, it seems as if the voracity, the hunger to attract the masses, increases still more: the more visitors we have, the more visitors we want. It would also appear that this popularity of art and culture has not been accompanied by an increase in education and debate. On the contrary. Broadly speaking, it seems that education levels are today at an all-time low. People do indeed go to museums, but they remain passive; they go to recognize a name rather than discover something they did not previously know.

But we here also fall into the same trap, that of programming blockbuster, easy-to-digest exhibitions with the ultimate goal of increasing our audience rather than educating them. While we might believe that with the popularization of culture we are helping to decrease illiteracy, in reality we are creating spectators, passive audiences instead of active readers, and thus contributing to the creation of a new form of illiteracy, a cynical one cloaked in the supposed goodwill of the popularization of culture. We are clearly living in a globalized world, a world that is rapidly changing both economically and technologically, and yet museums continue to be rooted in nineteenth-century notions of identity, memory, and patrimony. In fact, we seem to be trapped between the internationalization of many artistic proposals and the need to preserve our historical roots. These positions are quite often mutually exclusive and defensive in their relation to other cultures.

Yet, what are we to do? What are we to do when trapped between a present we don't like and a past in which we have ceased to recognize ourselves? At times of crises such as the present—and this crisis is obviously not short-term—perhaps we should reconsider our lifestyle, the system in which we live. Right now we actually have an opportunity to change our models of doing politics, our artistic paradigms, our ways of thinking. At this moment the museum has an entirely new role to play. Traditionally, intellectuals were associated with men or women of letters, writers, but in an age like ours, in which the image is so important, intellectuals are those who deal with images, with montage, with the *dispositif* in the Foucaultian sense.

In this day and age, museum professionals and those who reflect on museological concerns deal with crucial issues that constitute the foundation of the museum, namely collecting, narrative-making, and education.

While I leave the question open to our speakers and discussants, I would like to say that in these three areas we need to question the traditional idea of property associated with art and culture and begin to think in terms of “common knowledge”; that is, knowledge owned by and shared among everyone. Museums should be custodians, not proprietors. I believe we need to

question the way in which we construct our narratives, our *dispositifs*. For too long we have taken our inherited tools and concepts as givens rather than as constructions, as sites of power and control. And, finally, we must think in terms of radical pedagogy, by which the spectator becomes a reader, an agent, someone able to create his or her own narrative when visiting a show or contemplating a series of artworks, and, at the same time, capable of questioning that of the institution.

For this occasion we have an extraordinary group of speakers, as well as the largest number of people registered at a conference in the history of CIMAM, a great diversity of groups and experiences and a variety of case studies that will certainly enrich our discussions, so I am sure this is going to be a very successful event. I would like to thank the District Mayor of the Huangpu District, the Honorable Zhou Wei, for his hospitality; the Association of Art Museums of China; and the National Art Museum of China, the Shanghai Art Museum, and MoCA Shanghai, and their respective directors Fan Di'an, Li Lei, and Samuel Kung. I would also like to thank our patrons and particularly the speakers. As you know, this is the last term of the present board with which I have been working over the last three exciting years, and which I believe has accomplished a great number of things. I extend my recognition to its members, and especially to Pilar, with whom I have worked for six years, and I must say that I will miss her dearly. Thank you all very much.

SESSION I – THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN CREATING A COUNTER HEGEMONY

Seeing Global

Susan Buck-Morss



Figure 1 Section of the Dunhuang star atlas, mid-seventh century (early Tang Dynasty), displaying from the north circumpolar region, down to a celestial latitude of about $+50^\circ$ (Map 13, Dunhuang star atlas, Or. 8210/S.3326, British Museum)

You are looking at a section of a Chinese scroll containing the oldest complete atlas of the heavens that has been preserved from any civilisation.¹ It is a seventh-century (Tang Dynasty) star chart, discovered near Dunhuang, an oasis town on the Silk Road where two main branches of the western network of trade routes converge and continue eastward to China's capital city of Xi'an.² While the purpose of the Dunhuang atlas was astrological divination (celestial events were believed to mirror those on Earth³), it was based on accurate scientific observation. Beautiful to look at, it is a remarkably precise astronomical document. Its multiple panels are a graphic depiction of the entire visible sky. The scroll displays unambiguously the position of 1,500 stars within the traditional Chinese constellations. Its panels are a sequence of circumpolar regions in azimuthal projection, a method of measurement still in use today.⁴ The Dunhuang atlas is believed to be a more roughly executed copy of an imperial original,

¹ In comparison, the Farnese Atlas, the second-century (all dates in this essay are Christian Era) Roman statue of Atlas holding the celestial globe—famously replicated at Rockefeller Center in New York City—is scientifically naive. Considered to be a copy of a Hellenistic original, it shows the Western constellations from a god-like perspective of the outside looking in and without the positioning of individual stars. Ptolemy's second-century text, *Almagest* (Arabic for 'Great Constellation') included a catalogue of 1,022 stars but unlike the Dunhuang atlas, without their position in the sky. Lost to Europe until the twelfth century, the *Almagest* catalogue of stars was used by Dürer to depict the Western constellations in 1515.

² The Dunhuang Star Atlas was found nearby the town in Mogao, a Buddhist holy site known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas cut into the rock of a cliff. Discovered in 1907 by Aurel Stein, this scroll chart is now in the British Museum. A detailed description of the manuscript was published in 2009 by astrophysicist Jean Marc Bonnet-Bidaud and the astronomer François Praderie, working together with Susan Whitfield, Director of the International Dunhuang Project at the British Museum. See 'The Dunhuang Chinese Sky: A comprehensive Study of the Oldest Known Star Atlas', http://idp.bl.uk/education/astronomy_researchers/index.a4d (downloaded 24 December 2010).

³ 'Astronomy in China was an essential imperial science as the divination based on the sky events taking place in the celestial mirror image of the empire was the way to rule the state'. Bonnet-Bidaud et al.

⁴ An azimuth (from the Arabic *as-simt*, 'direction') is an angular measurement in a spherical coordinate system.

which, as portable, would have been useful for caravan navigation.⁵ Visibility changed with the seasons, but along the East-West trade routes that were roughly the same latitude, ‘Silk Road travellers and residents saw the same stars whether they were on the shores of the Mediterranean or the borders of China, and knowledge of the stars was disseminated along its length.’⁶ Star charts measured distance in time, the movement of the heavens, allowing caravans to traverse space. With an eye on the stars, one did business on Earth.



Figure 2 T-O Map, *Silos Beatus*, Andalusian illustrated manuscript from the monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos 1106 AD, British Library, London

Figure 2 is a European Map of the World (*Mapa Mundi*) that was produced by Christian monks in an Iberian monastery three centuries later, at a time when most of the peninsula, then called Al-Andalus, was under Muslim (Umayyad) rule. The type is known as a T-O Map, because of its shape: a circular (O) depiction of the inhabited world surrounded by ocean, with Jerusalem, the navel (*umbilicus*) of the Earth, pictured at the centre above a T formed by the Mediterranean Sea, the River Nile to the south and River Don to the north. These three major waterways separate the world into the known continents. Asia is above, with Europe on the left and Africa on the right, and there is a fourth continent below Africa, described as ‘not known to us because of the heat of the sun.’⁷ This T-O map appears in one of a series of illustrated commentaries on the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, that describes in calamitous detail the apocalyptic end of a fully Christianised world. The copiously illustrated manuscript series (of which there are 26 extant copies) is known as the *Liébana Beatus*, after the monk who produced the (lost) original prototype in 785 AD. It is a Christian perception of

⁵ ‘It is possible that we have in hands [sic] not a scientific text intended for scientists only but a product of more general use which existed in several copies for several users ... [T]he purpose of such a scroll could have been to help travelers or warriors on the Silk Road who needed both predictions of the future from the aspect of the clouds [images of cloud types were included in the scroll] and assistance in their travel from the aspect of the night sky’. Bonnet-Bidaud, et al.

⁶ Susan Whitfield, *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*. Exhibition catalogue, The British Museum, London, 2004, p. 35.

⁷ This description is from Isidore, Bishop of Seville, whose writings are among the sources used by Beatus, the eighth-century monk of Liébana who wrote the original commentary. Isidore adds, ‘It is said the legendary Antipodes live there, a fabulous people whose feet are positioned in the mirror image of our own, and who, included on some of the Beatus maps, are depicted as *Sciopods*, “shadow-footed men” whose leg is lifted overhead as a parasol’. See John Williams, ‘Isidore, Orosius and the Beatus Map’, *Imago Mundi*, 49, 1997, pp. 7-32. The definitive (if still debated) study of the 26 extant variants of the Liébana Beatus is the 5 volume work by John Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus*, a corpus of illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse, Harvey Miller, London and Turnhout 1994-2003.

the whole of Earth's space imagined in terms of time, from Adam and Eve to the End of Days that would come after the world was fully exposed to Christianity through the apostolic missions. China, the Orient, is the Garden of Eden and beginning of the world, as you can see clearly in the *Silos Beatus* variant of the *Liébana Beatus* series.

The Christian, symbolic meaning of space as time, the eschatological depiction of the history of the world, placed little value on scientific accuracy. Indeed, 'Christianity began with the announcement that time and history were about to end.'⁸ Within these temporal limits, geographical measurement of space was not a theological concern.⁹ Compare the T-O map with the *Mappa Mundi* in the *Tabula Rogeriana* by the Muslim geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi (figure 3), created only half a century later in 1154.

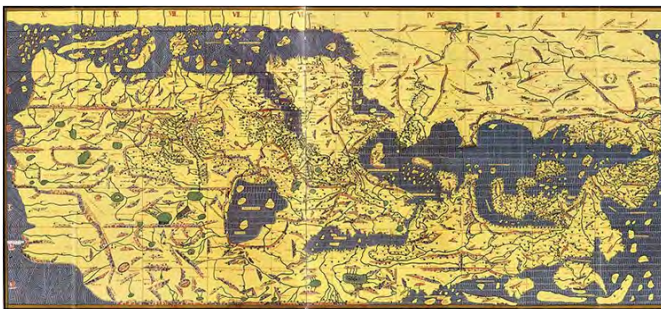


Figure 3 Fifteenth-century copy of the *Mappa Mundi* in the *Tabula Rogeriana*, 1154, by the Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi (North was at the bottom, the convention for Arab maps, shown here in inverted form to facilitate reading.) Bibliotheque nationale de France (MSO Arabe 2221)
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TabulaRogeriana.jpg>

Descendent from a Moroccan family of Princes and Sufi leaders, Al-Idrisi studied at Cordoba in Muslim Andalus (now Spain) at the same time that Christian monks to the north were still at work, diligently copying the prototypes of the *Liébana Beatus*. He had access to the extensive work of contemporary geographers, and himself travelled widely in Africa, Anatolia and parts of Europe before settling in Sicily at the court of the Norman King Roger II, who commissioned him to create this map. The King, whose Norman father (Roger I) had overthrown the previous Arab rulers of Sicily, welcomed Muslims whose scientific knowledge he valued, thereby maintaining Sicily's multi-confessional culture. Roger II commissioned Al-Idrisi to create this

⁸ Paula Fredriksen, 'Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45, 1991, pp. 151-183 (p. 151).

⁹ The *Liébana Beatus* series was also a commentary on current events, given the arrival of Muslim rulers in the early eighth century, and given the fact that the Prophet Mohammed appeared to re-open the tradition of prophecy that the book of Revelation had announced as closed. Just what meaning contemporaries were to take from the juxtaposition of the advent of Muslim rule and the book of Revelation is left open in the commentary, which is an amalgam of previous interpretations.

map and others as part of an encyclopaedic text incorporating knowledge of Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Far East, gathered by merchants, explorers and cartographers from various civilisations. It is considered 'one of the most exhaustive medieval works in the field of physical, descriptive, cultural, and political geography.'¹⁰ Al-Idrisi's map remained the European standard for accuracy for the next three centuries. Accuracy, however, while necessary for trade or plans of conquest, did not displace maps with more lofty theological values.



Figure 4 Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, ca. 1300, Hereford Cathedral, England (Wikicommons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hereford_Mappa_Mundi_1300.jpg)

The Hereford *Mappa Mundi* (figure 4) is a Euro-Christian version produced more than a century later (ca. 1300). While the geographical detail makes this map more topologically convincing, it is still a classic T-O map with Jerusalem at centre, the Orient on top, Europe at bottom left, and Africa, bottom right, and spatial significance marked according to theological understanding. In other words, even when geographic space was known scientifically, Christians persisted in depicting the world in the eschatological terms of space as time.



Figure 5 Da Ming Hun Yi Tu (Great Ming Dynasty Amalgamated Map), 1389. 大明混一图 Wikicommons: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Da-ming-hun-yi-tu.jpg> Image enhanced by contributor: http://geog.hkbu.edu.hk/GEOG1150/Chinese/Catalog/am31_map1.htm

¹⁰ Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, 'Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi, in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, Book 1: *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p. 160.

Figure 5 is a section from the *Ad Ming Hun Yi Tu* (Great Ming Dynasty Amalgamated Map). This is the oldest surviving, Chinese world map.¹¹ Benefiting from Islamic science and geographic knowledge, it is a detailed and sophisticated rendering, painted on silk in 1389 AD but with Manchu language captions on paper slips superimposed on the Chinese several centuries later.

We might be tempted to remark how backward Western and Christian Europe seems! But it would be wrong to limit our own historical understanding of the history of cartography in terms of a *telos* of scientific progress. The experts warn against the distortions caused by ‘scientific chauvinism’ that judges past maps anachronistically according to the modern value of accuracy of measurements, erasing theological and historical meaning and replacing them with the secular goals of science, whereby the history of cartography is made to chart the rate of progress among competing civilisations, a history written as ‘the saga of how the unmappable was finally mapped.’¹² If we consider later copies of the *Mappa Rogeriana*, the distortions of scientific chauvinism become evident.



Figure 6 Variant of Al-Idrisi’s map of 1154, from a Cairo manuscript dated 1348 and attributed to the Balkhi school of map-makers (inverted here to facilitate reading) This is the only known version without the more ‘scientific’ latitudinal markings of climate boundaries.

Figure 6 shows a variant that was produced two centuries later by a different tradition of Muslim map-makers, the Balkhi school, named after the tenth-century geographer Ahmed ibn Sahll al-Balkhi. Here, the map’s decorative aspects appear to overpower scientific description. Indeed, Islamic world maps with stylised spatial features similar to the T-O maps were produced by the Balkhi school. But even more to the point: what we call scientifically ‘advanced’ in Al-Idrisi’s *Mappa Rogeriana* was actually tied to the past: the 1,000 year old tradition founded by the second-century Greek geographer, Ptolemy, that had been lost in Europe but remained alive and was made more accurate by Muslim cartographers as early as the ninth century under the patronage of Al-Ma’mun, the great Abbasid patron of philosophy

¹¹ It is currently kept in protective storage at the First Historical Archive of China in Beijing. A full-sized digital replica was made for the South African government in 2002. The degree of ‘Chinese’ knowledge of world geography is debated. Much of the controversy would disappear, perhaps, if knowledge were not presumed to be the possession of a particular civilisation. Maps were translatable tools, not ethnic expressions. While the necessary knowledge took effort to acquire, it was held in common.

¹² J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), *The History of Cartography*, vol. 1: *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, pp. 3-4.

and science, and would continue unabated within the Muslim world, despite multiple changes in that world's theological and political orientation.¹³



Figure 7 Ptolemy's world map, redrawn in the fifteenth century from Ptolemy's *Geographia* (ca. 150 AD), indicating 'Sinae' (China) at the extreme right, beyond the island of 'Taprobane' (Sri Lanka, oversized) and the 'Aurea Chersonesus' (Southeast Asian peninsula)

The British Library Harley MS 7182, ff 58v-59 Wikicommons:

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PtolemyWorldMap.jpg>

In short, when it comes to map-making, its history does not fit the narrow conception of history as progress. In fact, none of the ordering binaries of modernity (science v. art,¹⁴ religious v. secular,¹⁵ Occident v. Orient¹⁶) enable us to grasp the empirical history of maps that had multiple traditions, and that were used simultaneously by theologians, court astrologists, imperial conquerors, travelling scholars, religious pilgrims and merchants of trade. The contrast being made here is a limited point of comparison. Star maps and land maps charted space in a way that allowed one to traverse space in time, as opposed to the theological approach whereby divine history—time—was mapped as the space of the world. In terms of the philosophy of history, the Christian depiction of space as time can be seen as proto-

¹³ 'Essential to an understanding of the Arabs' contribution to mapmaking is their approach to geodesy—the measurement of distances on the curved surface of the earth. Such distances can be measured either in linear units, such as the Arabic mile, or in angular units—longitude and latitude. To convert from one to the other one must know the number of miles per degree or, equivalently, the radius of the earth. In the Greek classical period, before the general use of latitude as an angular coordinate, the inhabited areas (the *oikoumene*) was [sic] divided into zones, or climates, according to the length of the longest day in the central part of the zone. Thus Ptolemy, in his *Almagest*, takes seven boundaries in steps of one-half hour, running from thirteen to sixteen hours. The practice continues in Islamic mathematical geography ... Simultaneous observations of a lunar eclipse in two places provide in principle a means of determining the difference of longitude between places.' Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, 'Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi,' J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), *The History of Cartography*, op. cit., vol. 2, Book 1, pp. 175-176. For Europe's renewed reception of Ptolemy, see Kathleen Biddick, 'The ABC of Ptolemy: Mapping the World with the Alphabet', in Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Eds.), *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1998, pp. 268-293.

¹⁴ Al-Idrisi wrote that his maps were both aesthetic and scientific, 'a true description and pleasing form'. Ahmad, in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), *History of Cartography*, op. cit., vol. 2, 1, p. 163.

¹⁵ In China, accuracy of astrological prediction was necessary for the religious legitimacy of imperial rule, and divination by star charts was based on the belief that events in heaven could be read as a reflection of those on earth. In the Islamic world, 'the concept of sacred direction (*qibla* in Arabic and all other languages of the Islamic world) in ritual, law, and religion, applying wherever the believer was, ... gave rise to the charts, maps, instruments and related cartographic methods', but this religious belief produced a 'dual nature of science', on the one hand 'folk science', advocated by legal scholars that was 'innocent of any calculation', and on the other 'mathematical science', derived mainly from translations of Greek sources, 'involving both theory and computation'. Ahmad, in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), *History of Cartography*, op. cit., vol. 2, 1, p. 189.

¹⁶ Ptolemaic science was fundamental to both Eastern and (after the twelfth century) Western traditions; O-maps centred on Jerusalem existed in Christian and Islamic forms.

Hegelian: the beginning of time is in the East, the 'Orient', and the end, the highest stage, is in the West.

Now to make this small point, why have I submitted you to all this cartographical data? It is to show you that the deeper one delves into empirical history (and this is generally true of historical research), the more the material evidence overthrows unilinear narratives of cultural developments belonging to particular civilisations. When empirical facts are not presumed from the start to belong to the histories of different political territories or religious spaces, the findings go against the conventions of history as a discipline. What I would like to propose is a different construction of history altogether—to cite the past, as one might sight the stars, bringing elements of it together within constellations of meaning that relate to our own time as the vanishing point.

2. Constellations

In August 1966 the US moon satellite Lunar Orbiter II transmitted the first picture of Earth shining over a lunar landscape. Two years later the first manned spacecraft, Apollo 8, orbited the moon and took this picture (figure 8) that was named *Earthrise*.



Figure 8 *Earthrise*, first image of the whole Earth taken by humans (Bill Anders on Apollo 8), 24 December 1968
http://www.archive.org/details/297755main_GPN-2001-000009_full

The timing—Christmas Eve—was not accidental. The scientists were politically pressured to meet that deadline so that the crew of Apollo 8, orbiting the moon ten times, could make a Christmas Eve television broadcast in which they read the first ten verses from the book of Genesis (from the King James version of the Biblical text). So much for the so-called secular West! (figure 9).¹⁷ Landing on the moon took place one year later. This was a triumph of

¹⁷ 'By television, people saw the earth from a distance of 313,800 kilometers. They saw the moon's surface from a distance of 96.5 kilometers and watched the earth rise over the lunar horizon ... Then followed on Christmas Eve one of mankind's most memorable moments. "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth." The voice was that of Anders, the words were from Genesis. "And the Earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and God said, 'Let there be light,' and God saw the light and that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness." Lovell continued, "And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters. And let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made firmament, and divided the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And evening and morning were the second day." Borman read on, "And God said, 'Let the waters

modernity as the technological dream of human progress.¹⁸ It was the apogee of American power. In a real sense, however, this culmination was also an ending.



Figure 9 US postage stamp, 1969

German historical philosopher Hans Blumenberg writes that the American moon landing initiated a transformation in human consciousness that ‘took place rapidly and almost silently.’¹⁹ It was the stream of transmitted pictures of the Earth that marked the world significance of this event—not the political staging, not the words, ‘That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind’, and not even the images of the first moonwalk (a visually pitiful, even dubious event), but rather the images sent back to us of Earth. Blumenberg writes: ‘Perhaps it would not have been necessary to send people to the Moon at all if what was to be brought back was, above all pictures.’²⁰ He called this event the end of the Copernican Age. Rather than looking out into space, human beings look back from it, and see themselves. Images of the Earth are returned to us in the cosmic mirror and, for the first time, humanity sees its whole body reflected. It is a body in pieces.

If, in Blumenberg’s sense, the event of seeing the planet Earth, a ‘cosmic exception’,²¹ marks an end to Copernican modernity, let us claim the right to authorise this lunar vision of Earth as the origin of a new era, one entered into in common by Earth-dwellers, and name it the Era of Globalisation.²²

under the Heavens be gathered together in one place. And the dry land appear.’ And it was so. And God called the dry land Earth. And the gathering together of the waters he called seas. And God saw that it was good.” Borman paused, and spoke more personally, “and from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas and God bless all of you—all of you on the good Earth”.’ Accessed June 24, 2011: <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/SP-4204/ch20-9.html>
The flight recording is available on audio: http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/image/apollo8_xmas.mov

¹⁸ The Soviets began the Cold War competition by sending the first human, Yuri Gagarin, into space in 1961.

¹⁹ Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World View*. Translated from the German by Robert N. Wallace, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987, p. 678.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 676.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 679.

²² That such a right is an act of sovereign power is the claim of Kathleen Davis in her recent book, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008. But if, as Fredric Jameson suggests, we cannot *not* periodise, then let us extend the ‘we’ to a communal (dare I say Communist?)



Figure 10 Liu Kuo-song, *The Sun is Coming*, 1991

Others were paying attention to this event of the birth of globalisation. One was the Taiwanese artist Liu Kuo-song. Liu was inspired by the Apollo 8 space mission to paint a series of images depicting the newly visible realities by fusing traditional Chinese brush techniques with those of contemporary hard-edged abstraction (figure 10). He was one of the co-founders of the Wuyue Huahui (Fifth Moon Group) a painting society of Taiwanese artists active in the sixties. Liu taught in Hong Kong in the seventies and eighties, and was a visiting artist and professor in the United States on several occasions. Invited to Beijing in the eighties, he has since become well known on the mainland. A major retrospective exhibition of his work was held at Beijing's National Palace Museum in 2007.

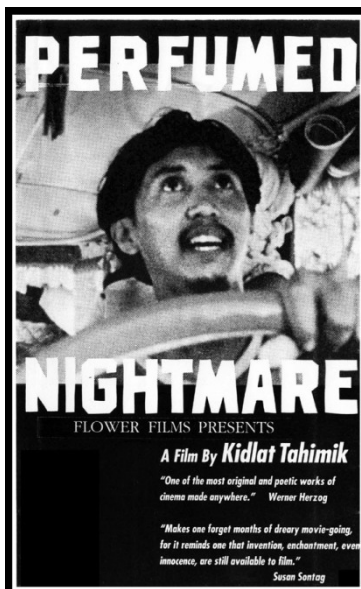


Figure 11 Poster for *Perfumed Nightmare*, film by Kidlat Tahimik, 1978

inclusiveness with this inaugural event. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, Verso, London and New York, 2002, p. 94.

A second artist, the filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik, was a young man at the time of the moon landing, living in a small village in the Philippines. He produced a film about that experience, which he describes as awakening from the 'cocoon of American Dreams.'²³ Entitled *Perfumed Nightmare* (1978), it received numerous international awards. In the film, Kidlat tells of his youthful enthusiasm when hearing reports from the Voice of America of Apollo 8 on his portable radio. It was the time of the US military occupation (and the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos), and Kidlat became the founder and head of the village fan club for Werner von Braun, the rocket scientist whose brilliance made the space voyages possible.

But that is not the whole Von Braun story. Before being recruited to the American space effort as its director, he worked as a scientist in his native Germany. Having joined the Nazi party in 1937, he became a German SS officer during the war. If we bring these three human beings into the same constellation under the sign of the 1968 lunar vision of Earth, we get an idea of just how fragmented the now globally visible body of humanity was (and, of course, still is). Hans Blumenberg, whose description of the moon landing is the climax of his lengthy philosophical history, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, was a student in Germany during the Hitler years. A Catholic, he was labelled a half-Jew by the Nazis, spent some time in concentration camps and was hidden by his future wife's family toward the end of the war. (He does not credit, or even mention Werner von Braun in his book).

Blumenberg was born in 1920, Liu in 1932, Tahimik in 1942. If we were categorising them according to nationality, chronological age or the genre of their work, they would never come into contact with each other. Blumenberg was a Western modernist, Liu merged modernism with traditional landscape painting, Tahimik's *Perfumed Nightmare* was singled out by Fredric Jameson as a Third-World example of post-modern cinema, coming out of a neo-colonised formation.²⁴ But rather than keeping them in place within existing mappings of the intellectual landscape, within a global constellation, these three figures are allowed to converge.

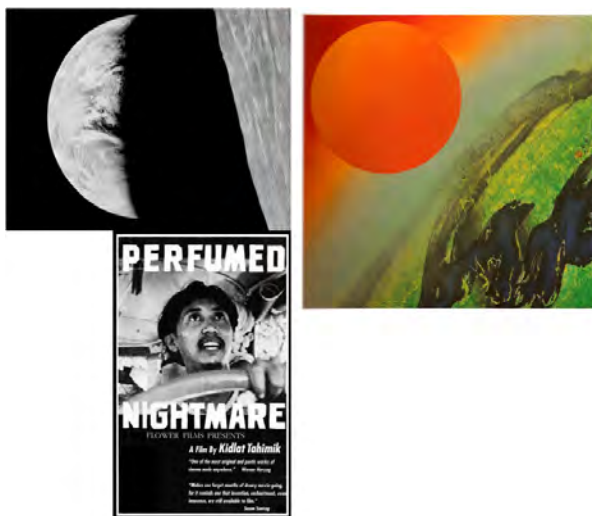


Figure 12

²³ <http://www.focus-philippines.de/kidlat.htm> Accessed October, 2010.

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992.

I will take you to another location.²⁵ The place is the Middle East. The time is 1964. In April of that year Malcolm X made the hajj to Mecca, an event that signalled his transformed understanding of politics, no longer a strategy of Black Nationalism and separatism, but one of transcending race through the universality of Islam. That same year, Sayyid Qutb's small book *Milestones* appeared. In opposition to both the religious and the government establishments in Egypt, it was a lay writer's call to action to recreate the Muslim world on strictly Qur'anic grounds. The book caused him to be re-arrested by Nasser's government and sent back to prison, accused of plotting to overthrow the state. His writing rescued for Islam the substance of Marx's critique of socio-economic injustice and demanded that society address the plight of the poor in religious terms, echoing the contemporaneous politics of liberation theology among Catholics and arguing that obedience to God superseded the sovereign claim of any earthly power.

It was the year, too, that leftist intellectual Ali Shariati returned to Iran after exile in France, where he had corresponded with, and published in Iranian translation, works by the Martinique-born Marxist psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, whose philosophy of liberation was foundational for post-colonial theory.²⁶ Arrested for a brief time by the Shah (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) of Iran, in the late sixties Shari'ati began his famous university lectures in Iran that articulated a truly leftist Islamic political position, drawing eclectically or *syncretically* (as opposed to Hegelian synthetics) from Marxist, Islamist, feminist, anti-imperialist and existentialist theoretical insights.²⁷

Two years later, in 1966, the Sudanese Muslim Mahmoud Taha published *The Second Message of Islam*, a reading of the Qur'an that interpreted the Meccan revelations to the Prophet as universal in their truth, in contrast with the socio-historical specificity of the Medina revelations that, he argued, reflected the particular needs of practical governance, given the customs and consciousness of the times—the Meccan revelations express radical racial and sexual equality.

Malcolm X was assassinated in the United States in 1965. The plot involved the Nation of Islam or the FBI, or both. In 1966 Sayyid Qutb, who became the intellectual inspiration for the Muslim Brotherhood (founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928), was executed for alleged conspiracy against the government. Ali Shari'ati died suddenly in Southampton, England, in 1978, just months before the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution (SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, remains suspect). In 1983 Mahmoud Taha was executed for his views by the Sudanese Islamist dictator Numeiri, who was backed at the time by the local chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood.

²⁵ This constellation is described in my essay, 'La Seconde fois comme farce... Pragmatisme historique et présent inactuel', Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek (Eds.), *L'Idée du communisme*, Lignes, Paris, 2010, pp. 93-113. English translation: *The Idea of Communism*, Verso, London, 2010.

²⁶ Fanon, like Qutb (but unlike Shariati) justified violence as a political act. He died of leukaemia in 1961.

²⁷ See the new biography, Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2009, reviewed by Nathan Coombs for *Culture Wars*, 'Ali Shari'ati: Between Marx and the Infinite', available at www.culturewars.org.uk (posted May 2008).



Figure 13

“You’re not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. Wrong is wrong no matter who does it or who says it” – Malcolm X

“The way is not to free the earth from Roman and Persian tyranny in order to replace it with Arab tyranny....” – Sayyid Qutb

“We have no right to know Angela [Davis, as the model of a liberated woman], the American girl in prison...The hope of all the free people of the world....” – Ali Shariati

“What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth....” –Franz Fanon

“Islam’s original precept is complete equality....” -- Mahmud Mohammed Taha

All of these historical actors (figure 13) were part of the sixties generation—a *global* generation, and this is the point. Seen from a global perspective, they can be brought together in the *same* constellation, despite their differences. Rather than inserting each of them individually into a separate national story or religious tradition, history is imagined in terms of simultaneities in space, instead of sequential developments in time. Such constellations mark the uncharted sky of a universal humanity that exists today as a body in pieces. What might the implications be for a global history of art?

3. Conceptualising the Global

‘Art teaches us to see things. It is training in observation.’
Walter Benjamin

A book published in 2006 under the title *Is Art History Global?* debated whether the study and teaching of art could, or should, be global in terms of its methods, its contents and its canon. James Elkins, the book's editor, questioned the extreme position of Mieke Bal, a founding figure in the field of visual studies, who was seemingly content to dissolve the disciplinary boundaries of art history completely. Elkins favoured, instead, turning to (Western) theory as the foundation of a global discipline of art. He finds exemplary the work of specific art historians: T. J. Clark, who grapples with Hegel; Michael Fried, who does the same with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein; Michael Camille with Derrida; and Didi-Huberman with Lacan. While supportive of non-Western art practices, Elkins concludes, 'I think it can be argued that there is no non-Western tradition of art history, if by that is meant a tradition with its own interpretive strategies and forms of argument.'²⁸ His evidence: Chinese specialists are not hired to teach art in Western universities on the basis of their ability to deploy indigenous—that is, specifically Chinese—historiographical methods.

The Bal-Elkins debate will not concern us here.²⁹ We take a detour around art history as a discipline, with its established, undeniably Western-centric traditions, and, sidestepping the interdisciplinary/non-disciplinary concerns and internecine struggles of the academy, push ahead by changing the question. Rather than considering the relevance of theory for art historians, we will look at how *looking at art*, studying art, making visual connections and cross-references among art works and artists, can help us *conceptualise the global* in a different way. Cultural production thus conceived as global is not world culture, wherein universality is understood as inclusion—expanding the existing art canons around abstract terms that imply universality, giving equal time to civilisations or cultural differences or arranging the art of civilisations in a chronology that culminates in a universalised, globalised modernity. Rather, global aesthetic imagination, the capacity to apprehend artistic production in a new way, emerges at a particular time, marked by certain common historical experiences.

These experiences have their origins not in the West, but in the post-colonial world. Acknowledging this shift in location requires a conceptual break *between* the modern and the global. 'The modern' is locked into a Western concept of time, one that itself is not at all modern, but dates back to the mediaeval T-O maps that I showed you and that conceives of space itself as a teleological progression, so that some parts of the globe are judged to be forward and others are backward, trailing behind. The teleological imprint on aesthetic and political modernity is encapsulated in the concept of the avant-garde. To be modern is to *be* avant-garde, at the cutting edge of historical time, economic development and political progress—all three. Western theorists have named the sequel to Western modernity 'post-modernity'—a feeble term if ever there was one. Post-modernity as a stage in a teleological sequence can take us nowhere. The West's self-understanding leads to a conceptual dead end.

²⁸ James Elkins (Ed.), *Is Art History Global?*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 9. This is the third volume in *The Art Seminar*, an ongoing, international programme held at the Stone Art Theory Institute under the auspices of the Chicago Institute of Art. This volume took as its starting point David Summers' book *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, Phaidon Press, New York, 2003. The rapid obsolescence of Summers' approach to questions of global art history (based on lectures given in the preceding decade) indicates how quickly the picture has changed. Several of the contributors to Elkins' volume make the point we make here, that the answer to these questions will not come from the West and its traditions.

²⁹ Elkins himself has modified his position. The next volume in the series, *Art and Globalization*, co-edited by Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska and Alice Kim (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2010) shows not only how assumptions change, but more, how the global art world has produced a counter-culture of resistance to its own hegemonic practices.

But globalisation is allowing the emergence of a new, planetary imaginary and the discovery of a new temporality, one that belongs, potentially, to all of humanity—that post-Copernican humanity which, coeval and diffuse, appears to us now as a body in pieces.

In the post-colonial world, as Elizabeth Giorgis has recently argued, aesthetic modernity was intrinsically bound up with national projects of modernisation. Even countries not colonised accepted the conceptual equation of modernity and West – which meant that they shared in the conscious attempt to mimic Western historical patterns of urban-industrial development and nation-state formation.³⁰ From this perspective, the only way to be modern as an artist was by Western standards that, while claiming universality, were in fact quite specific. Moreover, by those standards, non-Western artists would always be found lacking, *their* modernity always belated, derivative, mimetic. At best, artists were able to catch up with an avant-garde that had already arrived at a future to which the whole world was heading. As a consequence, post-colonial artists were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they were part of the national political project. They were relied upon to produce a separate, national identity as part of what it meant to arrive as a modernised nation state. On the other hand, that national cultural identity would need to be based on indigenous aesthetic traditions that were, by definition, *not* modern.

In the struggle to be both new and national, artists developed transnational strategies that rescued past traditions by subjecting them to a radical transformation. In the process—and this is the decisive point— they emerged from the post-colonial dilemma into new territory, a common ground belonging to no nation, no culture exclusively, opening up to a new, universally accessible (and in this new sense, *communist*) aesthetic. It is in this space, I am arguing, that an incipiently global consciousness emerges out of the modern and, in the art works themselves, comes into view.



Figure 14 Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle*, 1943

³⁰ Giorgis claims that whereas Ethiopian intellectuals insisted on the uniqueness of Ethiopia as a country never colonised, they were under the sway of colonial intellectual hegemony, accepting Western definitions of modernisation and modernity as universal. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism: A Subaltern Perspective*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2010, pp. 8-9.

A key figure in this development is the African-Chinese-Cuban artist Wifredo Lam. Only as an international figure who spent years in Spain and France and was befriended and promoted by Picasso, André Breton, and others, did Lam come back to Cuba with a thoroughly modernist sensitivity to the African heritage that he sought to rescue from two fates. One was its dehistoricised appropriation by European modernists; the other was its historical erasure from Cuban national identity.³¹ The painting *The Jungle* (figure 14) that Lam produced in 1944 after his return to Cuba was both figural and abstract, both nationally specific to Cuba and anticipatory of a new, transnational consciousness of *Négritude*.³²



Figure 15 Skunder Boghossian, *Night Flight of Dread and Delight (Juju's Flight of Terror and Delight (Nourishers Series)*, 1963

There are striking parallels between this strategy and that taken by the Ethiopian artist Skunder Boghossian (figure 15). Within Western histories of art, if Boghossian is considered at all (which is rarely), it is as a late arrival to the Surrealist tradition, as dreamlike and primitive—in short, *ahistorical*. But that was not Boghossian's intent. 'I am aware that I am a witness to my time, other times. I am just time itself', Boghossian stated, and the time of the modern for him meant developing imagery that, as Giorgis, writes, presents a 'critical account of the political culture of the colonial and post-colonial eras', involving a 'conceptually complex' dialogue between nationalism and transnationalism and anticipating the kind of 'hybridisation' that has been claimed by post-modernism, exhibiting the latter's anti-essentialist qualities *before* the metropolitan West.³³

³¹ This was a widespread dilemma, experienced between the world wars in New York's Harlem Renaissance by Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Alain Locke and others. '[T]he challenge ... was to establish their identity in an era when they were expected to draw on their African heritage but when that heritage had already been appropriated, decontextualized, and "essentialized" in the service of modernism'. Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2002, p. 218. On Locke's non-essentialising, universally humanising conception of the New Negro artist, see Michelle René Smith, *Alain Locke: Culture and the Plurality of Black Life*, PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2009.

³² The importance of Négritude in the post-colonial context cannot be overestimated, its African identity leading dialectically to the emergence of a global subjectivity, tying Afro-American artists to Caribbean theorists (Frantz Fanon), to the Algerian anti-colonial movement, and beyond.

³³ Cited in Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., p. 75.

Like Lam, Boghossian spent time in Paris, an experience that was less a pilgrimage to the European centre for colonial artists than a meeting place with others in their situation.³⁴ Boghossian recalled seeing drawings by Wifredo Lam in a Paris gallery window as he was passing by, 'that actually gave me a bodily shock'.³⁵ It was, again, the all-important decade of the sixties, when Frantz Fanon was also in Paris and Boghossian's circle included the African Martinique-born philosopher Aimé Césaire and the Senegalese Muslim-born historian Cheikh Anta Diop, who carved out transnational political positions that condemned French colonialism and existing African regimes, both at once.³⁶ Boghossian's 1969 painting, *Juju's Wedding*, is a fusion of African animism and Christian divinity, idols and icons, showing the influence of traditional Ethiopian magic scrolls that Giorgis compares with the influence on Lam of the Afro-Cuban cult of Santería.³⁷



Figure 16 Wifredo Lam, *Totem*, 1968

³⁴ Lam returned to Paris in the fifties, settled in Albisola, Italy, while still spending time in Havana, New York and Paris.

³⁵ Cited in Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit. p. 78.

³⁶ As Giorgis notes, echoing Walter Benjamin, this doubly problematic contemporary reality, not some primitive past, was the collective dream out of which Africa needed to a historical awakening. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., p. 83. Boghossian returned to Ethiopia to teach at the Fine Art School for three years in the late sixties, leaving a lasting impression on young Ethiopian artists before moving to the United States, where he was active in the civil rights movement. He joined Howard University in 1972 as a colleague of Jeff Donaldson, initiator in 1968 of the Afri-Cobra movement of black visual art and black power. Like Lam, multinational experiences were reflected in his art, defying any simple cultural categorisation. Lam compared himself to a Trojan horse, smuggling elements of Santería and Lucumí into European modernism. See Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982*, op. cit., p. 223. Boghossian 'acknowledged the ruptures and discontinuities which constituted precisely his uniqueness. See Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., p. 113.

³⁷ Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., p. 108. 'Influence' here should be understood as a contemporary aesthetic and critical interest, rather than a desire literally to return to the past. Wifredo Lam delighted in the fact that that the Afro-Cuban symbology in his work could 'disturb the dreams of the exploiters' while insisting, 'I have never created my images according to a symbolic tradition, but always on the basis of poetic excitation'. Cited in Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982*, op. cit., p. 217.



Figure 17 Skunder Boghossian, *Ju-ju's Wedding*, 1969

Giorgis describes this simultaneity of history and modernity as a Benjaminian sense of time, in which 'the meaning of the past is realized in the present.'³⁸ This particular use of the past in order to *be* modern, whereby the aesthetic power of historical objects is released within a contemporary force-field that is crisscrossed by multiple currents of politics and culture, produces a non-sequential temporality and is exemplary of the new, global imagination. Within this same historical constellation is Sadequain, who became the founding figure of Pakistani national art.³⁹



Figure 18 Sadequain, *The Red Couple*, 1960s

³⁸ Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., pp. 83-86. Giorgis makes us realise that if Boghossian's images were dreamlike, if they could be described as 'spiritual', then it is in Benjamin's sense, as an *historical* image, and not one that is universal and unchanging (Carl Gustav Jung), or individual and ontological (Jacques Lacan). She points out that the rescue of tradition in Boghossian's paintings is in opposition to its treatment by Western art historians, who classify early Ethiopian Christian art within the Byzantine world (whereas Africanists ignore this early Christian-identified art). Hitherto, the histories of Ethiopian art have been written by Europeans most of whom did not know Amharic and therefore could not carry out original historical research. The standard text, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting* by Stanislas Chojnacki, classifies the paintings into two periods: 'mediaeval' and Gonderane. Giorgis criticises 'the complete omission by European scholars of transcultural influences from the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda, which Boghossian easily fused into many of his works, and which one can easily identify in Ethiopian Christian traditional paintings and architectural forms'. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁹ Much of my material on Sadequain Naqqash (1930-1987) stems from the recent book by Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia (Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2010.

Like Lam and like Boghossian, Sadequain became nationally famous only after a sojourn in Paris (1961-1967) and some degree of international success. Like Lam and like Boghossian, he appropriated elements of modernity for very different purposes than artists of the West. The Parisian exhibitions of modernist painters were his *musée de l'homme*—a toolbox of raw materials, and with this toolbox he returned home to become the leading artist of the newly created Muslim nation of Pakistan.

Called upon by the Pakistani government in the sixties to construct murals in public buildings, Sadequain painted historical panoramas that matched in their monumental sweep the Mexican murals of David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera.⁴⁰ His relation to the nation-building project was complicated by the intertwining of modernity with the national hegemony of Islam as the form of cultural identity.⁴¹ Surprisingly, it was not in his murals but in his most personal, most Parisian paintings that references to Islam were decisive.

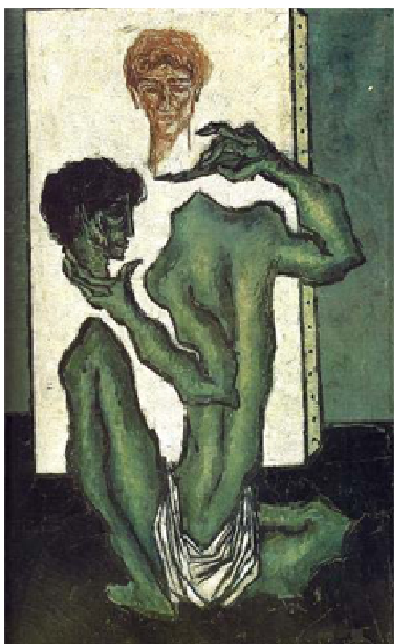


Figure 19 Sadequain: the artist in his studio

⁴⁰ Siqueiros and Rivera belong to an earlier generation of artists who went to Paris and returned home to become nationally identified artists. Sadequain's inspiration was Persian thinker Muhammad Iqbal (some of whose poems he illustrated). Iqbal, born in British India, studied in Britain and Germany (where he read Nietzsche with appreciation), and after the founding of Pakistan became the country's most nationally revered poet. Sadequain's murals depicted the histories of multiple civilisations. They included *Treasures of Time* (State Bank of Pakistan), depicting the ascent of human intellectual life from Plato and Euclid to al-Ghazzali and Rumi, from Shakespeare to Goethe and Marx, and from Confucius to Iqbal and Einstein; *Saga of Labor* at the Mangla Dam project (built in the sixties as the twelfth largest dam in the world); and a series of ceiling murals at the Lahore Museum, described thematically as man struggling to overcome the infinitude of space. In the eighties he painted several murals in India, including 99 calligraphic panels of *Asma-e-Husna* (the beautiful names of God) at the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies at Delhi (1971-1972). He completed a mural for the power station in Abu Dhabi in 1980.

⁴¹ This was a difference between Sadequain and the Mexican muralists, whose point of departure for transnational subject matter was Marxist in inspiration. Both had an audience with Stalin, arranged by Mayakovskii, in 1928; travelling home together, they quarrelled divisively over Trotsky, whom Rivera supported. Sadequain, too, meant his work for 'the people', including Islamic elements precisely for that reason. Dadi notes that the artist exhibited his paintings of Qur'anic verses on kerbs and public spaces in an industrial area in Karachi 'with the intent that they would be viewed by poor laborers'. Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, p. 175.

In the sixties he produced a series of self-portraits of the artist in his studio that clearly echo the work of Picasso (figure 18), but with the not so minor difference that the artist is depicted with his head in his hand—an intentional self-reference to the seventeenth-century Sufi mystic Sarmand, who wandered about naked and wrote transgressive verses that got him in trouble with the political authorities. Sarmand was beheaded in 1661 under the charge of heresy.

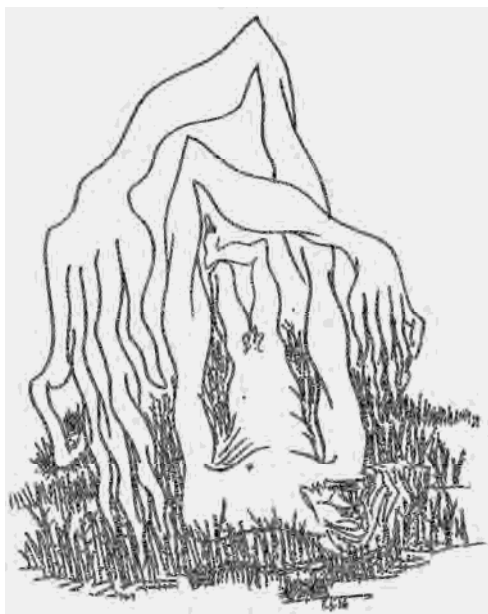


Figure 20 Sadequain, *Self-Portrait*, from the booklet, *Sadequain: Sketches and Drawings*, 1966

Figure 20 is Sadequain's self-portrait, naked, with sheltering hands that in their branch-like expanse, spell out the name Allah. Arabic calligraphy, that may appear to be non-representational abstraction in Western eyes, is filled with historical, cultural *and* political content for those who are able to read it.⁴² The artist accomplished a revival of the art of Arabic calligraphy with a distinctly modernist sensibility. Its appearance in his *Self-Portrait* is vegetative rather than textual, setting up a circuit of meaning that moves between nature and history mediated by the artist's own subjectivity.⁴³ Iftikhar Dadi has called such uses of hand writing in art 'calligraphic modernism', characterised by the affective, gestural communication of the brushstroke itself, the emotive quality of which can be appreciated despite linguistic obscurity.⁴⁴ At the same time, in other parts of the Islamic world artists were using the traditions of calligraphy to negotiate the post-colonial tensions between national belonging

⁴² Dadi writes that while Sadequain never adopted an official ideology (nationalist, Islamist, or Communist), the political strength of his work lay in the fact that his 'singular persona continued to serve as a reminder of the personal, sexual, and Sufistic surplus that could not be contained in [General] Zia's coercive and austere Islamization project'. Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴³ He claimed to have 'found the essence' of calligraphy in the late fifties in the silhouette form of cactus plants growing in Pakistan's seaside landscape: 'Everything that I have painted since then—a city like Rawalpindi, buildings, a forest, a boat, a table or a chair, a man, a mother and child, or a woman—has been based on calligraphy, which in itself issues from the structure of the cactus'. Cited in Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, op. cit., p. 150. The mural paintings have cactus-like forms in the landscape and in the drapes of clothing. Illustrations of Persian poems, including his own, integrate textual calligraphy directly.

⁴⁴ Iftikhar Dadi, 'Ibrahim El Salahi and Calligraphic Modernism in a Comparative Perspective', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109, 3, 2010, pp. 555-576. As a modernist method, it allows us to compare the work of various artists from multiple nations and cultural sites, from Sadequain in Pakistan to Franz Klein in New York City. See also Iftikhar Dadi, 'Sadequain and Calligraphic Modernism', Chapter 3 of *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, op. cit., pp. 134-176.

and a new consciousness that was, in Dadi's words, 'larger than the iconography of any single nation state.'⁴⁵



Fig. 21 Sadequain, illustration, 1960s, from *Rubiyat-e-Sadequain Kuliyyat*, published in 2010



Fig. 22 Madiha Umar, Baghdad, n. d.

A decade before Sadequain, the Syrian born artist Madiha Umar explored the formal elements of Arabic calligraphy. 'Modern' in Umar's work is the way she breaks apart the letters into their visual components, a destruction of literate-ness that has been described as working to 'free the Arabic letters from its bondage'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, op. cit., p. 161. Artists working 'not collaboratively or possibly without even knowing much about each other's work' were creating through calligraphy 'an aesthetic of Muslim cross-national modernism' that 'bears some correspondences' with the transnational Black aesthetic of Negritude.

⁴⁶ The first woman to receive a scholarship for international study from the Iraqi government in the thirties, she lived in Europe and the United States before returning to Iraq, and was in dialogue with Western art historians (Richard Ettinghausen, for instance) on the significance of calligraphy for Islamic aesthetics more generally. See Faye Oweis, *Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists*, Greenwood, Westport, Connecticut, 2007, p. 256. Dadi also acknowledges Umar as a forerunner, but would question calligraphy's role as the determining figure in a uniquely Islamic history of art, rather than seeing the emergence of Islamic calligraphic as a distinctly modernist practice, allowing global comparisons to other artists of the time. Compare with Giorgis' critique of Ethiopian historians of art, above, footnote 37.



Figure 23 Ibrahim Mohammed El -Salahi (Sudan), *The Last Sound*, 1964

By the sixties, calligraphic modernism as a practice that de-emphasised literal meaning became widespread, allowing artists to communicate to each other across national and linguistic divides. The Sudanese artist El -Salahi created an interplay between calligraphy and figuration, combining African motifs with calligraphic elements, and celestial bodies with animate forms in the 1964 painting *The Last Sound* (figure 23). While the work's title refers to a specific Islamic practice of reciting prayers for the dead and dying to accompany the soul's passing from the corporeal to the celestial, it is 'manifestly modern' in its dynamic integration of forms.⁴⁷ El-Salahi's experimental practices, rejected in the salon culture of post-colonial Sudan, engaged with 'a more democratic and vernacular visual culture'.⁴⁸

It was El -Salahi's use of Arabic calligraphy that inspired the Ethiopian artist Boghossian (when the two were in Paris) to create his *Feedel Series*, which incorporated the forms of Amharic letters (the script of the Ethiopian Christian church), intentionally merging the oppositional moments of abstraction and realism, the sacred and the profane.⁴⁹ In Iraq, and Iran as well, the Arab cosmopolitanism of 'calligraphic modernism' was, writes Dadi, a progressive aspect of the return of artists to tradition: 'the abstract/calligraphic mode pries open the boundaries of the nationalist frame', cutting 'across temporality and geography, thereby propelling this body of work into the present'.⁵⁰

Interestingly, a parallel revival of calligraphy also took place in East Asia in the sixties.

⁴⁷ Iftikhar Dadi, 'Ibrahim El Salahi and Calligraphic Modernism', op. cit., pp. 555-556. El Salahi was educated at London's Slade School of Fine Art in the fifties; in the sixties he travelled in West Africa, Europe, Mexico, and (with extended fellowships) in the United States.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 563. Dadi writes, 'As [El-Salahi] describes it, this transformation demanded breaking open the Arabic letter and exploring the new aesthetic universe that emerged from the fragments and the interstices'.

⁴⁹ Boghossian 'started working on calligraphy in Paris, heavily influenced by Ibrahim El-Salahi of Sudan, who at the time was working on Arabic calligraphy. Boghossian joked that an Ethiopian always wanted abstraction with a bit of realism, and is the reason why he started creating the *Feedel Series*'. Elizabeth Giorgis, *Ethiopian Modernism*, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

⁵⁰ Iftikhar Dadi, 'Ibrahim El Salahi and Calligraphic Modernism', op. cit., abstract and p. 567.



Figure 24: Liu Guosong, *Which is Earth?*, No. 9, 1969

The *Moon Series* by Liu Guosong, which we have already considered, evinced a similar technique (figure 24), combining the brush techniques of traditional landscape painting with the cosmopolitan potential of calligraphy. Liu wrote that he discovered abstraction precisely within the brushstroke of traditional Chinese landscape painting that often incorporated calligraphic forms.⁵¹ China, it should be noted, was a politically fractured landscape, including the Maoist People's Republic of China, the British colony of Hong Kong, and the nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan—areas whose residents speak such different dialects that only *through* writing is communication possible. Yet for Liu as well, the familiar calligraphic shapes, released from literal meaning, became visual forms that have affinities with the natural world. His description of the process echoes the motivations of Boghossian, Sadequain and El-Salahi, treating the past, as a modern painter, in order to break away from it. In 1965 he wrote, 'We are neither ancient Chinese nor modern Westerners. If copying ancient Chinese paintings is forgery, so is producing modern Western paintings'. His goal was to achieve a new kind of painting altogether: "'Chinese" and "modern" are the two blades of the sword which will slash the Westernized and traditionalist schools alike.'⁵² In all of these examples of calligraphic modernism, language—that element in social life which is experienced as most exclusionary—leaves textual rootedness and even semantic legibility, and allows artists to participate globally in the creation of something new.

There is another shared aspect of the new global aesthetic that deserves comment, the fact that in the various instances we have been considering (from orbiting the moon to post-colonial art), the reproduced image has been fundamental in the emergence of a global sensibility. Temporal simultaneity and spatial coexistence on a global scale are 'experienced' only virtually, mediated by the image. For post-colonial art, the importance of the reproduced

⁵¹ David Clarke, 'Abstraction and Modern Chinese Art', Kobena Mercer *et al.* (Eds.), *Discrepant Abstraction*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006, p. 80.

⁵² *Ibid.*

image is striking. While the artists we have been considering spent a significant period of time training and working in the West, their first exposure to modernism was mediated. Wifredo Lam first became familiar with the work of Picasso and Matisse through magazines brought back from Paris by friends.⁵³ Dadi writes that ‘Sadequain had formed his initial impressions of European modern art from magazine reproductions’, a decontextualisation that allowed for ‘mistranslation’ of the European modernist works, freeing them ‘to be perceived in the Pakistani context without their ideological baggage’.⁵⁴

Again and again we find documentation of this fact.⁵⁵ The technologies of reproduction—camera and film, illustrated magazine and televised broadcast—allow the image to meet the beholder halfway (to paraphrase Walter Benjamin⁵⁶). And far from being a problem for artists, far from degrading artistic production through a loss of aura, these widely dispersed images decreased the authority of the metropole over the post-colonial artist, for whom modernist techniques, ripped out of their original contexts, became useful tools within transnational networks producing intercultural solidarities. The anti-auratic appropriation of the image via technological reproductions is foundational for a global aesthetics.



Figure 25: Sadequain, *Martin Luther King* (Christ series), 1960s

Not only artistic but also political experiences circulated through images, bringing issues of social justice to world visibility in a global public sphere. Since the sixties, no political issue has been merely national (figure 25), and yet international solutions have remained elusive. Post-

⁵³ Lowery Stokes Sims, ‘The Post-modern modernism of Wifredo Lam’, Kobena Mercer (Ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005, p. 89.

⁵⁴ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, op. cit., pp. 150 and 153.

⁵⁵ Mitter, writing on Indian modernism, notes, ‘From the 1920s onwards, as modernist “technologies” like cubism came into India, and were adopted, we need to examine how art reproductions in books and magazines contributed to the reinterpretation of cubism that was specific to the Indian context ... [T]he main sources used by colonial artists were reproductions ...’. Partha Mitter, ‘Reflections on Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: An Interview’, in Kobena Mercer (Ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, op. cit., p. 26. Pakistan-born London artist Rashid Areen recalls being introduced to modern art in Karachi ‘through the information we used to get in the magazine and books imported from the West ...’, *Ibid.*, p. 162. Perhaps, echoing Blumenberg (see above), it would not have been necessary to send artists to Paris after all if what was to be brought back was, above all, images!

⁵⁶ ‘Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway’. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt (Ed.), translated from the German by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p. 220.

colonial societies learned during the Cold War that US foreign policy all too often sacrificed democratic ideals for national self-interest. At the same time, post-colonial movements attracted to Marxism became disillusioned by the Soviet Union's equally self-interested policy of backing brutal dictatorial regimes.

All of the artists we have been considering experienced the political ambiguities that the Cold-War rhetoric of absolute differences disavowed. None of them compromised their creative independence to back a particular political regime; none of them followed the whims of the art market; all of them risked the existential security of a simple national or cultural identity as a consequence. But the political significance of this art *for us* is not limited to the intention of the artists. By rescuing local traditions as a way of being global, they anticipated the political challenges of our time.

Conclusion

To return to the question is art history global?, the answer calls for remapping time as well as space, and questioning the most basic categories of our historical narratives—ones that privilege the sorting out of aesthetic production by national, civilisational or cultural identities. It demands that we question models of explanation based on causal influence and that define creativity in terms of an authentic original, disseminated mimetically in the form of degraded copies. From a global perspective, what is primitive about the modern is precisely the opposite of the mythic or the archaic. 'Primitive' here is fully historical: it means originary, the first stage, describing *Urforms* of the global present and possibilities of a time to come.⁵⁷ What is called for is nothing short of a transformation of scholarship, its empirics, its theories, but also, and perhaps most significantly, the social relations of art as property (of the artist-creator, or the culture/nation/ethnicity to which s/he 'belongs') that underlie both theoretical conceptualisations and the empirical research that sustains them.

Elkins' comment regarding Western universities not hiring Chinese-trained historians of art is valid within the given frameworks of knowledge. But if the established disciplines cling to their foundational narratives that lead into the cul-de-sac of postmodernism, then Western universities will find themselves irrelevant and no self-respecting intellectual will want to teach at them. But the alternative is not to get on the bandwagon of art's present globalisation—commercial markets, museums and biennials as currently arranged. No rupture with the past would justify totally jettisoning the history of art as just too much excess baggage, in favour of a continuous contemporaneity that flatters the already amnesia-prone profession, and lulls artists, critics and art promoters into believing that their blissful ignorance is liberation. We need history, now more than ever, but it will involve a transnational expropriation of the cultural heritage, a rescue of history in the communist mode.

Today we hold the world in our hands, but only virtually. Modernity's hoped-for 'family of man' remains a body in pieces. The creative forces of the present explode the structures of history, scattering fragments of the past forward into unanticipated locations. These fragments

⁵⁷ *Urform* (primordial) means primitive in this sense. The term has a scientific correlate: the 'primitive' streak is the beginning of life: 'a faint white trace at the uppermost end of the germinal area, formed by an aggregation of cells, and constituting the first indication of the development of the blastoderm'. See the *American Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, p. 702.

have multiple affinities that cannot be known beforehand, which is a good thing. Their juxtaposition in the present produces unforeseen constellations, providing new readings of the past as a way of charting a different future. Entering multiple constellations, they shine the brighter for it.⁵⁸

In the early twenties, with the rise of European modernity, Georg Lukács lamented the fact that modern society had lost every image of the whole. Influenced by Hegel, he believed that the totality of the past could only be grasped as a sequence of stages that led all of humanity from feudalism to capitalism and beyond. *This* trajectory of history has indeed come to an end. But the history of humanity, far from over, may be just at the beginning.

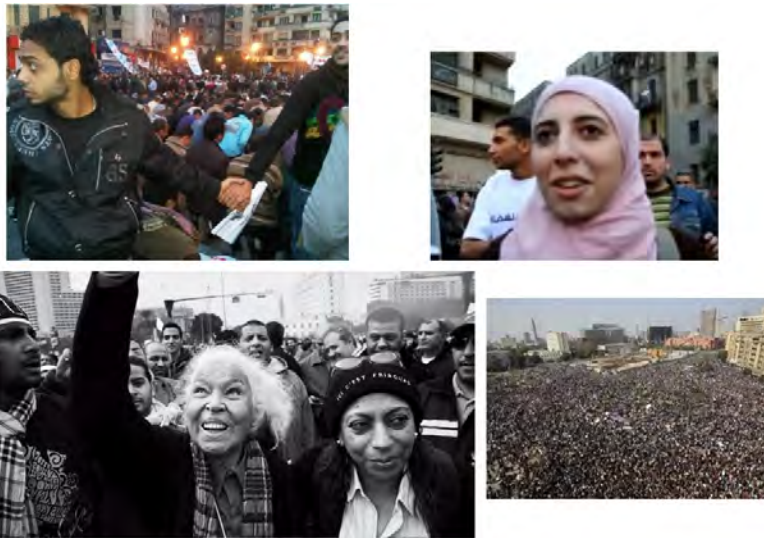


Figure 26 Tahrir Square, Cairo, spring 2011

‘East Asia cultures critique’

Xudong Zhang⁵⁹

⁵⁸ If the reader detects in this conclusion a theological inflection after all, I admit to having in mind Walter Benjamin’s description of utopia, in the context of his philosophy of history: ‘[N]othing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past —which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments’. Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, *Illuminations*, p. 254.

⁵⁹ CIMAM has not been authorised to publish the transcription of Xudong Zhang’s oral presentation

SESSION II: – EAST AND WEST, THE MUSEUM AS A “DIPOSITIF”

Beyond the Museums as a Dispositif: Counter-practices from the South

Rustom Bharucha

This session has been formulated by the organisers of this conference under the sign of the *dispositif*—a technical term which I will be interpreting in a predominantly Foucauldian register as context-specific configurations of power, at once implicit and explicit, which control and conceal the internal contradictions of institutions and discourses. The institution in question here is the museum in the cultures of the South.

At an empirical level, it could be argued that the *dispositif* is too heavy and ‘disciplined’ a category to account for museums within the chaos of countries like India, where, arguably, museums don’t matter. Certainly, they are not part of our public discourse, which tends to be heavily politicised for almost all our post-colonial cultural and social institutions. While institutes of science, technology and management, Bollywood and IT industries and the burgeoning art market of contemporary India have been steadily globalised in recent years, the museum remains a peculiarly anachronistic, if not regressive phenomenon. Arguably, it has yet to be decolonised, as it remains neglected, poorly funded and almost fossilised within a colonial time warp.

While there is much to regret about this situation, it also leaves us relatively free to imagine museums differently outside a Western episteme. What are the alternative epistemologies of museums that we can put on the global agenda, instead of submitting to the tedious task of ‘catching up with the West’? How can we call attention to the multiple pasts of India that are still seethingly alive in the cultures of everyday life, mutating and taking on new forms through disjunctive temporalities which challenge the very idea of museumisation?

With these questions in mind, I made my first museological intervention at a conference on the ‘new Asian Museum’ in Vancouver, where I speculated somewhat provocatively: ‘Can a museum erase itself?’⁶⁰ What was meant to be metaphorical was taken too literally by the predominantly East Asian diasporic spectators, one of whom raised an appropriately indignant rejoinder: ‘Why should we want the museum to be erased when we have yet to enter its premises and claim it as our own?’ Without undermining the legitimacy of post-colonial entitlement, my position—post-colonial in its own right—was less concerned with claiming or destabilising established structures, and more drawn to the possibilities of creating museums through new phenomenologies.

How, indeed, can we *embody* museums of our own making and experience, how can we *carry* them with us, in a nomadic, corporeal, and deterritorialised framework? I had in mind the work of my friend Judy Freya Sibayan from the Philippines, who has wandered through all kinds of spaces with her Scapular Gallery Nomad located in a pouch on her body. Furthermore,

⁶⁰ Rustom Bharucha, ‘Beyond the Box: Problematizing the New Asian Museum,’ *Third Text*, No. 52, Autumn 2000.

how do we call attention to those unconscious acts of musealisation that remain unnamed in the random, yet choreographed movements of everyday life?

In short, I was interested in relating museums to *movement*, not just to the phenomenology of movement but also to actual social and political movements which have given birth to several instances of a grassroots museology. The District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, is one such instance that emerged out of a brutal and painful history of displacement. Between 1966 and 1982 around 60,000 inhabitants of a vibrant, multiracial, working-class and cosmopolitan locality called District Six were forcibly evicted from their homes by the apartheid authorities and resettled under the *dispositifs* of a segregationist machinery. Not only were the District Sixers displaced, but the homes, shops, and neighbourhoods that constituted their collective *habitus* were demolished and razed to the ground. Out of this rubble the Hands Off District Six movement was born, and it was out of the movement that the idea of a museum by non-museum activists began to take shape.⁶¹

Given its political genesis, this museum was not likely to be simply a site of nostalgia; it also became the meeting ground for the District Six Beneficiary Trust which was entrusted to fight the battle of land restitution through intricate legalities. The museum and the trust shared common ground through a symbiotic relationship. When I first encountered the museum, I was moved by the dynamics of this relationship, and also by the extraordinary tenderness with which the museum had been nurtured and curated with the hand-drawn, floor-map of District Six, the street signs and the memorabilia evoking a multitude of homes away from home. I realised then that perhaps the strongest way of resisting the *dispositifs* of mechanised systems like apartheid is through acts of collective belonging and love. Tenderness is not a feel-good cop-out; it is a non-violent, curatorial strategy in which rage and pain can be camouflaged and consolidated.

A few years after this first encounter, I was invited by the District Six Museum to participate in its very upbeat Hands On District Six conference. Here it became clear that the museum was attempting to redefine its *raison d'être* within the politics of a newly constituted democratic South Africa where the hybrid, predominantly 'coloured', identities constituting District Six work against the purities of 'black' and 'white.' By now it was clear that the museum had become a success story, a model for community museums worldwide, but the District Six Beneficiary Trust had still a long way to go before land restitution could become a reality. To date, only twenty-four families have been able to return to District Six, with thousands still waiting to return. Many others, however, have chosen not to return. What indeed does it mean to return—not just at a psychological level but, more pragmatically, in legal terms? Who is entitled to qualify as an 'ex-resident' or as a 'descendant' of an ex-resident? Does a 'tenant' have the same rights as an 'owner' of District Six property? Burdened by such legal nitpicking, the museum and the trust are no longer connected through a common movement—the museum has museumised itself, while the trust has become entangled in a quagmire of bureaucratic regulations and its own organisational limitations.

⁶¹ For a broader context on the District Six Museum see my essay 'The Limits of the Beyond: Contemporary Art Practice, Intervention and Collaboration in Public Spaces,' *Third Text*, Vol. 21, No. 4, July 2007.

In this impasse faced by many institutions (and foundations) attempting to bridge the incommensurable rhetoric, modalities and strategies of 'culture' and 'development,' how do we animate and keep track of the conjunction 'and'? What mediations and intermediary actions are needed to prevent the schisms of cultural production and activism from growing? One thing is clear: if, at an earlier point, tenderness provided an appropriate strategy for rage in the District Six Museum, now it would seem to me that rage needs to be reconstituted in a more direct curatorial idiom, divested of sentiments and memories. Perhaps now is the time to stop drawing a vicarious strength of 'living together' in District Six, and forge instead a new aesthetics and politics of 'fighting together.' To fight on common ground could be the only way for District Sixers to reignite their *raison d'être*.

Let me shift my attention now to another museum project in which I have been directly involved in India—Arna-Jharna: The Desert Museum of Rajasthan. The words *arna* and *jharna* literally mean 'forest spring,' which is the name of the area where the museum is located in the rural hinterland of Jodhpur City. Envisioned by an extraordinary man called Komal Kothari, who was neither a museologist nor an activist, the conceptual ground of the museum was nurtured over his fifty-year interaction with diverse communities living in the desert. In the course of my conversations with him, which culminated in a book⁶², he talked about land, water, irrigation, livestock, oral epics, shrines, trances, musical traditions and puppetry, among other interrelated knowledge systems. He never once talked about museums but significantly, once the book was finished, he began to express the need for an ethnographic museum. Sadly, he did not live to see it fully realised, but his vision and principles furnished the foundations for the Arna-Jharna Museum of today.

When he first took me to the site of Arna-Jharna I saw neither a forest nor a spring. Instead, I saw a wasteland, or more precisely, an enormous dumping ground of animal carcasses. In the skeletal remains of the animals I remember seeing their bones wedged with undigested packets of plastic—a loathsome sight. Kothari urged me to look beyond the plastic: 'Are the horns and hooves of the animals intact?' A bizarre question at one level but, as he explained, bones are worth a lot of money, used as they are in the glue and pharmaceutical industries. If bones have economic value—as indeed, the global trade in body parts shows no signs of declining—they need to be collected. The word 'collection' has an obvious resonance in the world of museology, only here we are not collecting carpets or silks or handicrafts. Bone collecting demands its own set of tools for which skills are needed to sever the bone from the putrefying mass of animal remains.

One can be sure that in a country like India, this dehumanising task will be delegated to the lowest of low caste communities, the untouchables, now politicised as *dalits*. Although he was not a *dalit* activist, Kothari was keenly aware of the social functions provided by scavengers, sweepers and bone collectors—functions which remain largely unacknowledged in Indian society at large, if not treated with contempt. Yet more than other activists, Kothari was aware that these bone collectors are also singers and musicians, whose epic songs and narratives

⁶² Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan -- An Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003.

have rarely been recorded. Indeed, it would have been possible for Kothari to begin the museum with a focus on the songs of the subaltern, which could have been curated along with the 130 folk musical instruments in his collection. However (and herein lies what might be described as the *dispositif* inherent in the conceptual beginnings of any institution), Kothari decided that the museum would begin with the most inconspicuous of household objects: the broom.⁶³

Today, the Arna-Jharna Museum could be described as a Broom Museum because we have around 200 brooms from Rajasthan alone in our collection. But the collection is not the issue—the broom, for us, is not just an object but a repository of relationships. Through the broom we have been alerted at an ecological level to the subtle and fecund biodiversity of the desert. The broom has also alerted us to indigenous modes of production, since almost all brooms in India (and there are millions of brooms produced every single year) continue to be made by hand. Inevitably, this pre-industrial labour in what is now valorised as India's emergence in the global economy, has brought us into close contact with diverse broom-making communities, their poverty, struggle for livelihood, beliefs and customs surrounding the broom, stigmatisation through caste and the possibilities of 'social development.'

Clearly, this is a wide spectrum of interrelated contexts, tendencies and dispositions, in which a clash of different *dispositifs* of power is almost inevitable. As I mentioned earlier in the context of the District Six Museum, the agencies and specific strategies of museology and development are not easily reconciled even within the practice of any institution. Perhaps, the most challenging aspect of my work at Arna-Jharna as a Project Director had to do with negotiating the complexities of ownership and cultural property. To whom does a museum of the desert belong? Who owns brooms once they are curated, however minimally, and thereby endowed with cultural capital?

In my experience, the most tenacious *dispositif* was presented through the hegemony of family that prevails in the predominantly feudal social context of Rajasthan. In this context, the 'family' operating through the guise of a 'trust' or 'charitable institution' becomes the *de facto* owner of the museum. The almost non-negotiable entitlement of family to cultural patrimony through assumed rights of inheritance makes it more powerful than the more generalised *dispositifs* of caste and community, which come with their own pressures and agendas.

To complicate the problems of community, let me insert into the discussion some reference to the community museum movement in Oaxaca, Mexico. From the practitioner-scholar and advocate of this movement Teresa Morales, who visited us in Arna-Jharna, we learnt how museums in Oaxaca are not just made in the name of community; they are conceptualised, curated, administered and owned by communities themselves. Does this mean that the *dispositifs* embedded in the narrative of community disappear? Hardly.

⁶³ For more background on this relationship, read my essay 'On Bones and Brooms: Re-materialising the Imaginary of the Future,' *Third Text*, Vol. 23, No. 5, September 2009.

Community museums, according to Morales, are manifestations of *comunalidad*, which could translate as communalism.⁶⁴ Immediately, one confronts a problem with the word because in the Indian context communalism is not what brings people together on a common ground; rather, it is what sets people apart on different grounds of religious, linguistic and cultural identity. 'Our' communalism in India is sectarian, not communitarian—there's blood in the word. In the Mexican context, however, *comunalidad* connotes four interrelated concepts—the collective ownership of land which is endowed with sacred values; the joint decision-making of community assemblies; the practice of shared labour and mutual support by members of the community (what would be called *gotong royong* in the Southeast Asian context); and the affirmation of *fiesta* as a 'collective recreation, ritual and celebration.'

Community museums are run by committees appointed by village assemblies, which are similar to *panchayats* in the Indian context, except that I don't know of any *panchayat* that would be thinking about museums. In Oaxaca, the heads of each household in the village are obliged to contribute to the village assembly and fulfil their quota of community service. The museum is one possible avenue for such service, which should not be equated with the purely voluntarist labour provided by docents in the capitalist museum structure. Serving the museum in the Oaxaca context is more of an obligation, which cannot be rejected without facing fines, disapproval, public shame and social ostracism.

Another sensitive issue concerns the right to critique community within the grassroots curatorship of claiming the past against the onslaught of globalisation, migration and the subsequent loss of 'traditional values.' It seems to me that if a critique of the past is not embedded in its reclamation, we risk playing into the most tenacious forms of patriarchy and traditionalism.

To return to the example of the broom, it must be emphasised that the broom is not just a vibrant remnant of pre-industrial labour; it is also a means of legitimising degradation through poverty and a survival economy. It is at once grounded in caste hierarchies and yet capable of being mobilised as a weapon of protest. At once a means of dispelling disease through shamanist practices and the very concentration of pollution, it is that bundle of contradictions which holds society together even as it segregates the labourers and the beneficiaries, those who subsist through making the broom in oppressive conditions, and those who are able to profit through its massive market across the Indian subcontinent.

Let me now shift my attention to that crucial word 'ground' in the formulation of this conference's agenda by juxtaposing two examples of contentious grounds embedded with different political and economic histories, and their exploitation through the appropriation of memory.

The first example takes us back to Cape Town, South Africa, where in June 2003, in the course of building a luxury apartment complex in an area called Prestwich Place located in the highly

⁶⁴ Personal communication, October 2010. See also the essay 'Community Museums and Global Connections: The Union of Community Museums of Oaxaca' by Cuauhtemoc Camarena and Teresa Morales, *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Ivan Karp, et. al. (eds.), Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

gentrified district of Green Point, builders unearthed around 2500 remnants of skeletons constituting a burial ground. This could be described as another kind of dumping site, not of animal carcasses as I described earlier in the context of Arna-Jharna, but of the detritus of society from the apartheid era: slaves, sailors, victims of suicide, criminals, fisherfolk. This irruption of history from another time through a vast collection of bones precipitated a massive struggle of colliding constituencies—builders and real estate agents, the heritage industry in tacit collusion with the builders, archaeologists claiming the scientific right to study the ‘facts on the ground’ through forensic examination and a vast body of activists and citizens, notably from the District Six Museum, who opposed the exhumation of the bones, seeking respect for the dead and an acknowledgement of a marginalised history of humiliation.

‘Leave the bones there’ was the impassioned appeal of some of the activists within the larger politics of seeking, as Julian Jonker has described ‘legal legitimacy for a re-imagined sense of a community of descendants’ outside the narrow legalities determining the proprietary rights of ‘direct descendants.’⁶⁵ Sadly, this fervent affirmation of claiming the unnamed dead as ‘our common ancestors’ proved futile as the heritage authorities voted in favour of exhuming the dead though without forensic examination. After many candle-lit vigils, the skeletal remains of the dead in Prestwich Place were ceremonially blessed and taken in a multi-faith procession through the streets of Cape Town to a temporary shelter. Today, the bones are concealed in an ossuary which is part of a prison-like structure called Prestwich Memorial, which contains a lacklustre documentation of the movement along with a recently installed coffee shop called Truth. Even if one wanted to fictionalise a vicious satire of the political abuses of community struggle, it would be hard to match the perverse imagination of city officials in reducing Truth to the logo of a coffee shop.

What is it about movements so ethically and morally charged as the Prestwich Place movement, which, more often than not, land up being travestied by the State? How does one negotiate the hierarchies of *dispositifs* animating and dividing any movement in order to pre-empt such crass appropriations? How do we re-imagine not just the symbolic acts appropriate to respecting the dead, but the more official language of rights and entitlement determined by the law and consolidated by real-estate priorities? Re-imagining the law with all its bureaucratic modalities could be a more strenuous task than re-imagining a museum.

Against the rather humble example of Prestwich Place, let us juxtapose the most mediated and globalised of ‘grounds’ in what has come to be essentialised as Ground Zero on the remains of the Twin Towers in Manhattan. Clearly, the Ground Zero of Hiroshima has acquired a new resonance with unprecedented real-estate considerations. On this ground a \$700 million 9/11 Memorial and Museum will be built next year—less a memorial than a spectacular reaffirmation of American, never-say-die triumphalism, in the wake of the ‘war on terror’ and the crisis of the US economy.

⁶⁵ Julian Jonker, ‘Excavating the Legal Subject: The Unnamed Dead of Prestwich Place, Cape Town,’ *Griffith Law Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2005, p. 193.

This audience constituting the International Council of Museums may not need to be reminded of the spectres of another museum, which remained unbuilt on this very site—the International Freedom Center—modest in scale, but thought-provoking in its courageous attempt to link the tragedy of September 11 to a broader reflection on freedom. This museum was abruptly shut down in an advanced stage of its conceptualisation, censored out of existence, accused of raising irrelevant and troublesome questions relating to slavery, the genocide of indigenous people and the manufacture of global poverty from which the United States cannot claim immunity. The alleged ideological overkill of the proposed museum was also seen as a fundamental disrespect for the dead.

In such scenarios, the strongest most non-negotiable of *dispositifs* is often cast in the language of grief. But this grief, extending beyond the survivors and family members of the 9/11 victims, has been politicised, nationalised and, if I may insert that deadly Indian category, communalised. The grief of true-blood patriotic Americans has been legitimised in a scarcely concealed assertion of Islamophobia, whereby the grief of Muslims, among other migrant communities living in the United States who may also have lost their loved ones on September 11, is marginalised.

Today this capitalisation of ‘our’ grief has been extended to the ongoing travesty of an inter-faith Islamic Cultural Centre, modelled on the YMCA, being equated with a mosque and a hideout for ‘Muslim terrorists’ strategically seeking protection under the First Amendment of the American Constitution. Once again, it is the *ground* in terms of location that is the source of controversy, even if the proposed cultural centre is situated two blocks away from Ground Zero. Even so, liberals have, predictably, equivocated about how the possession of a right to do something does not necessarily mean that it’s the right thing to do: ‘You can build your cultural complex near Ground Zero, but wouldn’t it be a better idea if you relocated it somewhere else?’

Significantly, if I had to use this argument against the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, what would I tell its proponents? This would be an honest response: ‘I find your conception and design tacky; your intention to present an “unblinking account” of the horror of 9/11, with “no fingerprints” of intrusive curatorship, totally disingenuous. I think it’s grossly naive to imagine that visitors are likely not to be “re-traumatised” after seeing photographs of 9/11 victims leaping from the tower and then having to descend the “Survivor’s Staircase” at the end of the tour. Also, the idea that the exploitation of memory is preferable to the danger of perpetuating amnesia is a cynical argument made in bad faith.’⁶⁶

However—and here my liberal persona would need to be more stringently strategised: ‘You have every right to build your museum, but why don’t you build it elsewhere? Maybe create a theme park around it. But leave Ground Zero alone. Let it remain a vacant space, a place of mourning, a site of conscience.’ This argument would attempt to work against the valorisation of yet another instance of archaeological hubris. Against the spectacularisation of memory, I

⁶⁶ All the quotes and details in this paragraph are drawn from W. M. Akers’s article ‘Re-Remembering 9/11: The New Ground Zero Museum,’ *The New York Observer*, Culture section, August 3, 2010.

would try to open up the transformative possibilities of what Nick Shepherd has evoked in the context of Prestwich Place as ‘an archaeology of silence, of secrecy, of closure (rather than disclosure).’⁶⁷ In all candour, I have no illusions that my argument carries any weight in a global financial context where the imperatives of real estate triumph over grief, truth and reconciliation, even as they capitalise on these emotion-laden narratives.

Ending this lecture, I am compelled to return to my opening remarks that museums don’t matter in India, and perhaps, this need not been seen entirely as an unequivocal deficit or lack. The fact that we don’t have as yet an evolved museological culture gives us the relative freedom not to blindly follow the *dispositifs* of memorialising traumatic pasts. More concretely, following the legacies of museums made in the name of the Holocaust, Apartheid and genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, we have no Partition Museum commemorating the single most bloody event in the history of the Indian subcontinent. This lack can be attributed to the fact that we’re not prepared for it just yet—not only at a museological level but also at political, psychological and emotional levels.

In this interim, however, while we do need to reflect and debate seriously on the pertinence of such a museum and its manifold challenges (where it would be located, on which side of the border), perhaps we also need to acknowledge that there are different epistemologies, languages and resonances of silence which do not have to be equated with the illusions of forgetting and the cowardice and repression of not confronting the past. Can we envision museums of silence, or are we better off coming to terms with the demons of the past through the actual struggle of dealing with the traumas of the present? Are these traumas best addressed beyond the ground of any museum through acts of material or symbolic reconciliation? Let me leave you with these questions.

⁶⁷ Nick Shepherd, ‘Archaeology dreaming: post-apartheid urban imaginaries and the bones of the Prestwich Street dead’, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2007, p. 21.

The Museum as an Experimental Working Tool: Questioning History, Colonisation and Cultural Displacement through the Example of Black Art

Elvan Zabunyan

As an art historian, my research focuses on a redefinition of the field through post-colonial and feminist theories. I am not here, therefore, as a museum person but as an associate professor responsible for a curatorial programme in the Art History department of my university for the last ten years, and as such I am interested in questioning the place of the museum from a historical, artistic and critical point of view. The notion of exhibition and the importance of the display within the museum space are also questions I often raise while teaching and writing. One of my main topics of research over the last fifteen years has been the construction and deconstruction of a history of African American contemporary art within the context of a changing art world that challenged the new rules of globalisation and included cultural studies and post-colonial studies within the framework of historical and critical positions. I therefore decided to focus my talk today on how the museum deals with the past of colonisation and slavery.

These issues have moved in new directions over the last five years mainly in the context of the French cultural and political situation, which often considers the question of globalisation from a distance as if it necessarily implied disturbing the historical continuum of France as a former colonial empire. It is therefore with these thoughts in mind that I decided to articulate my speech starting first with a presentation of the French situation and taking two museums as examples: the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and the Musée du Quai Branly. I will try to underline the issues these examples raise by comparing them with the artistic practices by Black artists who insist on the importance of exhibitions—discussing how they use the museum as a working tool to change the visual, cultural and political reception of collections and/or art works with specific displays, helping with their practices to question the place museums occupy in the deconstruction of historical parameters embedded in a collective consciousness shaped by the Western cultural world. With this idea in mind, I would like to discuss how creative processes are part of the elaboration of theories linked to what we now call the 'global society' or the 'global world', to join two terms which are reflexive and shed light on convergences between geography and economy, space and politics, culture and displacement. Several fields help us to understand these encounters, among which we can easily list cultural anthropology, ethnology, history, geography, politics, sociology, art history, philosophy, urbanism and architecture. As a result we realise that the term 'global art' extends the scope of research in the fields of contemporary art history and museography.

These between states are also defined by the slippages inherent in the back-and-forth movements that characterise the local/global relationship. This approach ties in with the anthropological methodology applied by James Clifford when he takes the accounts of Western travellers and integrates them with a reflection that goes against the current, showing how these normative narratives have been put into perspective today. In his view, 'notions of community insides and outsides, homes and abroads, fields and metropolises, are

increasingly challenged by post-exotic, decolonizing trends.⁶⁸ The journey considered as physical movement permits a 'spatial practice' that questions changes of frontier.

'Where are we?' is a question we can constantly be asking, both in physical and conceptual terms, when we deal with globalisation. It is to this point of frontier that the notion of 'contact zone' proposed by Mary Louise Pratt, and also used by an artist like Renée Green, looks mainly for support. The term refers to 'the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. I borrow the term "contact" here from its use in linguistics, where the term "contact language" refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in the context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own. Like the societies of the contact zone, such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure . . . By using the term "contact," I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination.'⁶⁹

Looking at these references, we see that France had a late understanding of what could be or would be a contemporary analysis of art practices and theories dealing with the memory and history of colonisation and using the methodology proposed by post-colonial theories. To give an example, the almost simultaneous appearance in France of a must-read, *The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha, and an anthology encompassing some of Stuart Hall's most important essays ushered in a feeling of relief due to the fact that they came to fill a publishing lacuna (the books had come out in 2007, a few years ago). However, reading the writings of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha in French after studying them at length in English calls for a period of adaptation, almost as if we needed a translation filter to grasp the concepts raised by these major thinkers in the fields of cultural and post-colonial studies. The reason might well be the distance that divides political and cultural reality from the historical context that has enabled these essays to exist for example in the United States, Great Britain or even India (in some cases since the seventies) but not, until recently, in France. By calling on Hall's analysis of the notion of 'diaspora-like' displacement, which he defines in terms of dispersal and links, precisely, to the issue of movement created by trans-lation, we may borrow his evocation of linguistic space transformed into a political form of representation that comes across like the unity of a collective fragmentation. The origins of this delay with the French translation have still to be unravelled, and Hall's answer to that situation is the following: 'I think at the heart of all the great imperial powers there's an incredible ability to forget—an incredible factory of forgetfulness'.⁷⁰ Henceforth it falls to thinkers belonging to those colonised cultures to analyse this kind of process of forgetting or, I would add, of denying. It is because of their work on identity and otherness that the construction of differentness helps to form a line of thinking about the interstice which, by articulating the memory of a past and present of history, origins

⁶⁸ James Clifford, *Routes, Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 53.

⁶⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁰ Marc Alizard, Stuart Hall, Eric Macé, Eric Maigret, *Stuart Hall*, Paris, Ed. Amsterdam, 2007, p. 45.

and displacement, (re)establishes the significance of representations of ethnicity, race, class and gender as central paradigms within this world that Hall describes as 'self-centred' and whose 'extreme complacency' is given a hard time.

In Paris, two museums have recently been inaugurated that focus respectively on the art of non-Western countries and on the history of immigration: the Musée du Quai Branly, which opened in 2006, and the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, which opened in 2007. During the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1937 the Musée de l'Homme at the Trocadéro was founded. Focusing as it did on the natural and cultural history of human beings, it was initially considered a 'laboratory museum' and boasted an ethnographic collection of more than 300,000 pieces, all of which were transferred to the Musée du Quai Branly's permanent collection. However, the museographic aim of the Musée de l'Homme was more scientific, whereas the Quai Branly privileges aesthetic displays (which is one the main criticisms of this new museum). Approximately 15,000 pieces were on permanent display at the Musée de l'Homme and yet only 3,500 are presented at the Quai Branly, devoid of cultural context and focusing on the exotic origins of art pieces from Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The Quai Branly collection also encompasses that of the former Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens, that was kept there while the museum was being restored before reopening in 2007. In turn, this museum had replaced the former Musée des Colonies inaugurated during the Exposition Coloniale Internationale staged in Paris in 1931. The curator of this event, Hubert Lyautey, who was a military man and went on to become the Minister for Colonies, was charged with the responsibility of presenting every single piece that had arrived in France from Africa, Madagascar, Indochina, Syria and Lebanon during the process of colonisation. Initially known as the Musée des Colonies, in 1935 it became the Musée de la France d'Outre-mer. In 1960 it was renamed once again by André Malraux, Minister for Culture, as Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens before finally becoming the Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in 1990.

Jean-Hubert Martin, curator of *Magiciens de la Terre*, became the museum's new director once his contract with the Pompidou had finalised, and he would be the first to organise exhibitions in which pieces from the ethnographic collection confronted contemporary art. In the first years of the twenty-first century the museum closed, to reopen in October 2007 as the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'immigration, four months after the [French] presidential election and the controversial decision to create a new Ministry of Immigration and National Identity (ministry which was suppressed in November 2010), for French anti-immigration policies are among the most severe in Europe. The contradiction between this ministry and the desire to acknowledge the history and cultures of immigration in a museum framework reveals the difficulties faced by institutions attempting to underline the cultural politics of a country that had not yet come to terms with its own colonial past. For several weeks in the autumn of 2010, the museum was occupied by migrant workers (mainly African) who lived and slept there, trying to attract public attention to the social and racial discrimination they were suffering.

Of course, while this occupation of a museum devoted to the history of immigration was far from being ironic in a globalised context, it did reveal that movements between the 'Western' and the 'non-Western' world could be likened to relations between 'centre' and 'periphery' that today appear as an outmoded dichotomy. In spite of the fact that Eurocentric hegemony is trying to preserve its authority by every means, in Paris, in France, we have a counter-example that shows how much work still remains to be done. Movements are no longer made in *one* direction, but in multiple and different directions, from North to South, from East to West, and vice versa. The economic and political constraints characterising these geographical and territorial displacements co-exist with a new awareness of the globalised world. But even if we consider the changes that have taken place in the setting of major artistic events over a period of more than ten years, and find that artists coming from all non-Western countries are fortunately occupying prominent places in contemporary art and its marketing system, that their works are no longer systematically perceived in terms of their belonging to a 'minority' space, we also realise that notions such as colonial past and memory, which are often questioned by artists in connection with global society and post-colonial theories, continue to be utopian in certain countries (and France is one of them). When we consider the controversies surrounding colonial history, we understand that today's historian confronts the blurring of borders between history and memory.

This is how some of the artistic practices we could consider exemplary have since the early nineties been striving to reflect on the way institutions impose a specific way of contemplating the art works or objects they present, revealing from within how these come together to assert and confirm the links between conditions of cultural production, political analyses, the economic system and transfers of territories.

The way in which museums like the Quai Branly or Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration install their permanent collections within or without glass display cabinets, is quite revealing and helps us understand the importance of the language developed by artists and the history and memories they deal with in connection with different families of objects. In fact, their idea of museum installations should perhaps be studied in theoretical curatorial practices. In an essay published in the catalogue of the Kerry James Marshall exhibition held [at the Museum of Contemporary Art] in Chicago in 2003, Helen Molesworth refers to Fred Wilson's project *Mining the Museum* produced in Baltimore in 1991. '*Mining the Museum*—she says—suggested that unearthing the repository of museum collections and reframing them engendered the possibility of resuscitating the function of the museum as a legitimate site for the display and discussion of history. Indeed, the question became whose history will be told by whom and in what manner. Exposed as subjective, the museum was seen as a highly charged site, an institution that mattered.'⁷¹ Fred Wilson himself, referring to *Mining the Museum*, explained that the exhibition opened for the American Association of Museums annual meeting, which was being held in Baltimore that year, and that it was the first time museum professionals such as directors and registrars visited an exhibition that addressed their own profession.

⁷¹ Helen Molesworth, 'The Art of Hanging Pictures', in Kerry James Marshall, *One True Thing: Meditations on Black Aesthetics*, Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004, p. 11.

Since the late eighties Fred Wilson has conceived his artistic practice as a criticism of the museum institution, analysing the various processes of representation within museums. In 1987 he organised an exhibition in the Bronx (where he was born in 1954) entitled *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content and Context*. Each of the three areas that made up the installation simulated a distinct museum space: the first referred to an ethnographic museum, the second to a museum in the Victorian era and the last to a conventional white space —the ‘white cube’.

The works of nearly thirty artists occupied the three spaces, grouped according to similar distinctions to those of the three rooms in question. The ethnographic museum, for example, presented art objects, vaguely specifying their materials but without indicating their authors; the ‘Victorian museum’ displayed objects as antiques, placed on precious pedestals; finally, the ‘white cube’ welcomed rather cutting-edge pieces suggestive of contemporary art. The experience led Wilson to a creative process which focused on the museum itself, with its cultural, social and political parameters. The artist’s objective was to demonstrate that the construction of the Western museum was only effective from the Western viewpoint, and that it did not sufficiently consider the practices or creations of the periphery, often invisible to the mainstream.

Transformed into a subject and no longer a container, the museum mocked by Fred Wilson became at the same time an experimental working tool: ‘The whole museum environment has become my palette, my vocabulary. I observe everything and try to distil everything in order to reuse, to reinvent the meaning which comes out of it.’⁷² Playing the role of parasite in the museum space, his projects consisted in integrating within the museum objects that didn’t have the value of art works (objects bought from street vendors, for instance) and therefore tended to undermine the balance of the works usually presented. In 1990-1991 his project *The Other Museum* in Washington presented African masks whose ‘eyes’ were covered with the French and British flags in the form of headbands, explicit suggestions of colonial power. Under other masks posters indicated ‘stolen from the Zonge tribe’. He emphasised the presentation of the masks with colourful lighting, thereby revealing that his preoccupation with showing how museums ‘anaesthetize the historical importance of those objects in order to cover up the colonial past’.⁷³

In 1992 the artist began a year’s work on a project that consisted in creating an alternative model that questioned the space of institutional art as well as representations of the museum type. For the first time since the beginning of his research on this theme Wilson had the possibility of working within a traditional history museum, the Maryland Historical Society. Moreover, although he had a different status, that of artist, he also occupied the position of artistic director and exerted control over the exhibition project in its entirety. The *Mining the Museum* exhibition proposed a general reflection on the ideological mechanism of the museum and its frequent omission of the history of Black Americans. Wilson began a thorough

⁷² Fred Wilson quoted by Lisa G. Corrin, ‘Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves’, in the exhibition catalogue, *Fred Wilson: Mining the Museum*, Maryland, Maryland Historical Society, 1992, p. 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

investigation of the art works and objects in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society, as well as a precise study in the archives of the institution, which allowed him to go back as far as the period of the slave trade in the nineteenth century and to retain a certain number of documents connected to its history. He discovered administrative papers belonging to slave traders, contracts for the sale of slaves and letters: 'I was struck by the wealth that was there. Seeing the juxtaposition of those things was really painful. (...) Before I did this project I was thinking about colonialism and Africa. I wasn't really thinking about America or African-American slavery. I thought we had dealt with other issues. I didn't choose slavery. I was really taking my cues from what was there.'⁷⁴

In determining the elements that he would integrate in his installation (which occupied the whole of the third floor of the museum and included more than a hundred pieces related to the history of Black Americans) he questioned the way American museums represented (or rather did not represent) the specificities of African-American culture, and the way the history of Black people had been largely concealed by the mainstream. While lying at the intersection of a criticism on institution and multicultural identity politics, Fred Wilson's project had been seen by a great number of visitors and was very positively welcomed by the art world as well as by the local daily press.

After that experience, Wilson was invited by the Seattle Art Museum to set up a similar project the following year. However, there was a substantial difference between the two projects: the first museum was a history museum while the second was an art museum. The artist explained that difference by pointing out that in Maryland he insisted on the possibility of creating a history of Black culture from objects found in the collection, just as he could have taken other pieces from the museum to construct a history of women or a history of immigration. His choice of African-American history and the history of American Indians obviously depended on the subjective criteria that he fully accepted, which is why he did not consider his project a comprehensive history of Black culture. The Seattle project took another direction. Leaving the field of historical and ethnographical documentation, Wilson started to work in a very new art institution (barely one year old at the time) whereas the Maryland Historical Society dated back to the mid-nineteenth century. The artistic process was of course modified by that very fact. The collection of the Seattle Art Museum assembled art works and objects from all over the world. Fred Wilson ironically pointed out that the curators of those museums could boast they owned 'multicultural' collections, but for him 'they're about as multicultural as the British Empire: all the cultures are there, but who decides that they have to say, what's next to what, and what's important?'⁷⁵ Taking a plan of the museum and studying the layout of the collections—Antiquity and Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, then the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Europe, up to twentieth-century American art—the artist re-organised the displays by juxtaposing the works according to his own artistic logic.

The move from Maryland to Seattle also allowed Wilson to transcend the issue of his African-American identity, favouring his status as an artist rather than a Black man. Fred Wilson continues his analysis of artists who invest in their own ethnic or racial identities and develop

⁷⁴ Leslie King-Hammond, 'A Conversation with Fred Wilson', in *Fred Wilson: Mining the Museum*, op. cit., p. 33.

⁷⁵ Martha Buskirk, 'Interview with Fred Wilson', *October*, No. 70, Autumn 1994, p. 112.

aesthetic and political 'strategies' to construct an effective criticism of an American society in which African-Americans have little space to manoeuvre.⁷⁶

Among the processes Fred Wilson brought together in his work and the relationships he establishes with the museum [as an institution], we can again consider the aforementioned notion of 'contact zone', a confrontation in which we find a connection between two distinct but complementary elements, where the border is not seen as a gap but as a meeting point for the creation of new narratives. The artist's critical approach is combined with the difficulties in obtaining definitions that could be valid in different situations. When we speak about the reception of art in the light of global society or culture we realise how complex the changes operating in the art world actually are.

In the logic of the analysis put forward by Stuart Hall, the use of the word *translation* with its prefix *trans* derived from Latin etymology creates an intrinsic movement that usually marks the displacement of one term to another. Creolisation, contact zone, and transculturalism are linguistic approaches that become tools of interpretation. To understand the artistic practices that stem from or are connected with these concepts, the notion of interpretation is indeed an important one, for it creates a close link with translation as form. From the idea of the journey to that of the exhibition, the logic of a movement in space and time presents itself in transit.

Where are we?, we could ask ourselves again. Well, probably at a moment where even if what prevails are disorientation and displacement of territories of all kinds, the contemporary 'cartography' of our world helps create new forms of knowledge. Artists, curators and critics should trace the genealogy of this global society in order to construct another art history and another way of thinking that will truly emerge from cultural exchanges and border transpositions in the field that interests us today: the ideological paradigms of the museum.

⁷⁶ Fred Wilson was the first African-American artist to represent the United States when he created an installation for the American pavilion at the fiftieth edition of the Venice Biennale in 2003.

SESSION III – DIALOGICAL PRACTICES IN A POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

Museums as global banks of values

Tim Griffin

First of all, I would like to thank CIMAM and its hosts in China for the generous invitation to speak at this week's conference, an invitation, as the given title for this paper suggests, that stems from my final issue as editor of *Artforum*, devoted to an extended consideration of the museum in the contemporary cultural context and for which the magazine interviewed and commissioned texts from directors and curators around the world. In this regard, and given that I was organising this issue from a position outside the museum, I think it might be most productive if I were to begin today by considering a very simple question about that particular issue: why did we do it?

Granted, any contemporary art publication is supposed to examine all aspects of the art world as it stands today, but if a monthly magazine is largely premised on the very idea of relevance, or of dealing with issues steeped in the present, it is not immediately clear, I think, why the museum should be made an exclusive topic when, for example, the institution and its critique (both from within and without, and by artists, curators, journalists, and philosophers alike) has been exhaustively discussed for over four decades. What might be so pressing or novel here is not immediately clear.

In fact, for me, this conversation about the museum was a continuation of a debate begun two years before in the 'Art and Its Markets' issue of *Artforum*, whose focus was prompted by what in early 2008 seemed an unprecedented market boom, produced in tandem with an incredible expansion of popular interest in contemporary art. From the outset, our goal there was simple: to establish to what degree and in what ways had such developments influenced the production, circulation and display of art, to say nothing of their impact on our understanding of its public (both general audiences and individual viewing subjects) and, of equal importance, on art's position in regard to developments in culture, specifically in commercial culture.

The question drew our attention to a number of seeming paradoxes, many of which reached well beyond the museum's walls and into the institution's socio-economic context. For instance, an exponentially expanding audience might have endowed contemporary art with a new level of prestige in the popular consciousness, and yet such prestige also seemed to coincide with, say, a shift in attitudes around philanthropy, whereby traditional civic commitments of high culture were giving way to the pervasive desire for personal distinction. (Art historian Thomas Crow penned a text on changes in trustee culture, both in terms of what they funded and the singular relationships with artists they in turn sought.) In this regard, what was once the territory of a public sphere in art seemed subject to intense privatisation. Indeed, if one was to consider the changing economics of art, one had to account not only for rising prices among contemporary art works, but also, in a broader context, for cuts in government funding around the world on the one hand, and the renewed prevalence of the private

foundation on the other. Further, such privatisation seemed matched by an atomisation: if decades ago, amid a heightened art market, we encountered the first debates about pluralism, today an unparalleled greater array of artistic practices became fiscally sustainable as so many fields of 'interest', mirroring the customisation and niche marketing in mass culture, so that even 'criticality' in art registered less as subversion than as difference—something operating less in terms of effect than affect, or style.

The last point, clearly, is of utmost importance to any publication wanting to provide a sense of the day's artistic issues, since it underscores the imperilled status of discourse itself—the possibility that criticism and critique are historically specific, and not here forever (and notably, *Artforum* is nearly fifty years old). But here we see that in discussing the economy of art, we are actually discussing the institution of art in its broadest sense: what is put on display, where, and, moreover, the infrastructure that makes 'art' legible as such within the larger context of culture, right down to the language we use to describe it. (It's worth mentioning that the cover of the 'Art and Its Markets' issue was inspired partly by art historian Linda Nochlin's observation, in her 1971 essay 'Museums and Radicals: A History of Emergencies', that art is an inherently 'schizophrenic' sphere, at once elitist and democratic. Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God*, 2007, would seem a schizophrenic object *par excellence*: emblematic of a suppressed continuum between mass access, with its infinite reproduction, and select privilege. At the same time, it is a *vanitas*, speaking to the potential passing of one conception for art and its discourse.)

It's this possible 'passing' that I wish to consider today, touching on the 'Museum Revisited' issue, but also elaborating very briefly on authors' themes as they describe the institution formed in a distinctly contemporary context—and within an economic paradigm that is, after all, vastly different from the one in which the museum was conceived. In this regard, I wish first to offer a sense of the corresponding dilemma for both the museum and notions of critique; second, to outline how artists and the institution alike have migrated to temporality as a viable critical option in art; and, finally, I wish to speculate, with a brief case study in the newly opened Temporary Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where in fact the idea of the 'temporary' might well be seen productively in contradistinction with the contemporary field.

First, to establish a language for considering any such dialogue between museum and socio-economic context, one might first consider a predicament frequently underlined by museum directors and curators around the globe today: that the institution's traditional role—indeed, its singular status as a place of public creative engagement with the pressing issues of the day—has been eroded and perhaps even usurped by other commerce-driven entities in the post-industrial era. In this regard, I will cite Reina Sofía director Manuel Borja-Villel: 'Although they retain their importance in the network of creative industries, as public institutions museums have lost much of their mediatory power and, further, have lost their privileged position in defining what we understand to be culture. This is partly because those who shape the cultural scene most definitively today are prominent figures in communication industries, as well as a diffuse magma of cultural producers, who typically subordinate creative singularity to the selling or expropriation of creative capacity.'

So in other words, according to Borja-Villel, even the engendering of creative, personally fulfilling engagements has become the premise and activity for larger commercial structures. (One might take note in this regard, as Borja-Villel does, of the proposition made by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* that the bases of ‘artistic critique’—authenticity, personal fulfilment, creative freedom—had been recognised and introduced into corporate programmes in recent decades.)

And yet here we should perhaps consider the extent to which such erosion has also happened, or is also happening, from *within* the museum—and ask, subsequently, whether the relationship is more complex than one in which the institution’s traditional activities and qualities have migrated to, and been taken up within, the sphere of mass commerce. Indeed, to make an almost embarrassingly blunt analogy: if cultural historian and theorist Tony Bennett argued in his 1995 *The Birth of the Museum* that in the context of grand exhibitions and world fairs, the industrial age brought with it displays of objects for mass audiences to engender awe and ‘stupefaction before reified products of their own labor’ (he quotes Walter Benjamin’s description of such venues as ‘places of pilgrimage ... to the fetish commodity’), then perhaps a post-industrial age has brought with it similar displays in the context of the museum.

In other words, one might look again at the museum in such light—the institution as a site already well inside the framework of contemporary culture, not outside, and not even pretending to be—and take into account the rise there during the past fifteen years of participatory art works steeped in social exchange and live performance. The museum by itself might already have gravitated to, prized and celebrated precisely those aspects of a post-industrial economy which have, supposedly, worn down its unique status as a hub of public discourse and creativity.

I am hardly alone in underlining the significance of such a correlation as exists today in ways and means between museum and mass commerce. As art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann proposed last year in a lecture at the Serpentine Gallery in London (and here it is worthwhile to note that this quote comes to me from Tino Sehgal, writing in the same issue of *Artforum* as Borja-Villel), ‘Just as visual art’s attachment to the material object cultivates and refines bourgeois-industrial societies’ groundedness in material production, so does art’s contemporary shift toward subjective and intersubjective experience resonate with an altered, post-industrial and post-bourgeois social order in which, once material needs are satisfied, immaterial and subject-related demands come to the fore ... [The art work] becomes a kind of role model for most of today’s products ... [and *experience* becomes] a central aesthetic paradigm.’

There is a great deal to discuss in light of such an observation, particularly when paired with Bennett’s observations on the museum as a site where some teleology is typically constructed: placing the present as a kind of historical end-point of progress, where the audience member naturally stands, choreographed within particular narratives of national and socio-economic

identity. The museum carries with it a kind of legitimising function in a representational vein, meaning that we can reasonably ask, to what extent are performances in such a space representational? Do we occupy the same social space as, say, Marina Abramovic at the Museum of Modern Art? Or, whether here, or in, say, Sehgal's recent *What is Progress?* exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, are we being asked to stand back and learn something about the inherent value of such 'live' exchange, where the communication itself is made the object?

But what I am trying to add here is a suggestion that the shift described by Hantelmann from work steeped in material production to work steeped in 'experience' also influences the museum's traditional relationship to temporality and, moreover, alters the valences of temporality wielded as a tool of institutional critique (or affirmation) in recent contemporary art. So, even if we are to examine the erosion of the museum's status as it moves into a 'contemporary' context, we should nevertheless take into account alterations in both institutional and contemporary time, with which the institution is, after all, always in dialogue. Perhaps there is some potential to be found here.

I would like to take a step back and clarify what I mean by dialogue between institutional and contemporary time by bringing up a couple examples from other historical moments. In this regard I recall once speaking to retail anthropologist Paco Underhill about how the Metropolitan Museum of Art was developed during the era of the department store, and anticipated that the time viewers spent in the institution would match that of shoppers. (Four or five hours of time was a given, as opposed to today's speedier survey's of museum space.) In another vein, we could recall extended hours for expositions during the reformers' movement in the nineteenth century, designed to enable labourers to see displays after work. The time of the institution on some level, in other words, is always in dialogue with the time of culture, and with whatever transformations are going on there.

Of course, to talk in this way about institutional time always being in dialogue with culture is potentially to problematise a long-standing opposition when it comes to conventional understandings of the temporality of the museum versus that of art works, and particularly that of art works which would seek to subvert the museum by producing an air of contingency and, moreover, a vital relationship with the surrounding (often urban) cultural context, embedding the museum *within* society as opposed to placing it at some remove, outside of time and space, as it were. Such an opposition is introduced by Foucault in the essay 'Of Other Spaces' (cited by Bennett as the very premise of his book) when the philosopher says, '[Museums manifest] the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages.'

In contrast, he continues, there is the fairground, which is linked to time 'in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival.' And while this distinction, as formulated, is specific to the nineteenth-century museum and fair, one can nevertheless see

that this antagonism—this *kind* of time inserted into the institutional frame—is something artists and curators sought to mobilise in a pronounced way during the nineties.

This summer in *Artforum* I brought up the example of curator Nicolas Bourriaud's *Traffic* as emblematic in this sense. Taking place at CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, the exhibition sought, according to Bourriaud, to 'highlight social methods of exchange [and] interactivity with the onlooker within the aesthetic experience.' To achieve this goal, the curator developed 'human-scaled spaces' designed around 'the idea of a flea market ... hanging photographs and paintings on pre-existing walls' inside the otherwise cavernous spaces of the institution. And so, as if at a fairground, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster invited visitors to the exhibition to recall the homes of their youth, making drawings of these Proustian settings according to their descriptions. Christine Hill created an antecedent to her *Volksboutique* project, presenting suitcases full of detritus culled from East German thrift stores along with books so that audiences could 'dig through the history of the GDR.' And Jens Brinch and Henrik Plenge Jakobsen contributed *Alternative Society*, an installation comprising an artificial landscape with huts of plaster, a pond and an area with tables and kitchen equipment; the artists were supposed to live in the environment full-time for two weeks, during which period visitors could discuss the piece itself and alternative lifestyles more generally.

Further, some other artists, during the weeks prior to the exhibition opening, sought to extend the boundaries of the exhibition—both in terms of space and time—by collaborating with local students, wanting to weave themselves (or the 'exhibition') into the social fabric of the city. Lothar Hempel, for instance, brought in a dance school and an 'association of people who like to criticize others' (according to a review), presenting them on set for a television show.

Here I think it's worthwhile to say that, although *Traffic* is a useful case study in considering institutional moves out into the city—or artistic attempts to bring the city in to the institution—it was by no means an unprecedented enterprise. In fact, a particularly salient example for me is offered by the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, and its Museum Without Walls—known when created in 1989 just as The Contemporary—which, given that the institution did not have a building at its inception, instead executed 'exhibitions' in such locations around the city as empty warehouses, car dealerships and bus stations. (Notably, this was the programme that allowed for the institutional critique of Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* in 1992, at the Maryland Historical Society of Baltimore.)

In fact, I think a useful insight arises as we consider *Traffic* alongside the Museum Without Walls, particularly since the exhibition in France was (wistfully) deemed a failure among many participating artists by virtue of its inability to sustain the 'temporality' of the festival. For instance, Jakobsen would cite that once the exhibition's four-day opening's events and performances were over, the spaces were generally empty, saying: 'We were reduced to actors performing in a sculpture.' (The institutional space, in other words, was no longer being formulated as a social space.) And another artist, Liam Gillick, would write in *Flash Art* that CAPC was 'rooted in a professionalization of the apparent openness of the late sixties and

seventies', something underscored by the fact that it 'denied access to the preproduction and postproduction access to the show'—defining 'the atmosphere of the place, both structurally and literally.' That is, the delimiting infrastructure of the institution remained immobile. (The hours had been the same, ultimately; it still felt apart from the city in terms of its outreach.)

And yet what might have happened if the institution had been mobilised after all, as in the Museum Without Walls, with its framework more porous not only in terms of space but also of time? One must ask this question with the knowledge that Bourriaud went on to establish the Palais de Tokyo, an institution designed, he said, so that 'the art center and the gallery ... form an integral part of a vaster ensemble: public space ... The gallery is a place like any other.' In this regard, a crucial aspect was a shift in hours, remaining open from noon to midnight, in other words, complementing the working day, occupying the time of leisure. In order to alter the temporality of the institution—that being 'outside of time' conventionally associated with the museum—there had to be a moulding of the institution's functioning to the temporality of the contemporary landscape.

Again, talking about this kind of moulding by itself is not necessarily something new: it's intriguing to consider that expositions of the nineteenth century opened for late hours in order to draw crowds from the working classes; something similar takes place now as some museums seek to expand their audience even while others seek to change the terms of the institution to become just a 'place like any other'. (The good disruptive move is also a good marketing move, in other words.)

And yet, if numerous artists have attempted to deploy temporality as a means for institutional subversion and/or critique, and if time within the museum is altered by the work it displays (if such conditions can be described as belonging to a 'contemporary' situation) then I would like to speculate openly about some potential implications, turning to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam as a kind of case study. As you might well be aware, the Stedelijk Museum has been closed for some eight years and this autumn, under the direction of Ann Goldstein (who, notably, recently decamped from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles) opened the doors of its old building for two exhibitions, one entitled *Taking Place*, using works from the collection steeped in institutional critique, from Daniel Buren to Hans Haacke and Louise Lawler; and the other a juried show of new Dutch art, titled *Monumentalism*, both under the banner 'temporary'. It is here that I wish to ask, in considering the Temporary Stedelijk, whether we can make a useful distinction between a 'temporary' and a 'contemporary' institution, or even better, invent a new significance for the 'temporary' or 'transient' in the museum.

For if we typically understand the 'temporary' as something 'impermanent' or 'transient'—originating in the term *temporarius* of the 1540s and meaning 'of seasonal character, lasting a short time'—what is this but the character of our 'contemporary' economic/social context? Press material for *Monumentalism* at the Stedelijk mentions globalisation's impact on national identity, suggesting a kind of impermanence facing us all. To this I might add a shorthand sense of Paolo Virno's typification of post-Fordist subjectivity as one 'used to sudden change ... as old

categories are falling apart', and as one 'in the habit of not having solid habits' given the continual innovations in technology, the precariousness of employment and the loss of a social safety net among governing bodies. At the same time, at the workplace we find non-standardised productions operating on a project-by-project basis, making a virtue of flexibility and infinite adaptability (necessitating, in turn, a sociability that can accommodate ever-changing networks of individuals working on these projects). The artist Marianne Flotron's work, *Fired*, on display in *Monumentalism* takes up this last subject very specifically, and is darkly humorous for underlining how losing one's job can be portrayed as endowing us with the wonderful quality of 'mobility'.

This is all to say that the 'temporary', while perhaps undermining the role of the museum as it is traditionally understood, could certainly be taken as to be a quality befitting the age and adhering to it quite neatly— in other words, as something not 'temporary' at all, but instead speaking provocatively to the very foundations of the day. And if, as Virno says, 'training is needed to deal with unchecked uncertainty of life', the museum might indeed be one place that provides it.

So, how might we arrive at a different meaning for the temporary inside the contemporary, useful toward re-conceiving the museum? In considering the meaning of the latter, we can look at the essay 'What is the Contemporary?' by Giorgio Agamben and see that his assessment adheres very closely to the description of fragility and transitoriness, with the qualities of the individual resembling those of culture more generally. Something that is 'contemporary' is 'untimely', or, to be more precise, establishes for itself a kind of relevance *through* 'disconnection and out-of-jointness'. How does one establish an out-of-jointness with an era that makes a virtue of that very quality? (Time 'out of joint' comes from a description of cultural upheaval to be resolved in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but here it seems a self-sustaining proposition. To paraphrase Virno in *Grammar of the Multitudes*, in this time of uncertainty we are all strangers to society, but this is what makes us all 'thinkers' and creative in the workplace. Precariousness in the face of change spawns adaptability.)

Elsewhere in the brief essay, however, Agamben elaborates on his sense of 'untimeliness', saying that urgency arises out of our perception of the situation itself: 'the anachronism that permits us to grasp our time in the form of a "too soon" that is also a "too late" ... [taking] the form of an ungraspable threshold between a "not yet" and "no more".' The discipline that most adheres to this model, he suggests, is fashion, which always anticipates its own outmodedness. But what if one turned to a museum in this regard? How could that anachronism be established (even if by happenstance)? Is there some way in which we should look at the 'temporary' in this sense?

I ask this because the Temporary Stedelijk is very literally a figure of 'not yet' and 'no more', and the installations it currently contains—placing so many examples of institutional critique right alongside with, and on the same experiential plane as, empty galleries showing the museum as changing building—underscores this quality. (What is being critiqued is itself being altered within the field of culture.) And perhaps, by being 'contemporary' in this regard, the

Temporary might also offer another way to speak of our moment. We can find an out-of-jointness of another Order.

Though here one must again state the obvious: that the Temporary might well arise partly out of a desire for exhibitions in a new way, but also, and quite likely more so, out of necessity or need. (And with the Netherlands facing 40% cuts in arts funding across the board, such need will remain a key factor.) It's pragmatics that is having to be in play: the kind of pragmatics that might curtail traditional exhibition-making yet, as a result, tells more us about art and society.

Agamben's formulation of the contemporary—and this is where I wish to conclude my talk—in fact brings to mind another era's 'contemporary' described by Renaissance scholar Michael Baxandall in his 1972 volume *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. There the scholar sought to discuss art within the context of everyday living, with works reflecting the typical Quattrocento businessperson's quick knack for calculating the volume of a barrel or bale, for instance, or for recognising different configurations in dance. As fellow art historian Christopher Wood has noted, these talents, in the scholar's estimation, shaped and sustained, a 'common repertoire of skills, mental and affective habits, and bodily disciplines' among artists, patrons, and audiences, such that the language of art was 'woven tightly into the tissue of daily experience.'

However, this investigation on Baxandall's part revolved, after all, on 'one magical moment', between the Middle Ages and modernity, when people, per Wood, 'met one another no longer under the supervision of the clergy, and not yet in the collector's cabinet or the museum.' Here was, in other words, another kind of 'contemporary'—of no longer, not yet, existing in that ambiguous, finite time between regimes of thought—which re-opened, for a moment, the doors to the relationship between art and experience. Perhaps, as we consider the dialogue between the museum and mass culture, the finitude of the Temporary Stedelijk suggests something of the same, as it exists on its own interstice as a promise, a potential in programme and place, as well as on an interstice of culture more generally. Perhaps there is some model there for a reversal of the terms, showing how, in light of the museum, the 'contemporary' itself, as we know it is, 'temporary.'

'Museums as global banks of values'

Catherine David⁷⁷

⁷⁷ CIMAM has not been authorised to publish the transcription of Catherine David's oral presentation.

SESSION IV – CHINESE ART MUSEUMS IN CHINESE CONTEXT

Contemporary Chinese Art and Contemporary Art in the Chinese Vision

Fan Di'an

The CIMAM's annual conference provides Chinese art and museum professionals a precious opportunity to communicate with their colleagues around the world. It also gives museum directors and art scholars an important chance to learn what is really going on in the world of contemporary Chinese art. Now China has become an integral part of the world economy, contemporary Chinese art starts to emerge on the international stage. After this conference ends, you are invited to visit a few art institutions, major art museums and galleries, as well as some of the art districts in Shanghai and Beijing. I believe that if you take a close look at the art scene in China, you can form a picture of its current artistic climate. Along with the rise of China's economy, much public attention and many government efforts have been devoted to facilitating the development of culture in China. Due to the country's insistent implementation of its door-opening policy, the interaction between the Chinese art world and the international art world has been increasing. However, I also believe that you might find contemporary Chinese art hard to grasp, or even find it confusing, especially when it comes to its artistic tropes and cultural traits. In fact, some of this uncertainty or confusion is also experienced, perhaps even more strongly, by Chinese artists and art professionals. As an old Chinese proverb says, 'you cannot tell the shape of a mountain when you stand on it.'

If we feel it is difficult to envisage the shape of contemporary Chinese art, we may broaden our view to consider present artistic practices by examining a specific vision of Chinese artists. A vision implies the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination and wisdom. We all know that the multidimensional and cross-disciplinary study of social and cultural phenomena has long existed in both Eastern and Western scholarly traditions. In the context of globalisation, cross-cultural observations and studies of intertextuality help us understand the global-local cultural linkage in contemporary art. My emphasis on vision strives to bring two ways of thinking about contemporary Chinese art together. We should, on the one hand, consider contemporary Chinese art in relation to artistic practice and imagination in specific social situations. On the other hand, observing Chinese art in its original context, we need to place its contemporary manifestations on the interface between global and local cultures. The reason I stress the Chinese vision of contemporary art is because I hope that the meaning of Chinese art is neither lost nor distorted during artistic exchanges. Since Chinese contemporary art first appeared on the international art scene in the nineties, people have often understood it as a symbolic image, used all over the world on magazine covers and displayed in galleries as a symbol of China's politics and ideology. Such usage and understanding partially simplify and deform contemporary Chinese art, particularly its cultural connotations.

Given that the development of human culture is never either automatic or spontaneous, the progress of culture—the transition from its old state to a new one—requires a process of self-reflection in response to the changing environment, and this reflection is by no means a linear,

one-way or one-phase process. At least three factors influence the development of contemporary Chinese art. The first is China's social reforms of the past thirty years. Each phase in China's social transformation has its distinctive features that influence the topic and vocabulary of Chinese art. Secondly, the knowledge background of Chinese artists has gradually emerged out of a single structure. These artists increasingly absorb and combine diverse cultural contents with their own artistic traditions, generating a complex and dazzling knowledge structure for art, a process that is not only facilitated by China's social reforms but also by Western modernist and post-modernist culture and thought, extensively introduced in China since the eighties. From that point on, in addition to its inherent conflict between tradition and modernity, contemporary Chinese art has had to face the clash between global and local cultures. The third factor embraces artists' personal experiences, encounters and emotions, which largely determine the concept, motivation, value, and medium of Chinese art.

Describing the logic of contemporary Chinese art is difficult, but if we survey artistic practices in China over the past thirty years, the feature of each ten-year phase is recognisable. In the eighties, China was immersed in a period of ideological emancipation. Chinese artists started to use their critical power to reflect upon the long history of Chinese art in the service of social ideology and political propaganda. Trying to break restrictions, they devoted themselves to developing new artistic themes and styles. In this period, new forms of art embodied the social thought and enlightenment that exemplified cultural recuperation in the country at the time. In the nineties, China began to embrace the market economy and her artists tackled the problem of Chinese social reality. The conflicts between individual and society, between the self and the outer world, and between domestic and foreign cultures provided new drives for contemporary Chinese art. More importantly, original art forms and themes would increasingly abound in the twenty-first century alongside the accelerated globalisation process. During this phase, Chinese artists intended to change their focus, and the representation of private feelings began to be replaced by the expression of social concerns. Chinese art contains a combinative element, in which artistic tradition and contemporary features do not replace one another but accumulate and synthesise through time. Chinese painting of the past ten years, for example, presents many grand visual narratives and transcendent visions. In these works it is difficult to clarify the symbolic meaning of each visual component—artists fill their painting with information from all over the world, and China's traditional artistic concepts are thereby transformed into new languages.

I would like to present three concrete examples to show how the concept and language of contemporary art in China reflect such Chinese visions.

My first example involves the artist Liu Xiaodong. Xiaodong trained in China's art college education system and became a teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts after graduating. During the eighties, a time when many Chinese artists went abroad to study art in Europe, America and Japan, Liu chose to remain in China. We could say that Liu's work best exemplifies local artistic practice and contributes to the idea of a local Chinese identity. Since the year 2000 most Chinese artists have changed the support or medium in which they work, and yet Liu remains faithful to his original medium—painting. We know that the more developed a

field is, the less freedom the artist has to explore new directions. Painting today, in an age of new media, is a shrinking field with limited capacities, and yet for this reason precisely people are currently more able to capture the meaning of paintings. Liu takes his easel from his studio to real outdoor spaces, where social transformations or important events are occurring and attracting much attention, and produces his painting on the spot, for instance in the region growing under China's Western Development Policy, in the area destroyed by the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, and in places polluted by industries. Making on-site painting generates rich meanings and demonstrates an actuality or instantaneity resonating with social reality. In this way Liu's work renews the original concept of easel painting in China.

I find my second example in Miao Xiaochun's work. Miao has followed an interesting trajectory before becoming an artist. After studying German at college he changed his major into Art History at graduate school. Unemployed after obtaining his master's degree, he started to create art. New-media art education didn't arrive in China until the year 2000 so the artists who now specialise in new media came largely from other disciplines. Miao is one such example. Making art with digital tools, his vision transcends reality. Over the past few years he has continuously recreated Western canons of art history, transforming the space of the original art work with 3-D techniques. In *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace*, for instance, he replaces nearly 400 people in Michelangelo's version with 3-D models, hence enabling the audience to enter a new space and perceive the static painting from different angles. In this work, even more intriguingly, Miao replaces people's identities with 3-D figures, all of which refer to himself, as if he were seeking his origin at some point between the estranged self and assimilated society and history. Great social upheaval seems to have little impact on him, but his indifference to social reality is actually due to the fact that he transfers his concerns into a broader cultural realm. We may say that his artistic practice combines sociology and psychoanalysis. Focusing on the areas between real and unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the violent and the pastoral, as well as the self and the non-self, Miao recreates the image of contemporary life and envisions human destiny in the age of mass media, applying the concept of interface from the field of computer science to art. In technical terms, an interface refers to the interaction between images or systems, whereas from a conceptual perspective it points to a shift between contexts.

Recently, Miao has made further progress, using digital techniques to transform other traditional artistic media. In one work, for instance, he applied digital vocabularies to create the visual effect of Chinese ink, and he is now dedicated to making oil painting, sculpture and prints. Over the past few years, 'cross-boundaries' has become one of the most popular cultural terms in China. In Miao's artistic experiment, 'cross-boundaries' undoubtedly stands for an ongoing evolution in Chinese art, during which different traditions and media have challenged and supported one another in the aim of achieving visual and conceptual reconstruction.

The third example is this year's Shanghai Biennale. Mr. Li Lei, Director of the Shanghai Art Museum, will invite you to see the show. China boasts many different biennales, which suggests that such a system of international artistic communication has been popularised in

the country. These biennales, however, all have their individual identity. Since 2000, the Shanghai Biennale has focused on the various features that have emerged as a result of Shanghai's evolution, devoting itself to grasping cultural problems arising out of urban development and generating topics for discussion such as *Urban Creation* in 2002, *Techniques of the Visible* in 2004, *Hyper Design* in 2006, *Translocalmotion* in 2008 and *Rehearsal* in 2010, co-curated by Director Li Lei, Professor Gao Shiming and myself. We believe the term 'rehearsal' emphasises the tentativeness and openness in producing culture. As Brecht observes, 'Actors in rehearsal do not wish to "realize" an idea. Their task is to awaken and organize the creativity of the other. Rehearsals are experiments, aiming to explore the possibilities of the here and now. The rehearser's task is to expose all stereotyped, clichéd and habitual solutions.'

Today, every show acts as a sort of theatre, although the consideration of exhibitions as theatres or spectacles has begun to be questioned. In our opinion, the terms 'theatre' or 'rehearsal' do not only suggest an exhibition effect, but more importantly, a scheme to create, to display and to communicate. In the rehearsal, the theatre is a knowledge community. The purpose of the art work is finally accomplished through the cooperation between artists and audiences. In the process of rehearsal, artistic individuality has been revised and the artist becomes an open subject. Site, context, narrative, and social participation have now become cutting-edge topics in investigating contemporary art and visual culture in China. This year's biennale, therefore, which has chosen 'rehearsal' as its theme, hoped to push this edge forward and transform the biennale into a public event-happening, culture-producing and medium-transforming site.

In this day and age, the production of culture and knowledge is endorsed by huge amounts of information. I wonder if artistic practice itself has any connection with cultural production, or whether it is a special way of producing culture. In this sense, examining the Chinese vision in a broader context would be more beneficial than merely discussing contemporary Chinese art.

Knowledge Production: The Function and Responsibility of Art Museums

Wang Huansheng

An art museum shall have multiple functions, and shall fulfil its sociological and cultural significance comprehensively in accordance with these functions. As the modern art museum pays more and more attention to the relationship with the public, with society, it becomes increasingly complacent and entertaining. However, when knowledge in a society is not high or widely popularised, as is currently the case in China or Asia for instance, then the art museum should assume its historical responsibility and play its professional role in such contexts.

Knowledge production is the main driving force behind the art museum. In other words, the institution should direct its efforts at creating, spreading, communicating, conserving and reproducing knowledge. To be more specific, the art museum should be a compound in which all artistic and cultural activities add meaning and value to knowledge. Therefore, if the significance of the art museum lies precisely in knowledge production, we could say the latter is represented in the following forms:

1. Exhibitions and relevant academic construction, i.e., the planning, organisation and realisation of exhibitions, the discussion of current cultural affairs, the call for new ideas, the promotion of pertinent academic issues and new academic trends. Whether an art museum is well equipped for the task of efficient knowledge production may be verified by considering the new forms of expression and meaning it elicits in the interactive field of the visual arts.
2. Contemporary explanations of history, culture and resources, i.e., research, co-ordination, conservation of collections and artistic writings, pertinent theoretic constructions. Collections and art historical writings usually contain abundant information, so by processing and conserving them we shall contribute to extending knowledge. Such historical resources are often ignored, and yet their meaning and value enable us to re-explain history in modern times. Another important function of the art museum is to enable systematic studies of the history of its collections, conducive to furthering the writing of art history. Temporary exhibitions and displays from permanent collections are thus intended to advance knowledge, which should be enhanced by the growth of critical and descriptive studies. If the two do not go hand in hand, the museum has shortcomings.
3. Active participation in current artistic trends. As time flies, history moves forward and art history evolves, the explanation of—and intervention into—modern time are important means for knowledge production. The construction of art history is an ongoing process in which museums should be actively, if cautiously, involved.
4. An open and compatible academic spirit, placing emphasis on communication, dialogue and interaction of knowledge. The effective value of knowledge can only appear in liberal, honest environments. So the art museum should not only be a platform for promoting democratic discussion from its own academic position, but also

provide a free and liberal space for the development of comprehensive intellectual thinking and artistic perspective.

5. Knowledge application, research and development. These should enable knowledge to reveal its value, play its constructive function and advance its significance in real social practice, thereby contributing to its reproduction. New knowledge has indeed emerged and evolved in our ever-changing societies, just as the development of new media has triggered new visual and spiritual meanings and expressions, creating new co-operative relationships between the art museum, the knowledge society and the public.
6. The extension of public education. Changing the methods and means of producing and disseminating knowledge will favour plural and multidimensional knowledge and thus reflect the cultural demands of different classes. Moreover, multidimensional and multilayer demands for knowledge will stimulate the art museum to lay down new requirements regarding its own knowledge structure and productive mechanisms, that will allow it to extend the democratisation of culture in its interaction with the public.
7. Communication and interaction, both of which can produce potentially penetrating effects. Multidisciplinary interaction does not only pose a new challenge for the art museum, but also affords new opportunities and meaning.
8. Research on the museum's content and style, embracing its administration, acquisition policy, conservation, restoration and capital raising, contributes to its extension as a knowledge system and is the basis of the new discipline of museology.

Over the past decade, China has experienced a surprisingly rapid growth in the construction of art museums, both as regards number and scale. This development is paralleled by the number of exhibitions and academic activities they have organised, which have attracted huge audiences. However, we must admit that Chinese art museums are still in a preliminary phase in terms of their status in the field of knowledge production. In other words, their planning and academic insight are still superficial, their expertise regarding the history and current situation of art collections is still insufficient and they still lack the passion and sense of responsibility that museum work demands.

The key problem, however, is their lack of awareness regarding knowledge production. It is generally believed that an art museum is only an exhibition venue, and an exhibition is seen as a means for artists to make their debut in society. In point of fact, as previously mentioned, an exhibition includes an operational system of knowledge production that involves the planning, perspective and selection of works, relevant research and display; it also considers the relationships set up between the works and the space, and between the space and the audience, and the process and characteristics of visual acceptance, communication and interaction. Each factor contains some specific knowledge, which will eventually be combined into a systematic project that will comprise the production process and generate the production output. The exhibition is only a part of the whole process, a sub-system of the

knowledge production mechanism, alongside the areas of research, public education, collection history and communication. While we continue to lack awareness of the function and role of the art museum, we cannot positively establish knowledge production.

CASE STUDIES

The Museum as a happening

Jaroslaw Suchan

Regardless of their actual systems, all political and economical powers show an increasing demand for spectacle. The more dominant the role played by mass media in shaping the reality of human desires, the greater the need for the spectacular as a means guaranteeing media coverage and, consequently, the influence over the decisions of voters and consumers. Spectacle is even more desired because, as Guy Debord observed long ago, it produces an attitude of passive acceptance: 'Spectacle is the source of enslavement which fascinates and, at the same time, limits the freedom of individuals because it has monopoly over creating illusion.' Spectacle produces a tendency for gullibility, for thoughtless acceptance of imposed 'truths'. The spectacular seduces spectators, guides their lives according to the will of those who rule the spectacle. The spectacular drives people away from real life, alienates them from it and makes them defenceless in the face of the overwhelming strength of attractive images that appear as projections of real life. Spectacle is then desirable for any kind of power, both as an attention-absorbing technique and as a means for its proper organisation.

In Poland we are used to thinking that contemporary art, particularly radical, critical, socially committed art, does not participate in the process of turning public life into spectacle. On the one hand, this is thought to result from the uncompromising attitude of the artists themselves. On the other, it might be due to the fact that specialists who organise the collective imagination see contemporary art as useless for their goals. Broadly speaking, contemporary art in Poland doesn't enjoy high prestige, which condemns it to functioning on the margins of public life, from where it only enters the mainstream circulation of information in connection with scandals, such as the attack on Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *La Nona Ora* or the lawsuit against Dorota Nieznalska for offending believers' feelings. Over the years, those scandals seemed to focus the interest of public opinion and, when appropriately covered by the media, fixed the image of art as something extreme: a cheap sensation, an empty provocation, etc., thereby confirming the legitimacy of the marginalisation of art. Zbigniew Libera, one of the most radical artists of the nineties, described this situation, slightly emotionally, as a 'cold war between artists and society': on one side were the artists who bravely proposed difficult subjects and broke the taboos of social life, and on the other side was a conservative society attached to traditional values and widely-held thought patterns, and its emanation, the authorities.

Obviously, this black and white division didn't actually correspond to the real distribution of powers, and recently seems to have lost most of its relevance as a result of the social and economic changes that have taken place in Poland since the fall of Communism and have produced a gradual modernisation of behaviours, attitudes and views of society. These changes have led to greater openness, or at least greater consent, regarding the presence of non-traditional expressions of culture, i.e., the mirrored values and projected images of the world. Obviously, the process is not lacking in conflicts but it reaches such significant dimensions that public authorities and corporations alike see profit in including these non-

traditional forms in their public relation campaigns. Ever since ‘nonconformity’, ‘freedom’ and ‘rebellion’ became attractive slogans for a great number of potential voters and customers, the machinery of the spectacular tries to intercept even the most radical manifestations of contemporary art. Under the banners that once accompanied anti-systemic demonstrations, today costly festivals are organised and richly supported by authorities who thus gain opportunities and scenery for celebrating and advertising their openness, tolerance, progressive attitudes, etc. Similarly, new biennales are being set up, and artists who had until recently been labelled controversial or even unacceptable gain celebrity-like status in the mainstream media. Last but not least, museums of contemporary art are being built. In a country where for many years artistic circles could not count on setting up even one such museum, now every large city is either building or planning to build one: Warsaw, Cracow, Wrocław, Poznań, Lodz. The latter, for instance, is planning to create a museum under the name Special Zone for Art, a giant building covering almost 40,000 square metres which is a flagship project of a huge investment undertaking to create a modern district in a run-down part of the city centre. Let me add that Lodz has little over 700,000 inhabitants and already has a museum of modern art, namely the Muzeum Sztuki, which is not overflowing with visitors, so the only justification for building a new institution is the need of the current city authorities to play a leading role in a spectacle that could be entitled ‘This is our doing, we are here to assure the city its future’.

Obviously, it would be unfair to see pure public relations [campaigns] in most of these initiatives. The building of new museums responds to real shortages in the culture infrastructure. Some of the new festivals are well-programmed initiatives by exceptional curators that bring together good artists, enabling Polish audiences to become acquainted with important phenomena in the field of contemporary art, and thanks to them there is a chance that the marginalisation of contemporary art will begin to decrease. At the same time, however, these activities may lead to an overarching instrumentalisation of art, subjecting it to the spectacle of propaganda designed by public and private powers—state, local, corporative, etc. (Literally, in a week’s time, a new museum of contemporary art will be inaugurated in Cracow, even though it is still not ready to conduct its activities. Local elections are approaching, however, and the current president is set on re-election, so the opening of the new museum hopes to win favour with the voters. Whether or not there is any cultural justification for opening the museum now doesn’t matter. What counts is the opportunity of creating yet another spectacle that will outshine any uncomfortable questions about the real problems of culture.)

Is there a way of escaping the mechanism of the spectacle? At Muzeum Sztuki we feel compelled to ask this question, not only because of our avant-garde beginnings but also because of the fact that the opening of ms², a new building for our collection, heralded that museum boom. It also was one of the first spectacular effects of the changing attitudes of the authorities towards contemporary art. Another additional reason that makes this issue particularly important for us is the specific location of the new building **[fig 1]**.



Fig. 1 Muzeum Sztuki ms2, photo P. Tomczyk

ms² was born out of the refurbishment of a nineteenth-century weaving plant that used to be a part of a huge industrial complex. This complex was recently taken over by a private developer, who turned it into an entertainment-shopping centre called Manufaktura. ms² is a public property, but the centre's managers use the fact that it is located within their premises to try and present the museum as a complement to their offer. Shops, restaurants, cinemas, a theme park, a theatre and, finally, the museum of modern art—Manufaktura tries to prove that it provides all that is essential for 'real' life. Such manipulation causes no problem for local authorities, as it gives them an opportunity of presenting Manufaktura as more than a business venture aimed at the profit of a private investor, i.e., as a successfully conducted project of revitalising a part of the old town, and thus as a culture-oriented venture that creates a positive image of the city.

The spectacle of prosperity, however, clashes with harsh reality. Exactly opposite the museum we find one of the most neglected parts of the city, a former workers' settlement now inhabited by people of low material status. Unemployment, alcoholism, petty crime, the lack of proper models and of good prospects are the problems this community faces every day, while their horizon of aspirations is outlined by that which is found on the other side of the street—the shopping and entertainment provided by Manufaktura.

The status of the museum in this particular context is clearly ambivalent. On the one hand it may contribute to building and asserting social prestige and thus strengthen the symbolic division into the world of Manufaktura and the world of the workers' houses (and so it does), but on the other hand, it may also disturb this bipolar arrangement and deconstruct simple life scenarios based on the passive subjection to the power of desire created by the spectacle. In order to do the latter, the museum must confront its own nature. As Griselda Pollock remarks, the narration constructed by the museum leads to experiencing reality as a spectacle, reducing the spectator to 'a particular contemporary combination of a tourist and a consumer'. This is, most significantly, a consequence of the referential status of the continuum created by the museum: a museum exhibition is a kind of drama that symbolically represents the history of art using the works as actors. On the stage of the museum, re-creating the universe of art, the works play the role of certain historical types: a characteristic product of the Renaissance, a breakthrough Cubist work, a representative example of Pop Art, and so on. The events to which they refer and which they try to evoke took place in a different time and place, so the museum merely exhibits their illustrations. Because that which is illustrated does not belong to the time and space of the audience, the only possible form of activity of the latter consists in

passive watching of the spectacle. Furthermore, the ostensible cohesion and credibility of the displays, which are guaranteed by the authority of the museum and of art history, overawe viewers, taking away any possible initiative they could have.

So, the dismantling of the spectacle has to be connected with the weakening of the referential function and with creating a situation where the presence of an art work is actualised in the 'here and now' of a museum. This enables the viewer to enter into real interaction with the work of art. Rather than the theatre, what seems to be an appropriate model for museum activity is the happening, i.e. a situation in which the works do not refer to a pre-existing script (history of art) and do not constitute a message from the author, omniscient custodian, to the recipient; a situation where the works are an instrument for creating an experience, tools that activate the viewers' imagination and intellect. The recipients are not presented with what happened some time ago, somewhere else, but are allowed to participate in the event themselves. As there is no pre-existing script to determine the contents of the message, meaning is created as a result of the recipients' activity and is born anew in each of their meetings with the art work. Seeing itself becomes, as Rancière sensed, an active work that makes its own selection, its own interpretation. Such seeing is more difficult to be seduced by the appeal of the spectacle. It becomes independent, critical, suspicious. It is able to break down illusions and problematise that which we take to be reality, and which is in fact a construct created by those who rule over the visible.

How can we awaken such an active way of seeing? The continual movement of contexts in which works of art are placed seems most important. It is also crucial to break down the set orders according to which works are organised, to confront different interpretations, to bring the works face to face with extra-artistic reality and to welcome the unpredictable forms of viewers' interaction with them. Rather than any spectacular *Wow!-effect* we should expect the Brechtian *V-Effekt*, produced by situations that throw us off the automatism of thought and undermine the obviousness of the obvious, broadening the limits of that which can be thought and imagined.

Working with the Muzeum Sztuki collection for four years, we have been trying to direct our activities in this way. The first step was the elimination of the permanent exhibition, which has been replaced by exhibition-sketches, every one of which presents the collection from a different theoretical perspective. Viewed together, the temporary exhibitions are designed to make recipients aware that no interpretation can claim to be exclusive. The Neo-plastic Room, for instance, designed by Władysław Strzemiński, which is the centre of our collection, can be seen as an expression of the gift economy (one artist giving the space he has designed to the works of other artists), but also as a variation on a specific architectonic formal device or as a situation that can evoke certain psychosomatic tension. **[Fig. 2]**

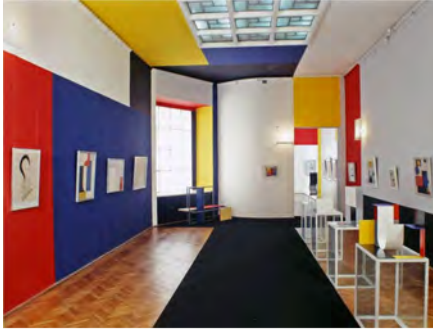


Fig. 2 Neoplastic Room, designed by Władysław Strzemiński, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz 1948, photo P. Tomczyk

Projects based on non-obvious juxtapositions also call set interpretations into question. The example here might be the exhibition that connected Katarzyna Kobro's Constructivist concept of sculpture with the works of Lygia Clark, who started from the concrete art inspired by Malevich and ended up carrying out therapeutic activities. The idea behind the exhibition was to draw attention to the less obvious but possible extensions of certain concepts of the historical avant-garde, and thereby re-work the relationship between avant-garde and contemporary artistic practices.

The experience we gained from working on these projects helped to construct the display of the collection in the new building, ms², where different overlapping theoretical discourses perform the role of a frame, collisions between works of art break down traditional chronological narration and the point of reference for the composition of works is not so much sought in art history as in the issues and problems that seem important in contemporary world. What is more, thanks to the maximum openness of the architecture, at almost all times viewers are able to choose between several different ways of visiting the exhibition and can therefore create their own narrations. This doesn't mean, of course, that the museum resigns from its own narration (the curators still select the works and decide how they should be placed), merely that this narration no longer appears as the only one valid—on the contrary, it has to constantly negotiate its position in relation to other narrations that exist in the same space. **[Fig. 3]**



Fig. 3 Permanent exhibition view, Muzeum Sztuki ms², Lodz 2010, photo P. Tomczyk

The polyphony of the museum is also strengthened by the activities taken up by the artists themselves in relation to the collection. When Jozef Robakowski, one of the most important figures of the Polish Neo-avant-garde, was invited to co-operate with the museum instead of a

monographic show he proposed an exhibition that would be changed every two days, and would include, beside his own, works by his artist-friends and works from our collection. Furthermore, the changing exhibition became a setting for a never-ending sequence of meetings, discussions, workshops and screenings. **[Fig. 4]**



Fig. 4 *Mirages of Józef R.*, exhibition view, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz 2007, photo P. Tomczyk

Another example we could mention is Hakoobo, a street artist from Lodz who designed a ramp for skateboarders inspired by Katarzyna Kobro's spatial compositions, and thereby made an unorthodox commentary on sculpture as a tool for organising the movement of a human body in space, a concept developed by the Polish Constructivist. **[Fig. 5]**



Fig. 5 Hakoobo, *Wallride + Qurater*, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz 2007, photo from artist's archive

Finally, we should mention the young Polish artist Ela Jabłońska, who changed the well-known Neo-plastic Room into a puzzle which anyone could use to build his or her own version of the space.

The possibility of a new look at the Neo-plastic Room was also offered by the works that began to be created or located nearby and were supposed to enter into a conceptual dialogue with it. The first project juxtaposed in this way was *Cabanne éclatée*, [a structure] designed in 1985 by Daniel Buren to house the paintings by another Polish constructivist, Henryk Stażewski, in the permanent collection. **[Fig. 6]**



Fig. 6 Daniel Buren, *Hommage a Henryk Stazewski. Cabane eclatee avec tissu blanc et noir, travail situe, 1985-2009*, installation view, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz 2009, photo P. Tomczyk

It doesn't only make the Neo-plastic Room appear as yet another statement about the status of exhibition space, but also as an expression of that special gift economy, which is very important for us: as you probably know, the collection of European avant-garde that lay at the origin of our museum in 1931 was initiated by artists and nourished by their gifts.

The undertaking that radicalised the polyphonic nature of the museum was the project titled *ms*³. *Re:action*, or, as we called it ourselves, 'our neighbours' museum'. We invited neighbouring residents and Manufaktura customers to take part in the project by sharing with us their vision of modern art and of what should be presented in a museum of modern art. In other words, we asked them to play our roles as curators, custodians, art critics and, finally, as artists. At their disposal they had the most important exhibition space, the necessary materials and a team of education curators. For two months, the museum played the role of Hyde Park Corner. Everyone could present whatever they considered worthy of being displayed, bring 'works of art' from home or create them on the spot. Everyone could also refer to the activities of the others, either by commenting on them in a weekly magazine, published especially for the occasion or by joining in the activities or even by destroying their results (as actually happened). [Fig. 7]



Fig. 7 *ms*³. *Re:action*, Muzeum Sztuki *ms*², Lodz 2009, photo P. Tomczyk

As a result, the division upon which the order of a traditional museum, but also the order of the world of spectacle is based, the division into those who 'can and those who cannot allow themselves the luxury of playing with words and images', to quote Rancière, was most strongly questioned.

It is worth noting here that, although the location of *ms*² undoubtedly makes it easier for the agents of the spectacular to instrumentalise the museum, it may also, paradoxically, contribute to the emancipation of the spectator from the power of the spectacle. The presence of the museum, with its collection of useless objects, hardly comparable with anything else, in a space defined by a utilitarian order of purpose, can in itself work as a *V-Effekt*. The museum is here a hum, an interference that breaks down the ordered message. It no longer confirms the 'natural' order of things, but becomes a space in which the validity of established orders is debated. The heterotopic character of such a museum is based not so much on the separation of two completely different domains (the external world versus art), as on the separation of two different orders in the perception of reality. It can be said that this museum is a place where a different way of being in the same world is put into practice. This is the place, again to quote Rancière, of an 'autonomous form of sensual experience', of selfless play that, according to the philosopher, is 'the embryo of a new humanity, of a new form of individual and collective life'. Suspending the rule of practical reason, the museum can question the non-alternativity of the world of spectacle.

Attempts are, of course, made to inscribe the 'autonomous form of sensual experience' into the order of purpose. Quite often successfully, I might add. Nevertheless, among all other forms of human activity it is still this form that has the greatest potential of subversion and, as the French philosopher often said, of 'transforming that which is given'. All that is left is to actualise this potential. **[Fig. 8]** And to do so, we should just follow the artists.



Fig. 8 Robert Rumas, *Step by step*, Manufaktura shopping mall, Lodz 2008, photo P. Tomczyk

Meeting Chen Zhen: An Artist's Appreciation of Chinese Contemporary Art

Ken Lum

I first met Chen Zhen in 1995. I was living in Paris and teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts. While there I was introduced to a number of Chinese artists and curators who had immigrated to France. They included the artists Yang Jiechang, Huang Yong Ping, Yan Pei Ming and the curator Hou Hanru. It was the latter who suggested that I contact another Chinese artist living in Paris: Chen Zhen. Hou said he was sure that we would get along. His intuition intrigued me—apart from our Chinese heritage, what common ground could I possibly share with someone who had grown up an ocean away? I didn't know much about Chen, except that he was one of many Chinese artists who had moved to Paris during the 1980s and chose to remain after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. I was interested in learning more about him.

This was a time in which I felt great disillusionment about art and great disappointment in myself, a crisis of being which I believe afflicts all artists from time to time. I wanted to enlarge my frame of understanding of art by looking far beyond the place to which I was accustomed. I began to embrace an increasingly philosophical view of artistic purpose, one inscribed more in terms of the artist's life and less in terms of the art world's idea of the artist. I saw the necessity of letting go of the art world as I knew it in order to be freer, to rediscover the true purpose of art and to become re-encharmed with it by giving myself over to the world. I would soon discover that Chen Zhen had long ago chosen a similar route.

Although it was not so long ago, the art world in 1995 was only beginning to acknowledge artists and curators working outside of Europe and North America. In spite of the prescience of conceptual art and its relationship to the processes of globalisation, the Western art world has been slow in transforming rhetoric into practice. I recall meeting curator Okwui Enwezor for the first time in Paris in 1995. He was relatively unknown then and was interested in curating exhibitions focused on contemporary African art, but he was having difficulty finding institutions that would commit to his projects. Nevertheless, something was in the air. New faces were appearing in the art world from places such as China, Africa, Mexico and other previously marginalised areas of the world, and their presence contributed a new and urgent purpose to art. It struck me that there was much to learn during my time in Paris.

I called Chen and was kindly invited to his apartment near Paris' Chinatown in the Thirteenth Arrondissement for dinner. I had never been to this part of the city before and was struck by how different it looked from the rest of Paris, with its concrete high-rise buildings and an ambitious modernist complex called Les Olympiades. An uncanny feeling of familiarity—a 'spiritual running away,' as Chen would say—washed over me as I walked past Chinese Parisians going about their day. At that moment, I suddenly felt as though I was no longer on my way to meet a stranger, but rather someone connected to my past. And, in a sense, I was.



Image: Paris: Les Olympiades. Photo credit: Thierry Bézecourt

My formative knowledge of China came from my immediate family growing up in Vancouver's Chinatown.



Image: *Lum Nin* (c. 1960-1965)

My grandfather would tell me stories about China before and after the Communist Revolution of 1949. Every month he would bring home a copy of *China Today*, an illustrated publication glorifying life in Mao Zedong's China. Chen Zhen could have been one of those children featured in *China Today* whom I had related to as a boy. It was difficult for me to articulate why, but as I walked towards Chen's apartment I sensed an opportunity to know myself better through another.

I arrived on Chen's street but had difficulty locating his apartment. I couldn't find the apartment number, for no number existed on his door. Or, perhaps, there was a number, only I couldn't find it. It was only after Chen came out into the courtyard of his complex that his home was revealed. In hindsight, the absence of a number pointed to a kind of dislocation of location, a home without an address. Chen explored this sense of dislocated habitation in much of his work.

Image: *Maison Portable* (2000)

Maison Portable (2000) takes the form of a work that is simultaneously a cradle, a cage, a wagon, a playpen, a Chinese sedan, and a prison. Constructed mainly out of wood and supported by four wheels with handles at either end, the interior is filled with melted red candles that form an anthropomorphic shape lying in repose. The caravan-like appearance of the work suggests mobility. And the viewer is invited to speculate on the future course this enclosed figure will take.

Describing *Maison Portable*, Chen wrote, 'The house can be a utopian space, virtual, immaterial, spiritual, a space "between." This is why the real house has no address. I am a "homeless person" and even Paris, where I have been living for fifteen years, is just a stopover for me.' Of course, Chen did have a fixed address and was not homeless in the destitute sense. He didn't identify himself as a nomad, a figure of great currency in the art world embodying the flows and distributions of migration and power. Indeed, there is an ambiguous parallelism with the contemporary art world's equation of the artist as nomad. Artists today are increasingly called upon to represent particular ethnic communities of which they may be a part. One of the potential problems with this is the reification of essentialised ethnic identities that contradict the increasing levels of transnational privilege and mobility that many artists working today enjoy. Chen negotiated this contradiction by constructing the experiences of 'homelessness' developed by ancient Chinese philosophers such as Shen Tao and Lao Tzu. The former famously advocated that one should 'abandon knowledge and discard self' in order to experience a life unencumbered by those conventions produced in the service of the social order. Lao Tzu claimed that:

When all beneath heaven is your self in renown
you trust yourself to all beneath heaven,
and when all beneath heaven is your self in love
you dwell throughout all beneath heaven.

This passage describes an unanchored state where the self is located 'all beneath heaven' and has the capacity to open up to the world.

The *Tao Te Ching* or *The Classic of the Way of Virtue* (c. 600 BC) is attributed to Lao Tzu, record keeper of the Imperial Library during the Zhou Dynasty. Comprised of paradoxical poems, the *Tao Te Ching* is a literature of metaphysical teachings emphasising the contingency and continuity of all that comes to pass in the world. The *Tao* is a Principle or Way, which represents 'unimpeded harmony' and is everywhere and in everything. It is not something imposed from without, but something that requires discovery from within:

It is we who need to discover that Way (Tao), which is immanent in all aspects of the world, not a rule imposed from without; and we need to fit into it, letting things take their course, not exerting ourselves in opposition to it by trying to bend things to our will.

One must give oneself over to the world and the contingencies of existence. But it was necessary to maintain an ethical life. Throughout his career, Chen spoke about finding love in one's relationship to the world, a love that can only be found upon the forsaking of self-love. Chen's notion of a surrender of the self is not meant to function as a means of transcendence but rather as a way to challenge us to revise our notions of identity and to think of ourselves differently, away from processes of individual definition with its inherent inflexibility against collective memory and its focus on self-affirmation.

When I met Chen for the first time, he shook my hand warmly with both hands. I immediately felt a connection. At first I felt awkward about not being able to converse in Mandarin, but unlike others who have questioned and even ridiculed me for this deficiency, Chen accepted me for who I am. He understood the historical reasons why my Mandarin-speaking mother decided that my brother and I learn Cantonese and English rather than Mandarin. When I was growing up, Mandarin was not spoken in Vancouver's Chinatown. Almost all of the Chinese inhabiting the city at that time had emigrated from Guangdong Province in the South of China where the Cantonese dialect is favoured.

Our dinner conversation kept returning to the topics of travel and identity. Chen's ideas about travel were more complicated than the metaphor of the nomad, that boundary-defying muse of so much contemporary art theory. He was more interested in thinking about acts of passage and the laws of the immigrant. For Chen, passage bears moral weight and historical anchoring, perhaps akin to Confucius' regard for China's ancient past. Confucius saw the past as a point of perpetual return for understanding the present. As he would say, 'Study the past as if you would define the future.'

The intertwining of diachronic and synchronic time is a salient thread in Chen Zhen's art. So many of his works use materials that are in themselves full of time. The layering of time is powerfully conveyed in his extensive use of natural materials such as earth, iron, wood, ceramic, foodstuffs, candles and cotton clothing. All of these materials refer to the lived world that they once occupied.

Image: *Chair of Nirvana* (1997)

In *Chair of Nirvana* (1997), several chairs are tied together to form a latticed dome over a cradle base. The assemblage of weathered chairs constitutes a present community but makes reference to past lives. The title of the work calls up a third temporality, that of eternal time. Chen's work also often invokes ideas of suspension and states of liminality. Like *Chairs of Nirvana*, many of his installations employ materials that suspend or elevate other materials. String, rope, and steel are used to render liminal everyday objects so that they are given new orientations and meanings. Chairs are often made to hover in air, their physical injuries accompanied by a sense of transcendental endowment. Chen salvages them, imbues them with love and sets them on a new path.



Image: *Round Table* (1995)

In *Round Table* (1995) chairs from five continents are brought together to form a new structure that evokes the round dining tables of Chinese banquets and restaurants, but the familiarity of the tables and chairs is rendered strange by the ways in which they have been embedded into one another and stripped of their original function. In his discussion of the table that appears in Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867), Jacques Derrida states:

'This table has been worn down, exploited, over-exploited, or else set-aside, no longer in use, in antique shops or auction rooms. The thing is at once set aside and beside itself. One no longer knows, beneath the hermeneutic patina, what this piece of wood, whose example suddenly looms up, is good for and what it is worth.'

Chen's table looms up, but in a different way. It is not a table by itself, but altered so that a series of paradoxical significations emerge.

In other works Chen employs a strategy of supplementation in order to draw attention to paradoxes existing in the relationship between life and death. The supplement, according to Derrida, 'comes to an aid of something original or natural.' The supplement is a device dependant on ambiguity. What is supplementary can always be interpreted in two ways. Image: *Un monde accroché/detaché* (1990)

In *Un monde accroché/detaché* (1990), ninety-nine found objects of varying scale, degraded of their use-value and recuperated from abandonment, are conjoined onto the branches and trunks of a burnt forest outside of Paris. The denatured landscape is given visual and symbolic sustenance by the affecting supplementation of everyday objects. The viewer is confronted with a strange and haunted landscape that embodies the crossover between the real and the unreal, on the one hand, and completion and depletion, on the other. In the reanimation of the forest through supplementation, the objects function as a *memento mori* of that space. Chen and his wife, the artist Xu Min, made a wonderful meal. I recall Chen deftly handling the wok for one of the dishes. He told me of his desire to become a doctor of Chinese medicine so that he could heal himself from the life-threatening disease that scourged his body. We talked at length about health and the spiritual dimensions of life. I recall thinking about how spiritual Chen was in terms of his affinities to Chinese ontological precepts. I remember thinking Chen was not a man in search of wholeness but one who understood the world as a whole, no matter how deficient and injurious the world may be.

The body, health and medicine are syncretic terms in Chen's art. As in the concept of the yin and yang, the condition of illness contains within it the potential of health and well being, just as the reverse is also true. At one point during the evening Chen asked me if I had suffered illness or if there had been any illness in my family. I did not find the questions intrusive in the least. On the contrary, his caring curiosity was reassuring and caused me to think about my existence at that moment. It also made me think about my mother, who had died years before of leukaemia, and my sister, who had never been given the chance to grow up.

Chen shared with me his experiences of illness. He told me that many members of his family were doctors and he spoke convincingly of the possibility of healing himself. This was conveyed with a modesty that struck me. I sensed his belief that nothing in life was self-evident and that one had no choice but to give oneself over to life at every moment of being. Chen wrote, 'I dream of discovering how the immune system is "a second brain," and how we can cure by being attentive to everyday experience.' He claimed, 'When one's body becomes a kind of laboratory, a source of imagination and experiment, the process of life transforms itself into art.' This statement is a reminder of the profound interconnectedness of art and life that complicates the Western art-historical ideal of the sublimation of art into life as a reconciliation of two estranged terms. For Chen, every day meant taking medications that let him 'keep a cool head' and made him 'less proud.' He asserted that the project of becoming a doctor would be a synthesis of his life and the making of art.



Image: *Six Roots* (2000)

Six Roots (2000) takes the form of an allegory comprised of seven installations in six parts. The title refers to a Buddhist expression describing the main senses of our body. Chen borrowed this Buddhist theme to consider the 'six stages of life' and the many contradictory aspects of human behaviour. The themes of birth, childhood, conflict, suffering, memory, and death-rebirth are presented. Significantly, death is not presented as the end stage, but rather the setting for a transcendental re-emergence in life. Conflict and suffering and the memory of them express the ineluctability of life in the here and now. The acknowledgement of conflict and suffering was but the first step in effecting their respective conclusions. *Six Roots* asks us to consider the following questions: How does memory operate in relation to a reordered life where there is disjuncture between past experiences and present realities? What is rebirth in the context of a haunted inner life and an exterior that may be deeply discordant with the values of one's memories? And given the circularity of death and rebirth, are exile, displacement and loss permanent symptoms of identity creation and recreation? For Chen, harmony and reconciliation are ambiguous terms, effected by the passage of time and the accumulation of wounds.

Chen's warmth and compassion seemed without end. The puffiness of his countenance caused by cortisone treatment gave him a Buddhist aura. He was curious about what it was like for me to be Chinese and yet born and raised outside of China. He told me that he had a sister living in Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver. He was fascinated with the way in which Vancouver's sizable Chinese population played an important role in terms of the city's social politics.

I told him that it was not always this way and that the Chinese in Canada had been unable to vote in national elections until 1947 and in the province of British Columbia until 1949. Canadian immigration laws made a special case of the Chinese in the Chinese Exclusion Act, which placed a head tax on all immigrants from China. This head tax effectively eliminated the immigration of Chinese women and children and was combined with laws that made it illegal for white women to work for Chinese-owned businesses, namely restaurants and laundries. Several generations of Chinese men, integral to the building of the Canadian nation, died without ever re-establishing long-severed familial ties.

Image: Unidentified Chinese cook at Skeena River in British Columbia (c. 1890)

Vancouver's Chinatown is one of the oldest districts in the city.



Image: A view of Vancouver's Chinatown today

By contrast, Paris' Chinatown lies at some distance from the historical centre of the city. Today, the Chinese in Vancouver don't only reside in Chinatown but all over the city.

This awareness, knowing that the unity of different peoples was possible, seemed to give Chen satisfaction. For him, ethnicity was a category of mediation existing between groups that can only function in the presence of more than one group. One of ethnicity's fundamental properties is the articulation between self and other. Chen's reference to Chineseness in his work emanated from his own relationship to the world as an ethnically Chinese man. Stuart Hall has emphasised the necessity of recognising that the figure of the migrant 'comes out of particular histories and cultures and that everyone speaks from positions within the global distribution of power.'

It is important to consider the ways in which Chen modulated the terms of migration and ethnicity without reducing them to reified expressions. Rather, his modulation is highly situational and relational and allows for an examination of social identity in multitudinous layers. Much of Chen's art is an expression of how ethnicity is a contingent rather than closed concept. The presence of subjectivity sits in complex fashion next to the traditional Chinese concept of ontology, a theory of being that is founded centrally on a heterogeneous synergy of being revolving around a yin-yang dialectic of bipolarity that is abounding with philosophical agonisms. At the heart of Chen's art lies the idea of self-actualisation, an idea that Chinese poet Lu Xun deals with in his book *Diary of a Madman* (1918) in which he equates China's national turpitude in the early twentieth century with the repression of the individual. For Chen, the experience of ethnicity is a constantly changing process.

Image: *Precipitous Parturition* (1999)

In *Precipitous Parturition* (1999) numerous bicycle frames and tyres are assembled so that they are suspended on rafters to appear as a 'dragon-snake giving birth to countless toy cars painted in black.' The idea for the work emerged from the common remark regarding China's transformation from a nation of bicycles to a nation of automobiles. The celestial origin of the dragon is vetted through the prism of actuality as there is no masking the constituent parts of its construction and the support system of the exhibition space rafters. Signifiers of Chinese identity in the image of the bicycle and the dragon are conflated. The dragon is an ancient symbol of Chinese culture, while the bicycle is a marker of Maoist modernity with its links to social utopia. The toy cars in the installation prosecute an ambiguous role as both natal and parasitic, appearing as an army of insect-like vehicles that move from the symbolic space of the bicycle-dragon into the real space of the exhibition space. As a symbol of power and divinity, the dragon is swarmed by the little cars and there is a sense of foreboding that the dragon itself could be destroyed by the cars it engendered. Past, present, and future are braided together in a complex and tension-filled entanglement, yet the materials employed and the forms produced do not only evoke the problem of modernity confronted by China, for they are echoed in other parts of the developing world.

Chen was curious about the life of the Chinese who had immigrated to British Columbia in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Image: Chinese labourers working on the Canadian Pacific Railway, c. 1880-1890. Copyright: Library and Archives Canada

I told him about my grandfather, who arrived in Vancouver in 1907. He was one of the last of the coolie immigrants brought over to Canada to work on the construction of the Canadian railway. I told Chen that my grandfather never forgave me for accepting student summer employment with Via Rail, a government-run passenger rail service that took visitors to the Rocky Mountains. My grandfather saw my action as a personal betrayal. It was not fair of him, but in light of his experiences while building the railway, it was understandable. At that point, I vividly recall Chen mentioning something about the violence of migration. He said that migration imparts a violence that goes beyond the ideological inscription of social othering and stigmatisation. He said that it has the ability to penetrate deeply into the recesses of the individual's physical body, to the cellular level of mnemonic registration.

Image: *La digestion perpétuelle* (1995)

Chen's idea of the migrant as both an eschatological and regenerating subject is a thread that courses through much of his art. In *La digestion perpétuelle* (1995), new and used Chinese artefacts such as abacuses, mah-jong tiles, electric fans, scales, vases and porcelain dishes are partitioned in loose groupings within a food turntable, or 'lazy susan,' mounted on a dining table surrounded by traditional Chinese chairs. The food turntable is a feature of many Chinese

banquet tables. Used here, it is a device that invites the viewer to symbolically partake of the objects in an eternal cycle of bodily processing and maceration.

Image: *Field of Waste* (1994)

Such ideas recur in *Field of Waste* (1994), where the supplementary binary of degeneration and regeneration form the axial points of an installation consisting of several garments sewn together and interspersed and Chinese and American flags laid out on the floor. The assemblage of clothing and flags takes the shape of a wedge that pierces a mound of charred newspapers resembling coal. Sewing machines similar to those found in sweatshops today are found at the base of the wedge. The two components interact dialectically, producing an ambiguity in terms of which is devouring the other.

Often overlooked in writings on Chen's work is the particularised sharp political content that imbues his art. The politics in Chen's art operates as a re-imagining of community that considers the specificities of China, and by implication, the developing world's relationship to modernity. It is a politics articulated in terms both concise and poetic. *Field of Waste* is very much an expression of anguish relating to the plight sweatshop worker in the garment factory, many of whom are Chinese. According to Chen, the work,

'Introduces *burning* and *sewing* as the main plastic method and the way of transformation. The first is revolutionary, destructive and chaotic, while the second is more constructive, re-organizing and crossbreeding. The sewing process as a "plastic language" links very closely with the fact that the sweatshop was, and still is one of main methods of survival for Chinese immigration.'

As someone who is a beneficiary of the labours of the sweatshop—my mother, aunts and uncles all worked and continue to work in sweatshops—Chen's invocation of politics within the complex forms of his art continue to affect me in a profound way. Very early on in my life I became aware of the experience of the migrant in terms of social hardship and penury. I witnessed the psychic and physical damage caused by economic and racial exploitation.

In spite of the painful realities that often accompany the experience of migration, we need to acknowledge the shifting definition of the migrant in order to accept all that may be possible in terms of empowering the individual we define as a migrant. Salman Rushdie has written extensively on this subject:

'The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves.'

Gayatri Spivak's theory of 'strategic essentialism' is that which enables diasporic identifications with a specific ethnicity—such as Chineseness—to carry some original cultural identity with the idea of a return home, despite identity being marked by hybridity rendering home a highly problematised site of desire. It seems to me that this contradiction is one of the foremost guiding principles of Chen's art. He coined the term 'transexperiences' to articulate 'the complex life experiences of leaving one's native place and going from one place to another in one's life.' For Chen, leaving one's native place for another place implied a concomitant passing through this life to whatever may follow. For Chen, illness was a succour for his creativity and the yin-yang dualisms of life and death, degeneration and regeneration were dialectical processes, processes that Chen would diagnose through his art.

Towards the end of our dinner I felt a strong bond with Chen that carried far beyond our common ethnic heritage. During a period of disillusionment, he reminded me of the need to continually form and express new connections in terms of one's art, but especially in terms of the ways in which one inhabits the world. Above all, I think Chen's art was about a questioning of how one lives a life of love and purpose, love for the world and purpose in terms of one's gift to the world. As I was about to leave his apartment that evening I thanked Chen Zhen and Xu Min for the delicious meal that they had prepared for me. Chen gave me strength that day. I knew that I wanted to see him again, if only for the selfish reason of feeding off his passion. I knew that I had met someone special. As I walked out of his apartment into the Parisian air, I recall everything seeming that much more vivid and feeling grateful for all that I saw around me.

Collection/Collective: Tracing the Southeast Asian Contemporary

Patrick D. Flores

In Bangkok in the nineteenth century, the Thai king of the Chakri dynasty Chulalongkorn reserved a place in the royal palace for a museum he called *phrabas phiphitaphan*, or 'a tour of various materials'⁷⁸ and in the early part of the twentieth century, the American anthropologist, census-taker and museum-maker Dean Worcester went around the islands in the Philippines to document ethnicity. These forays found affinity with the toil of explorer Sir Stamford Raffles, who hoarded his own share of things as recounted by an attentive observer: 'He kept four persons on wages, each in his peculiar department; one to go to the forests in search of various kinds of flowers, fungi, pulp and such like products. Another he sent to collect all kinds of flies, grasshoppers, centipedes, bees, scorpions.'⁷⁹

The intersection between the amassing of objects and people through the devices of the Wunderkammer and anthropometry is well known in the reconnaissance discourse, something that ultimately leads us to ponder the scale of the colonial in relation to the scale of the modern, the monument of empire and the miniature of periphery. In the long term, this act of rendering the world picturesque and therefore collectible may be coincident with the act of representation of both the self and the state, as can be gleaned in the efforts of the Thai king, the American social scientist and the British discoverer. The subject who is spoken for in the fullness of time internalises this longing to be part of the representation of the modern and beyond the auspice of the colony or the kingdom. Raden Saleh's supposed self-portrait at the Rijksmuseum attests to this aspiration in which the ethnographic and the exotic, inscribed in the image of a Javanese partaking of Europe self-consciously, craft the conditions of appearance and possession: to be enchanted, to transfigure and finally to be had. The Filipino National Hero José Rizal would call this kind of bedevilling or bewitching, *el demonio de las comparaciones*, the spell of recollection, or in the translation of the historian Benedict Anderson, the spectre of comparisons.⁸⁰

The post-war republics of Southeast Asia, after consolidating their nation-states in the wake of post-colonial revolutions against European powers and in the shadow of the Cold War, invested in nation-building initiatives, alongside industrialisation and modernisation, in which the production of official culture was central. Exemplary of these exercises were the programmes implemented by Suharto in Indonesia and by Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. The so-called strongman rule in these countries created a co-ordinated system of cultural infrastructure revolving around nationalism and a national civilisation. In Indonesia, the anti-Dutch hero Sukarno began this agenda with commemorative statuary in Jakarta that was pursued by the successor Suharto. In Manila, Imelda Marcos undertook an extensive public-works project, reclaiming a large part of Manila Bay and building a complex of edifices for culture and world-class events like the Miss Universe pageant in 1974 and the International

⁷⁸ Caverlee, Cary. 2000. 'In the Image of the King: Two Photographs from Nineteenth-Century Siam.' *Studies in Southeast Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*. Nora A. Taylor (ed.). New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, p. 132.

⁷⁹ Liu, Gretchen. 1987. *One Hundred Years of the National Museum*. Singapore: National Museum, p. 15.

⁸⁰ Rizal, José. 1996. *Noli Me Tangere*. Ma. Soledad Lacson-Loacin (trans.). Manila: Bookmark, p. 67.

Monetary Fund-World Bank meetings in 1976. The iconic monument of this vision is the Cultural Center of the Philippines, which advanced the cultural policy of the government to foster an aesthetic form at once internationalist and nativist. In this elaborate measure, Suharto and Marcos envisioned the multitude of islands and ethnicities as a unity under the paternalist aegis of development. To condense such vastness into an impossible singularity, among other endeavours in the realm of language and culture they built miniature archipelagos in veritable theme parks called Nayong Pilipino (Philippine Village) and Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park).⁸¹

This totalising impulse was resisted, alongside the orthodoxy of the art academy, a resistance that may be referenced in the manifestos of such artist coterie as the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (Indonesian New Art Movement) and the Kaisahan (Solidarity) in 1975 and 1976 respectively. The nucleus of such formation had deep roots in the early part of the twentieth century. The Sanggar (workshop) in Indonesia was a critical community in which artists met and discussed art. The Persagi (Union of Painters) led by Sudjojono in 1938 advocated a nationalist style 'for the people' in a critique of what was perceived as the idealisation of the locale, or what was dismissed as *Mooi Indië* (the beautiful, if not corrupted, Indies). This mode of gathering proved to be so potent a force that it would be drawn to ideological allegiance as in the case of Lekra (Organization of People's Culture), another incarnation of the workshop that was known to have had sympathies with socialism, having been conceived at the behest of the Communist Party in the fifties during Sukarno's time. This political lineage would be stigmatised by the Suharto regime leading to what an art historian has called the 'depoliticisation' of art in the seventies; its 'repoliticisation'⁸² through the Gerakan may have effected a break between the modern and the contemporary and sought, as the manifesto contended, 'to ensure the sustainability of culture' in which 'it is the artist's calling to offer a spiritual direction based on humanitarian values and oriented towards social, cultural, political and economic realities.'⁸³ An emblematic work from this period is Jim Supangkat's figure of Ken Dedes, revered queen of the Rajasa dynasty who ruled Java from the Singhasari to the Majapahit era. Cast in chalky plaster, the face of Ken Dedes, who is chronicled to have exuded stunning beauty and wisdom that men killed for, is delineated cosmetically, primed with fiery red lipstick. The torso is painted on a pedestal that is the surface on which her lower body appears, breasts uncovered, dressed in tight denim trousers, unzipped to reveal wisps of pubic hair. The work is fragmented: a bust that alludes to the stone statuary of a Southeast Asian empire to which the Suharto government pretended for reasons of pedigree and the minimal plinth that contains the rest of the stripped corpus including the blue jeans and unshod feet, which may imply urban and contemporary mores. This work sparked outrage in the world's most populous Islamic nation.

In the Philippines, the social realist movement had links to the ideology of the armed revolution, which had appropriated Maoist pedagogy in its strategy and tactics. In the field of

⁸¹ See Kusno, Abidin. 2000. *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture and Political Culture in Indonesia*. London: Routledge and Lico, Gerard. 2003. *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth and Marcos State Architecture*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press.

⁸² Supangkat, Jim. 1997. *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*. Jakarta: Indonesian Fine Arts Foundation.

⁸³ Sumartono. 2001. 'The Role of Power in Contemporary Yogyakarta Art.' *Outlet: Yogyakarta Within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*. Jogjakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, p. 23.

art, it looked to Mao Zedong's doctrine on culture, specifically to his description of the people's new culture as national, scientific, and mass in a 1940 article titled 'The Culture of New Democracy.' The New People's Army, the armed organisation of the socialist movement, soldiers on to this day, making it one of the few remaining revolutions in the world. Perhaps it is in this context that the contingency of the national allegory becomes salient. The manifesto drawn up in the seventies by Filipino artists with the same ideological inclinations stated: 'We believe that national identity is not to be found in a nostalgic love of the past or an idealized view of our traditions and history. It cannot be achieved by using the common symbols of our national experience without understanding the reality that lies within them.'⁸⁴ An early work consisted of a reinterpretation of Juan Luna's nineteenth-century painting *Spoliarium*, which was awarded a gold prize at the Madrid Exposition of Fine Arts in 1884, depicting the spoliarium, the cellar of the Roman coliseum where gladiators were despoiled and burned in the furnace. At the time, the Filipino revolutionaries considered it an allegory of the colonial condition under Spain, an interpretation pursued by the latter-day social realists to portray the trifecta of inequity: American imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism and feudalism.

These aforementioned instances carve the political in sharp relief, animating the production of art and its complicity with the people and social transformation. Surely such an engagement with the political would render art prone to the instrumentalisation of ideology, something that a cognitive mapping of the totality of radical change requires in contrast with the equally radical particularities of the subjective and the aesthetic?

The idea of a coherent tradition and its vitiation by singular power and sometimes co-extensively with the 'West' was a notion in play in this political struggle. Art collectives like the Dharma Group in 1971 and The Artists Front of Thailand in 1974 came to the fore in the context of the bloody struggle between civil society and the military government of the period in Thailand. Pratuang Emjaroen's *Dharma and Adharma* (1973-1974) exudes the disquiet of the time intuiting the 1973 turbulence (reprinted in 1976 and 1992) in Bangkok by way of Buddhism: *dharma* (truth, righteousness, justice) and *adharma* (evil, wrong, injustice, immorality). As the artist himself declared: 'I wanted to capture the feeling of confusion, shock and horror ...The face of Buddha is symbolic of Thai people who have been hurt; his eyes are closed, tears are streaming, bullet holes are shot across his face.'⁸⁵

It is important to note that this surrealist inclination was part of the more fulsome syntax of the neo-traditional aesthetic of Thai mural painting, as social transformation may have also meant a return to traditional values of Thai folk culture and Buddhism, supposedly untainted by the perversion of the modern or the metropolitan. The neo-traditional in Thailand dwelt on the notion of Thainess in a political register; this identity as an essence or life-force was decisively politicised because it dared to interrogate the basis of and longing for art itself. The fine arts school Silpakorn, founded by the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci, set up the Department of Thai Art in 1977 in the midst of the internecine upheavals.

⁸⁴ Guillermo, Alice. 2001. *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970-1990*. Manila: University of the Philippines, p. 243.

⁸⁵ See Apinan Poshyananda. 1992. *Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 162. See also Clark, John. 1998. *Modern Asian Art*. Sydney: Craftsman House.

In the same season (1974), Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa, styling themselves as 'mystical conceptualists,' curated an exhibition in Kuala Lumpur of 'jointly initiated experiences' they called *Towards a Mystical Reality*, with a manifesto that elaborated on a different mode of perceiving reality beyond the pale of the West. According to them: 'It is our contention that there are alternate ways of approaching reality and the western empirical and humanistic viewpoints are not the only valid ones there are.'⁸⁶ Piyadasa was likewise staunchly opposed to the reduction of Malaysian subjectivity to a pan-Islamic ecumenism, actively engaged in the critique of the conflation of ethnicity with faith. One work comments on the ethnic riots between the Malays and the Chinese in 1969, while others reconceptualise art through pieces bearing texts like: 'Why did the Chinese artist refuse to halt reality in a single instance of time?' and 'Art works do not exist in time, they have entry points.'

The episode of modernity in Southeast Asia is, therefore, rooted in such a sequence of incidents. The promise of post-colonial critique within a broader dialectic of liberation was conceived in democratic movements, activism and community. This collective ethic may be key in our understanding of the interdisciplinary, collaborative, cooperative and social engagement in contemporary art in Southeast Asia that challenges the authority of collections in the form of the history of art and the history of nation.

We can analyse this conjuncture as co-ordinated along two nodal points: the artist-curator and the artist collective. Four conceptualist artists turned curators were crucial in this project, investing in the curatorial, and by extension, museological authority to critique the museum, redeem it as a productive site and prepare the ground for its mutations: the biennale, the national pavilion, the cultural centre. Jim Supangkat in Indonesia, Redza Piyadasa in Malaysia, Raymundo Albano in the Philippines and Apinan Poshyananda in Thailand acted as virtuosos and tricksters of sorts, re-engineering the modern and confronting tradition, nationalism and internationalism, development and democracy, exoticism and cosmopolitanisation. They demonstrated the will to be part of the world in terms that poached on the Western avant-garde and entitled themselves to be conceptually different in the global sense. Two cases may be cited. In 1981 Raymundo Albano, curator of Imelda's Cultural Center of the Philippines, wrote a seminal essay on installation, claiming that 'if one were to consider a medium's intimacy to folk patterns, installations are natural-born as against the alien intrusion of a two-dimensional western object like a painting.'⁸⁷ And in 2003 Apinan Poshyananda, writing in the catalogue of the first Thai Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which he commissioned and curated (and at the opening of which Thai food was served, massages were given and Thai women in traditional attire entertained), offered a playful take on contemporary art: 'The journey from the canals in Bangkok to Venice evokes a time dislocation. Thai artists in traditional and contemporary attire are like art pilgrims whose mission is to find their space on the international art arena (...) They entertain by offering national identities and exotic differences to cultural consumers who experience cultural goods at the first Thai pavilion in Venice.'⁸⁸ In

⁸⁶ Piyadasa, Redza. 1974. *Towards a Mystical Reality: A Documentation of Jointly Initiated Experiences by Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa*. Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Albano, Raymundo. 1981. 'Installations: A Case for Hangings,' in *Philippine Art Supplement 2*, no. 1, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Apinan Poshyananda. 2003. 'Reverie and Phantasm in the Epoch of Global Trauma.' *Thai Pavilion: La Biennale di Venezia, Italia, 2003*. Bangkok: Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, p. 63.

these texts, the wunderkind artist-curator, who made the art and also historicised it, measures the power of culture and the sociality that is evoked as a source of distinction as well as the excess of the exotic. The artistic and curatorial work of these four figures had been presented in two exhibitions with shared concerns: *Telah Terbit* at the Singapore Art Museum in 2006 and *Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator* in 2008 at the Gwangju Biennale. It may be instructive for us to regard their at once clumsy and clever instantiations as improvisations from 'within,' variations of co-operations with structures like museums of modern and contemporary art and pre-figurations of eccentric practice. In an assessment of its history, a museum in Barcelona has framed its own experiments as 'memories of a possible future (that) offer prototypes, cases and experiences of models or fragile, temporary, deterritorialized institutional modulations that have interiorized the demands of various waves of institutional critique (...) starting points for a new type of radically democratic institutionality.'⁸⁹

Beyond this orbit of artist-curator lie the more inchoate movements of artists coming together to form their own contexts like the Chiang Mai Social Installation in Northern Thailand, the Artist's Village in Singapore, Taring Padi, Apotik Komik, and Ruang Mes 56 in Jogjakarta, Ruangrupa in Jakarta, and Tutok in Manila, among others. Prominent curators who theorise on these collective instincts have spun captivating terms like relationality and altermodernity and encompass these tendencies in their careers as global mediators of the contemporary. In a meeting of organisations of this bent in Indonesia in 2004, Charles Esche's observations are telling. After going around the villages north of Jogjakarta, he would be moved to speak of a terrain 'largely unconceptualized by western contemporary art,' and according to him the workshop *Fixing the Bridge* may have created the 'germ of a rural proposition. By paying more attention to the village in Europe, perhaps through a process of agonistic workshops between non-urban locations across the world, we might engage in a type of globalization that recognizes and seeks to avoid globalization's evil intent, at least on the micro-level of individuals and small communities that culture can effectively address.'⁹⁰ Equally interesting are the comments of Claire Bishop, who has figured notably in the debates on the collaborative aesthetic, on The Land project in Chiang Mai initiated by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Letchaiprasert. Bishop describes Thailand as 'the "spiritual home" of relational art' and states that The Land is 'one of the most frequently cited examples of a socially engaged "relational" project' by curators like Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birbaum. After her visit, she felt that The Land was falling into a state of entropy, which she curiously found endearing: 'Tobias Rehberger's pavilion was made with Swedish wood for a show at the Moderna Museet, and is now rotting in the tropical climate. Philippe Parreno's Battery House, which is supposed to generate its own electricity through an "elephant plug," has never worked. The building was supposed to fulfill Kamin's request for a meditation hall, but the concrete floor is curved, and punctuated by many struts, and cannot be used for this purpose. The ratio of water to land on the farm is organized according to the principles of a Buddhist agriculturalist, Chaloui

⁸⁹ Ribalta, Jorge. 'Experiments in a New Institutionalism.' *Relational Objects: MACBA Collection 2002-2007*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, p. 264,

⁹⁰ Esche, Charles. 2004. 'Agonism and Bilaterality.' *Fixing the Bridge*. Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, p. 9.

Kaewkong, but this too isn't really working: the water is stagnant rather than flowing. Ironically, all these "failures" really endeared the project to me.⁹¹

This presentation foregrounds the fact that post-colonial critique is fundamental in the knowledge of the contemporary and the history of global art and that forms of sociality emerge from this as agencies, as expressed by artist-curators and artist communities in a continuum of impulses and disruptions within the democratic desires of people and nation-states. I would like to end with two occasions of reflection in relation to the formation of the collective, whether it be the 'collection' of art representing culture or the groups of artists in Southeast Asia mediating the geopolitical.

First, there is the need for a national art gallery in a time marked by commentators as post-nation and post-museum. The government of Singapore is currently working toward the largest museum project in the region that seeks to collect, exhibit and circulate Southeast Asian art. In an age of world art history or the history of global art, what might it mean to speak of national art histories that stem from nineteenth-century Realism and culminate in Post-Impressionism and the School of Paris supposedly in an Asian century? At a time of brisk auction sales and the flourishing of private collections of contemporary art and active commissioning of art in the biennale system, of which the Singapore Biennale is exceptional in the region, how does a collection weave a discourse of the contemporary that is distinct from the discourse of the market and the biennale? Or is the urge for a distinction untenable and immaterial? Does a national art gallery in Southeast Asia mimic the structure of modernism and museology in the West at the expense of its equivalent modernity? How does it grapple with the belatedness of this gesture as well as with the lateness of the modality of the museum of modern art through a critique of the curatorial authority that was fundamental in the history of rights and redemptions in Southeast Asia? How does it respond to a contemporary that importunes the modern to cede its ontology but without which it may lose its potency as an interventional proposition?

The latter question leads to the second point of reflection, which is related to the ties between the modern and the contemporary. I was in the United States recently to study how museums across the country curate these rubrics of art, trying to crack both the historiographic and museographic codes of the shift, if these are ever charted or made to appear self-evident as a natural progression. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, for instance, rests on its stature as the consummate normative museum of modernism, that construes modernism as metabolic and self-renewing, seemingly an immovable object that not only withstands the irresistible force of the contemporary but assimilates it, spurred by the dynamic work of its interdisciplinary curatorium and collection, and in the present by its explorations of the modern in Japan, Brazil and Eastern Europe. Pioneer curator John Elderfield describes the mission of the museum as 'the collecting of both modern and contemporary art. However, Alfred Barr used the word *modern* not to describe precontemporary art, but rather an aspect of contemporary art, one that suggested the progressive, original and challenging rather than

⁹¹ Roche, Jennifer. 2006. 'Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop.' Community Art Network, n.p.

the safe and academic which would naturally be included in the supine neutrality of the term “contemporary.”⁹² Elderfield continues that ‘if modern art did mean something different from contemporary art, its most recent manifestation, then those founding works would be needed for as long as modern art existed, precisely because, and to the extent that, those founding works were never completely assimilated but continued, however distantly, to offer an example. Indeed, that would be (and remains) the test of whether modern art did (and does) continue to exist.’⁹³

This notion has implications in how it looks at Southeast Asia in the exhibition of Vietnamese artist Din Q Le’s helicopter work in the contemporary section of the museum that involves projected scenes of war and interviews with present-day Vietnamese recollecting the trauma. This lineage of integration of Southeast Asia into the narrative of modernism may be inflected by an earlier collection of the MoMa of Khmer Rouge photographs of Pol Pot’s photographer, who was sent to Shanghai to train, of Cambodians right before their execution and their exhibition as photographic art, prompting the theorist Thierry de Duve to write an essay on the vexing deed of disseminating art in the face of what he calls “radical evil.”⁹⁴ Inherent in the subjects of these museum presentations is the sociality that underlies their urgency: of people ruined by war and living to tell the tale in a museum in America, province of imperialism and the Cold War that substantially shaped Vietnam and Cambodia and the rest of Southeast Asia. And so here we come again to the critical intersection of the collection and the collective, the institution and the public sphere of art at home or in the diaspora, of subjectivities and the objects typifying the latter and hopefully awakening the communities outside the museum that have a stake in the imagination of what it means to be Vietnamese and Cambodian.

What this paper seeks to foreground are the formative conditions of what may appear as the singular, monolithic museum of modern art. It argues that the nature and history of the collection/collective mediates a post-colonial response and crafts techniques of a quick-change, polytropic modernity. The production of objects and the formation of subjects that fall under the category of the modern would find their context in the critique of this coloniality and the conception of the ‘political’ in the search for emancipation at a time of kindred struggles in Europe, the Americas and Africa for certain inalienable freedoms.⁹⁵ However the energies of this volatility are tracked, what is reassuring is the history of a robust sociality that is critically inherent in the formative nature of art in Southeast Asia. The challenge for the storied museum that houses its restive memory is to cut deep into itself and open up another vein of its always contemporary origins.

⁹² Elderfield, John. 2004. ‘The Front Door to Understanding.’ *Modern Painting and Sculpture 1800 to the Present at the Museum of Modern Art*. John Elderfield (ed.). New York: Museum of Modern Art, p. 12.

⁹³ Elderfield 2004, p. 22.

⁹⁴ De Duve, Thierry. 2007. ‘Art in the Face of Radical Evil.’ International Congress of Aesthetics 2007. Istanbul, n.p.

⁹⁵ Enwezor, Okwui. 2008. ‘Bio-Politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of “Truth” in Contemporary Art.’ *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art # 1*. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (eds.). Berlin: Sternberg Press.