



Mela*Books

CULTURAL MEMORY, MIGRATING MODERNITIES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES

edited by
Beatrice Ferrara

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MELA BOOKS 03 – RF 02 CULTURAL MEMORY, MIGRATING MODERNITIES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES

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Acknowledgments

This book grew out of the work of the Research Field “Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices,” led by Professor Iain Chambers (Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”) within the European project MeLa—European Museums in an age of Migrations. MeLa is a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded in 2011 by the European Commission under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities Programme (Seventh Framework Programme). Adopting the notion of “migration” as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world, MeLa reflects on the role of museums and heritage in the twenty-first century. The main objective of the MeLa project is to define innovative museum practices that reflect the challenges of the contemporary processes of globalization, mobility and migration. As people, objects, knowledge and information move at increasingly high rates, a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity is needed to facilitate mutual understanding and social cohesion. MeLa aims at empowering museums spaces, practices and policies with the task of building this identity. MeLa involves nine European partners—universities, museums, research institutes and a company—who will lead six Research Fields (RF) with a collaborative approach, and this book is designed to report on the preliminary findings of the first research phase of the RF02.

Preface

MeLa Research Field 02 is dedicated to the issues of “Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernities and Museum Practices.” It is led by the MeLa research group of the University of Naples “L’Orientale,” composed of Professors Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti, Marina De Chiara and Tiziana Terranova, and Drs Alessandra De Angelis, Beatrice Ferrara, Giulia Grechi and Mariangela Orabona. RF02 also benefits from collaborations between “L’Orientale” and the Politecnico di Milano, the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, the Universities of Newcastle and Glasgow, and the Royal College of Art in London.

This book presents an overview of the critical work carried out so far within the MeLa research group at “L’Orientale.” In addition, the book also features a number of articles emerging from work developed during the MeLa Brainstorming event “Museums, Migration, Memory and Citizenship,” held at PAN (Palazzo delle Arti) in Naples on March 14, 2012.

RF02’s investigations are fuelled by the critical space opened by Postcolonial and Cultural Studies. The RF aims at disseminating critical perspectives that contribute to a different comprehension of museums and archiving practices. These should respond to the challenge of rethinking museums as mobile and “heterotopic spaces,” rather than stable places of institutional memory. How to conceive of a “postcolonial museum” in the contemporary epoch of mass migrations, Internet and digital technologies? How to re-open the museum space, in order to transform it from a place of national identity and the unidimensional logic of multiculturalism to a site of contaminations, fluxes, border-crossings and migrating memories? How to consider this space, its practices and institutions in the light of the repressed histories, sounds, voices, images, memories, bodies, expression and cultures that the Occident has either denied or investigated as merely objects of traditional display practices? How to re-think memory and its means in the light of the dissonant, asynchronous and displaced memories coming to meet us from the unregistered present, and the future narration of contemporary migration? How do new media arts participate in the complex transformation of cultural art-

works? How to work towards new forms of archiving—“affective,” sensorial, sonic and fluid archives—even in conventional museum spaces? Focusing on the transformation of museums (meant as cultural spaces and processes rather than just physical places) into living archives through creation, participation, production and innovation also impacts on understandings of labour, precarity and associated subjectivities.

The following essays seek to engage with this emerging critical field from diverse angles and interests. Together they constitute, in both theoretical and empirical terms, an unfolding engagement along many fronts that are signalled by questions of memory, migration and modernity. Or rather, whose memory and modernity is represented and/or repressed; how and why does this occur? In this key, the debate on the contemporary museum, on its critical organisation and disciplinary procedures, on its identification of objects and memories, and its avoidance or negation of others, is transformed into a debate about modernity itself. Further, in pushing such inherited concepts as memory, history and the archive to the limit, it allows us to begin considering spatio-temporal relations that interrupt both the assumed linear consequentiality of “progress” and the possibility of registering further, invisible archives that are sustained without the physical support of objects and institutions: oralities, sounds, silences.

August 2012 — the MeLa Research Group at “L’Orientale”

Introduction



The Museum of Migrating Modernities

→ IAIN CHAMBERS

Iain Chambers is Professor of “Cultural and Postcolonial Studies” at the University of Naples “L’Orientale,” where he is Director of the Centre for Postcolonial Studies, and previously coordinated the PhD programme in “Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World.” He was a member of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, and he is particularly known for his interdisciplinary and intercultural work on music, popular and metropolitan cultures. More recently he has extended his work on interdisciplinary and intercultural analyses to the formation of the modern Mediterranean. He is leader of the MeLa Research Field “Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices.”

→ ABSTRACT

This essay considers the historical and cultural implications of the museum as a heterotopic space. In the light of Michel Foucault’s understanding of the disruptive and coeval nature of heterotopia, the representation of memory and history are critically evaluated in terms of movement, instability and the impetus of historical becoming. As a potential archive still to be registered and narrated it comes from the future. It provokes a counter-space to institutionalised understandings of modernity through privileging modernity as a migratory configuration and the structural repression of memories as its organising trope. This suggests a museum that is always under construction, able to punctuate inherited understandings of home, history and belonging. Here there emerges the challenge of accommodating other histories and memories, others... As such, the museum, as a heterotopic site of continuities and discontinuities, becomes the potential laboratory for an extendible citizenship and a democracy still to come.

PREVIOUS PAGE – Lift shaft to the Contemporary Image Collective (4th floor) 22 Abdel Khalek Tharwat, Cairo. © Iain Chambers

Heteropias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language,
 because they make it impossible to name this and that,
 because they shatter or tangle common names,
 because they destroy “syntax” in advance,
 and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences
 but also that less apparent syntax which causes
 words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together.”

Michel Foucault ([1966] 1991)

This essay proposes an engagement with a constellation of key concepts such as memory, locality, belonging, identity, history and modernity that orbit around, and impact upon, our understandings of the modern museum. The idea is to excavate a practice and an institution—the museum—in a critical ethnography sustained by questions that emerge from postcolonial perspectives. The argument intends to demonstrate that the cut or interruption provoked by postcoloniality imposes a radical reconfiguration on the conceptual frame that has historically and culturally produced and propagated the Occidental museum as a planetary model of official memory. This will draw us into considering the multiple scales of belonging that this memory seeks to secure when appeals to the stability and homogeneity of such established referents as locality, history and modernity come to be unravelled in an altogether more heterogeneous and mobile critical space.

→ LOS GATOS, 1948

In January 1948 a plane crash occurs in California, just south of San Francisco. Angered by the manner in which the New York Times reported the death of the 32 people in the plane—naming the pilot, co-pilot, stewardess and the immigration official, while referring to the 28 illegal workers being returned to Mexico merely as “deportees”—the American songwriter Woody Guthrie wrote the lyrics for what would become the song “Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Deportees).” It is probably most noted in one of the many versions by Joan Baez, but we can also listen to a more avant-garde blues version recorded in June 2011 in Palermo by the English musician Mike Cooper (2012).

Picking strawberries, lettuce and fruit in southern California, picking tomatoes and oranges in southern Italy: cheap, underpaid and illegal labour, close to slavery. This is a story of oppression and misery that runs from southern California to southern Italy (from Los Gatos to Lampedusa, to Rosarno in Calabria and Castel Volturno in Campania). It also propels us back in time, spiralling down into the depths of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* and the slave ships criss-crossing the Atlantic between Africa and the Americas while laying the foundations of today’s global political economy (1993). Then forward into the pre-

sent again, and the small boats crossing today's Mediterranean, poetically and politically figured in Isaac Julien's five screen video installation *Western Union. Small Boats* (2007). Such different times and locations come together in a common critical constellation called modernity.

So, why the song? Firstly, because it refers us to the historical continuity of migration, drawing our attention to its structural centrality in the modern making of the West. The song also because it invites us to consider the means of memory: from the psychoanalytical writing pad to the cinema, memory requires a means, a medium. Further, to consider the means of memory is to consider the nature of the archive and the manner of archiving. What is legitimated and what is excluded becomes explicit in the forms, technologies and organisation of knowledge: this is the power and the authority of the archive and its institutional realisation in textbooks, museums, popular representations, and ultimately common sense. So the song, in both the materiality of sound and the largely unsung history of migration, proposes an archaeology of unsuspected and unauthorised memories that promote another history.

Conscious and unconscious memories—both those registered and recognised, and those repressed and refused—solicit the question of the archive, a question that is here sustained in sound. All of this is also to cross the claims of institutional history, the accumulated power of its narrative, with the disturbing traces of memories that scratch and finally cut into the body, the corpus, of its pretensions, producing an open and incurable wound.

To talk of migration is not to refer to a peripheral social and economic phenomenon, but rather is to reference the characteristics of labour in the formation of the forces of production of Occidental modernity: slaves brought to the American shore, and into the first modern organisation of mass labour in the plantation system; the rural poor of Scotland, Scandinavia, Italy, Greece and Ireland, dispossessed of land and livelihood, sucked into the urban ghettos of the industrial city and the factory system in both the Old and New World. Today, that cheap labour is drawn, sourced and networked from the south of the planet into the overdeveloped world's obsession with material and technological "progress." These are different chapters in the planetary organisation of labour power and the social relations of production. In this sense, migration is *the* story of modernity.

The negation of a memory evoked by the questioning presence of the contemporary migrant betrays a critical incapacity to consider one's own past and its responsibility in the making of the present-day world. At the same time, the interrogative presence of the migrant announces planetary processes that draw Europe and the West to the threshold of a modernity that exceeds itself and is not merely ours to manage and define. The migrant, as an othered life, has already got our number and occupied our modernity. If the migrant's body is expressly written into punitive European legislation, her mobility continually exposes the instability of

IMG. 01 – Freud Museum, Vienna. © Iain Chambers



abstract distinctions, harsh legislation and shifting borders. The migrant is not merely the historical symptom of a mobile modernity; rather she is the persistent and condensed interrogation of the true identity of today's political subject. At the end of the day, his or her precariousness is also ours; for it exposes the coordinates of a worldly condition in both the dramatic immediacy of everyday life and in the arbitrary violence that is sustained in the abstract reach of the polity and the law.

This is clearly a dark, counter-history. Like Mike Cooper's version of "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Deportees)," this is a blues version that insists on the unauthorised notes that stretch the official account until it tears and releases another narration of our time. Of course, this has found little space in the official narratives of national histories, their explanations of modernity and the transformation of the past into the exhibitionary spaces of the museum. Here there lies a critical and explosive link between a largely repressed historical memory and the radical reevaluation of

modernity announced by today's migrants. The racialising biopolitics that mark, catalogue and define the migrant's body as an object of economical, legal and political authority, exposes the Occidental imperative to reduce the globe to its needs, and reopens the colonial archive that initially established this planetary traffic in bodies, capital, goods. The biopolitical rationality displayed in the extension of the modern state to govern populations through the individuation of bodies to cure, educate, sustain, punish and repudiate, uncovers the racialising mechanism that lie at the very heart of European liberalism (Foucault [1997] 2004). Once it is set to another rhythm, narrated according to another marking of time, another body of experience, sounded with subaltern inflections, accented in a poly-vocal manner, that history turns out to be neither unique nor complete.

To undo that particular historical inheritance is not to cancel it. It is rather to adopt what the French critic Evelyne Grossman calls a "dis-identity" (2004) with the historical and cultural formation into which, as Heidegger would put it, we have been cast. Subjectified and captured as "subjects" in the apparatuses that invest us with their powers, and these include those of the museum, we find ourselves with Friedrich Nietzsche opting for a history guided by the third choice when choosing between a "monumental method an antiquarian method and a critical method" (Nietzsche [1974] 2010). This third option, which resonates with postcoloniality's noted "third space" (Bhabha 1994), deliberately seeks to stage an "inappropriateness" (Nietzsche 2010) with the conditions of continuity, and sets the terms for a very different museum and a distinctly diverse configuration of entangled histories and memories to house there.

→ UNDER CONSTRUCTION

A thought that abandons itself to the rhythm
of its mechanisms problematises itself.

Jean-Luc Godard (1998)

So, an inherited palimpsest—the museum and modernity—remains to be reworked and rewritten in the light of other histories; in the light thrown by others crossings its spaces, languages and technologies. Hence, the modernity that stages the past and goes up on display in the museum, despite the authority of the building, the arrogance of the architecture, is ultimately an altogether more fragile and precarious arrangement of knowledge and power. There are other, unauthorised, archives, that are perhaps better sustained in untidy processes than in clearly defined representations secured in objects; although the polyvalency of objects can also supply an unsuspected and provocative silence that exceeds institutional explanation. Other archives intrude to lay their claims on these spaces. Here we might begin to contemplate catalogues that are not simply a guide to items and their place in a unilateral chronology, but also suggest the exhibition of processes, gaps, silences and unsuspected returns.

If representations have been reduced, rendered inert and disciplined to reconfirm the imperious sovereignty of the subject through the maintenance of critical distance, then today we are beginning to encounter the turbulence of historical processes that push definitions of memory, modernity and its objects well beyond that particular Kantian (and European) cultural framing. This is the critical potential, noted by Foucault, that lies with the heterotopias sustained in the museum (Foucault [1966] 1991). Opposed to the neutralising solutions of critical distance is the problematisation achieved by an interested cut. A cut into time, and through the oppressive historicism of an implacable linearity, inaugurates an interruption in the teleology of the West. The rationalisation of the exhibitionary space can be disturbed; the assumed neutrality of its scientific protocols and its disciplinary procedures challenged.

Of course, the museum is not cancelled, but is rather being reworked in a manner that goes well beyond the instrumental incorporation of once excluded elements in a superficial remix. The narrative the museum has historically and culturally sustained is now doubled and dubbed in a postcolonial revisit and repetition. This reopens the archive, exposing it to unauthorised questions, proposing a further configuration of both belonging and the rethinking of an eventual citizenship. Like those disquieting Kara Walker's silhouettes, foreign bodies mark white walls, and the passage between them becomes an altogether more troublesome process, a site of uncomfortable, even traumatic, affects.

So, why the museum? To what sort of social and historical needs does this institution seek to respond to? Why and where did it emerge and go on to acquire such significance? Seeking to answer such questions means to engage with the critical elements that constitute its conceptual space: memory, history, identity, representation, and knowledge. To think the museum is inevitably to think and rethink these terms, and to expose their premises to the interrogations disseminated by an emerging postcoloniality. Postcoloniality, as the radical reevaluation of Occidental modernity in the light of the subaltern histories, cultures and bodies that have been structurally occluded and repressed in order that its version passes as unique, and hence, universal, here proposes a persistent critical landscape. Today's museum is no longer able to subtract itself from this horizon. As Foucault would have pointed out, posing the question of the historicity of objects of study, of display, of knowledge, is to pose our relationship to a given discursive regime and configuration of power ([1966] 1991). It is to pose the question of the constitution of the present.

To bring a certain cultural tradition represented by the museum—most obviously a Western invention and institution—into a space proposed by postcolonial perspectives is to expose it to unauthorised questioning. In the museum the West consciously sought to put its knowledge and power up on display, to represent itself, in a collection of objects, images and explanations that selectively represent the past (and the present). Precisely

for this reason, the museum is not the site of dead matters, a mausoleum, or merely the storehouse of a ransacked past. The museum provokes a potential and polemical engagement with present understandings and perspectives on who we are and what we might desire to become. Maurice Blanchot puts it like this: “The Museum assists in the contestation that animates all culture” (Blanchot [1971] 1997, 15).

The very ideas of time, place and belonging—whose time, what is this “place,” how does one identify or “belong” in the available coordinates?—become a matter of debate. The neutral authority of displayed knowledge and expertise, safely secured behind the museum’s walls and seemingly set apart from the antagonisms of everyday life, here emerges in the multiple possibilities of “representation”: what and who gets to “appear”. This poses a response in simultaneously cultural and political figurations. For if the objects and images we encounter in the museum are seemingly disciplined by a precise chronological and cultural logic that subjectifies us in an apparently neutral (and neutralising) explanation, we also know, as Georges Didi-Huberman persistently points out, that they contain more time than can ever be contemplated by the observer (2000). The image continues to exceed whatever configuration it is allotted. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, the image is never inert but is suspended in time between the poles of endurance and destruction, between the renewal and the death of history ([1963] 2009). The chains of explanation that seemingly secure the image to a particular telling of time and place can be sundered by other explanations crossing its material surface and relocating it elsewhere. As an altogether more volatile space, in which objects, images and explanations are both sustained and suspended, the museum



IMG. 02 – Cliff inscription, Qiyun Mountain, Anhui Province, China. © Iain Chambers

implicitly promotes an altogether more critical and experimental sense of place and belonging.

Such considerations suggest the cultural and intellectual freedom of not simply adjusting the museum to meet new times and accommodate what had previously been ignored and overlooked. An acquired fluidity, an excess of time and a supplement of sense, encourages a re-mapping and reworking of inherited traditions and their transmission in a manner that precisely privileges the transit and transformation of history, memory and belonging. This is the vulnerable space of a cultural translation that is always under construction. After all, what is this memory but a site of images with its gaps, jumps, slow motion and fast-forward? The historian's drive for objectivity surely misses the point. It is not objective truth that draws us on. As Jacques Le Goff points out "the document is not objective raw material, but expresses past society's power over memory and over the future: the document is what remains" ([1977] 1992, xvii). Even if Le Goff ultimately reveals his own faith in an underlying objectivity, the question is better located in the prospect of history as a "problematic"; what Le Goff himself calls, referring to historiography, as the "history of history" (xix). The coordinates of time, place and belonging, once removed from seemingly taken-for-granted and common-sensical understandings, inevitably introduce us to their social production and historical fabrication. If "the basic material of history is time" (xix), it is a poly-rhythmic materiality that produces space and place, and suggests discontinuous and multi-tiered temporalities: whose time, whose events impact on the construction and organisation of the calendar?

How time is selected, organised and represented within the narrative, are clearly questions that undress the premises and challenge the protocols of inherited museum practices. Drawn away from the seemingly solidity of obvious representation—of a nation, a locality, an identity, a past, that is presumed to be transparent to the educational and political will—we are drawn into the historical weave of semantic uncertainties. Simply put, the museum is an acutely tuned site of contested histories and memories, where understandings of place, identity and belonging are constantly being challenged and negotiated. As a machine for producing meaning this has obviously always been the case. For if, as Walter Benjamin argued, it is the victors who write the tale, the forgotten, negated and subaltern are also silently written into the account, even if only as an absence. It is precisely in the challenge of posing the prospect of the postcolonial museum that this dark side of representation irrupts most forcefully in what historically persists, culturally resists and ultimately returns to ghost the official narrative with its disquieting presence.

Here, once again, lies an unsuspected rendezvous between the museum and present day migration. For the much-vaunted mobility of modernity also sustains a story of the colonial return in the bodies and lives of contemporary migrants. In this context, the colonial extension of Europe on a planetary scale is irreducible to a seemingly closed chapter in the triumphant epic of Occidental modernity. The centrality of colonialism

to the making of the modern world is such that it requires recognition as a contemporary presence and present: it has both produced our time and is of our time. Like racism, and the hierarchies of value inscribed in the conceptual categories of cultural and historical discrimination, colonialism is a structural and structuring force. Usually relegated to the geographical, cultural and historical peripheries of colonial modernity, racism and migration are not only deeply entwined in each other's trajectories, but are central to the making of the modern world. The matter of race, power and representation, and perhaps the point here is that their cultural dimensions and political representations are inseparable, reveals the right to narrate a history, an archive, still be to registered, still to come. In the refusal to confront the racialising mechanisms that operate at the heart of Occidental modernity lies the negation of the structural centrality of racism to the reproduction of its power. Such subjective and subjecting powers cannot simply be confined to a social or economic phenomena, reduced to social statistics and political legislation. To repeat, today's migrant, with her illicit presence and clandestine history, renders in the flesh the political economy of modernity, exposing the dark matter of a hidden history that is also ours.

→ HOME, HISTORY AND HOLES IN TIME

To be sure, we need history. But we need it in a manner different from the way in which the spoilt idler in the garden of knowledge uses it, no matter how elegantly he may look down on our coarse and graceless needs and distresses. That is, we need it for life and for action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and from action or for merely glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to serve history only insofar as it serves living. But there is a degree of doing history and valuing it through which life atrophies and degenerates. To bring this phenomenon to light as a remarkable symptom of our time is now every bit as necessary as it may be painful.

Friedrich Nietzsche ([1974] 2010)

So, the museum, in modernity, as modernity, is invested with a critical responsibility. Of course, this challenge does not imply simply seeking a "solution" through exhibiting the forgotten and repressed and renovating the archive. That would be to reproduce the very same logic that authorised the colonial appropriation of the world, bringing everything under a single and conclusive point of view. Registering a difference, perhaps an impossibility—who, why and how does one speak the postcolonial and the migrant's world?—does nevertheless propose a critical lexicon that can suggest other modalities of representation and explanation. The rush for reason (whose?) need perhaps to be slowed down, deviated and re-routed, even if only to register a gap, an interval, a silence. The drive to represent what until now has been unrepresented or more simply repressed can also encounter the obstacle of when the right to narrate (Bhabha 1994)—once denied and ignored—also insists on a right to "opacity" (Glissant [1981] 1992). The refusal to appear before our

eyes and respect our regimes of truth inaugurates a diverse modernity: a modernity that is multiple and heterogeneous. It is also a modernity in which there is not simply a landscape crossed by migrants but rather the altogether more complex terrain of a migrating modernity; one that is not simply mine, ours, to define and manage. Opposed to the inherited certitude of location there is the proposal of a new, heterotopic geography, composed in diverse rhythms and temporalities: a modernity that is folded and unfolded to form another space, an elsewhere within.

This fold, this cut, this interval in our time by other times, by the times of others, is probably most decisively registered in recent postcolonial art practices. In a repetition with a difference, the postcolonial artwork elaborates a critical cut across and within an inherited Occidental art discourse that leads simultaneously to recovery and renewal. Deconstructing

IMG. 03 – Maoist archive, Shanghai. © Iain Chambers



and reconstructing the languages and techniques of art and its critical grammar, the drive for the pleasure of the new is pushed out of joint, sent sideways into an unauthorised setting where the autonomy of art and the aesthetic suddenly becomes a pressing ethical and political issue. I will return to this ethical-aesthetical cut or interruption in a moment.

Thinking the interleaving of memory, history, identity and migration forces a review of the cultural and historical sense of the institutionalised marking of time exhibited in museum spaces and public art displays. It is precisely in this space that it becomes possible to assess the response (and lack of) to the postcolonial challenge of rethinking modernity in the light of the histories and cultures it has structurally excluded. This means to shift the grounds of consideration from the museum as a delegated place for authorised histories and memories towards its potential for becoming an extra-territorial space. As a heterotopia it can provoke and provide hospitality for fluxes and flows alongside obstacles and gaps, rather than merely objects and their institutional definitions set within existing frontiers of identification. Moving across this threshold we would be drawn into an emerging opposition to the objectification of memory and the past, and here begin to consider the spatialisation of memory, its means and media, in an affective economy of connections and fractures, together with the resonance of gaps, intervals, silences and opacities. This interruption of a deadening historicism and its order of the past allows us to encounter the agonism of time in which the past refuses to pass, is not yet past, and occupies our present attending a reply (Benjamin [1969] 2007).

Interrupting the artificial continuity that guarantees a historical narrative implies cutting up and re-assembling the past according to another rhythm, another series of accents. This introduces the prospect of a critical montage which establishes an unsuspected proximity between what was once separated and held apart. Again, this is not simply to bring into focus what was once defined as peripheral (slavery, the colonial, migration), but is rather to propose a new assemblage of time and space that permits another telling. Further, in a history composed of images, objects and traces, it is the case of remembering that history itself is an image, a constellation of signs and their interpretation suspended in the means that sustain and reproduce memory: from the document and the signature of the event to the subsequent interpretation saved to digital memory. Here it hardly needs underlining that the museum does not so much conserve and transmit memory as produce and elaborate it.

The still to be realised postcolonial museum that evokes another, untapped, economy of sense, promotes a sharp reassessment of the subject-object divide that maintains the complex and seemingly neutral power relationship over a non-European, and apparently non-modern, world. Moving away from the abstract isolation of the ethnographic and aesthetic object leads to an ethical engagement with the object's location in historical and cultural processes (which include our own and their modes of appropriation). In other words, a critical reflection on the historical definition and practices of the museum breaches its assurance of the sta-

bility of the public sphere, emphasising its role in the construction of imagined communities, while at the same time exposing it to an emerging sense of post-colonial citizenship. Further, in the critical intervals that are disseminated we are alerted to the possibility of other archives and other modalities of archiving, particularly those that are often rarely considered and usually marginalised by the ocular hegemony of Occidental culture: sounds, orality, sensations, and unscripted memories.

These considerations clearly impact on the syntax of place and belonging, on their histories, memories and representations, now subject to the interruption of an archive, a memory, a history, that is not merely ours to administer and define. At the same time, as a transit, or contact, zone (Pratt 1994; Clifford 1997), such a space (the postcolonial museum?) is clearly not simply to be considered a multicultural bazaar of symbolic exchange. Something altogether more significant occurs at this point. The museum space is transformed into a location that sustains the potential, often against its institutional intentions, for a democratic laboratory of emerging citizenship. This pressure that insists on the holes in time, on the intervals in memory and history, not only, and most obviously, disrupts an assumed linearity, seemingly authorised by a particular, hegemonic reading of the historical past. The analytical tension between the need to narrate (accompanied by the drive and desire to represent) and the critical cultivation of its interruption and interrogation is also significantly deepened. Here the museum is transformed into a disquieting pedagogic practice where we learn to accept absences and anonymity as the trace of the histories of men and women without “archives,” leading, in turn, to the proposal of a museum without objects (Vergès 2010). Such a prospect insists on the unfinished business of a past yet to be recognised, yet to come.

At this point it should be clear that the argument is not merely about reopening the archive to accommodate other histories, other memories. The archive itself has to be re-invented in such a manner that it comes to invest us from a future still to be realised. In seceding from a mono-dimensional exercise of power, and its identity and knowledge requirements, the concentration on indexed objects in the museum’s exhibitionary complex is pushed into relational and rhythmic movement. The previously established ethnographic and aesthetic distance that permitted the museum space to “other” its objects is now itself othered in the elaboration of an emerging critical place. Drawing upon the prospect of a postcolonial museum, and the associated narratives of diasporic roots and routes, stages an ethical engagement with the seemingly altogether more stable cultural construction of European identities and the authority of their memories.

Here, for example, the narrative force, fluidity and cross-fertilisation of digital technology might also participate in promoting a reconfiguration of the museum’s ethnographic patrimony: deepening discussion of the “ownership” of the object in question, and problematising the right to narrate the explanation, while expanding the prospects of connecting, identifying and “belonging” in an altogether more fluid set of archives



IMG. 04 – Uluru, Northern Territory, Australia. © Iain Chambers

and networks. This would render altogether more explicit that subtle interactions of unequal powers and cultural resistance on display discussed by James Clifford, where questions of property, ownership and the entanglement of multiple histories are raised and debated in shifting frames. This simultaneously points to local grounding and trans-national circulation, together with “the need to deploy both tradition and modernity, authenticity and hybridity—in complex counterpoints” (Clifford 1997, 178). Two decades later, Clifford’s “remote places” acquire a further presence in the previously unsuspected proximity of social networking that is scrambling (not necessarily cancelling, but certainly re-codifying) earlier understandings of place, belonging and the survival of traditions through the added complexities of digital and visual circulation. This is precisely the ambiguous itinerary of travel and translation, announced in the subtitle of Clifford’s book, which accompanies the contemporary lifelines of culture itself.

In an altogether less object-centred context, where sounds, sensations and absences register intervals and ignorance, layers of signification (both recognised and repressed) can be assembled in an “affective catalogue.” This would serve to register the critical potential of intervals and opacity, of holes in time and fissures in memory, while avoiding the will to fill in the “gaps” and saturate the narrative with a conclusive coherence. As a counter-space that proposes cultural improvisation and historical blue notes in the techno-cultural orchestration of the museum, such signs, sounds and silences strive to promote the perpetual remembering, repeating and working through of an unfinished business. This is the colonial world that was yesterday, is of today, and still nurtures our future.

→ SCALES OF BELONGING

In *Being and Time* ([1927] 2010), Martin Heidegger speculates on

whether being involves first inhabiting the territory and then thinking it, or first conceptualising the territory prior to its inhabitation. In this question lies all the insidious ambiguity of *Heimat*, homeland, place, location, community and subsequent appeals to belonging. The critical return to the past proposed by a postcolonial detour through the Occidental archive leads not simply to the complication of ideas of place and belonging as cultural and historical fabrications. Through the excavation of the sedimented and forgotten layers of Occidental modernity, the intertwined constellation of the historical memories of being, belonging and becoming is propelled into an altogether different space.

We might begin at this point to think of the museum as a potential arena of the commons: a shared (even if largely unacknowledged, if not explicitly negated) inheritance, in which the lived locality that is represented and reaffirmed can never fully block the lines of lives unfolding inwards from, and outwards to, an elsewhere. Cotton spun in an early nineteenth-century Lancashire mill today draws upon a representational grammar that also speaks of slavery in the Americas and the destruction of the textile industry in colonial India. Specific, but interconnected, the image of industrial Britain that is consigned to the archive and subsequently retrieved for display in the museum space, contains, to repeat Didi-Huberman, more time and meaning than a unilateral explanation under the sign of “local” Lancashire or nineteenth century industrial Britain can ever contain. The image itself multiplies meaning and exceeds a single narrative. Bringing this complexity to the surface disseminates a discontinuity within any unique accounting of time and place. It is somehow to be situated critically between flows and places, between the geo-cultural specificities of historical situations lived in terms of immediate belonging (and their multiple scales: where does the local cease and the extra-territorial take over?) and an elsewhere that provides the network (ultimately planetary) in which the local is sustained and signified.

Drawing back from precise localities and their scale of belonging (the street, the neighbourhood, the city, the region, the nation), we can also travel with the planetary processes of migration (of bodies, histories and cultures) as a critical paradigm and consider how these impact on understandings of “community,” locality and “identity.” Migration and the mobilities induced by modernity attune us to the critical experience of place: something that is both lived, constructed and transformed in time. Located between these apparent roots (the locality of place) and routes (transnational mobilities and fluxes), between the illusory stability of tradition and the domestication of transformation, the museum becomes an archive in construction. It finds itself inevitably dialoguing with the politics and poetics of representation in an expanding universe of belonging and citizenship.

It is beyond the mandate of the museum—any museum—to respond in a conclusive manner to the problems and perspectives of a migrating modernity where questions of locality, identity and belonging are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. It is precisely the critical necessity of

this failure that keeps these questions open, and maintains the museum as an unfolding critical space. Both the inherited localising imperative of the museum that roots the narrative in the domestic drive for affirmation, and the charge within the Occidental episteme that seeks to render all transparent to its will, necessarily remain unresolved, open to accommodate further freedoms. Here entertaining a space beyond the limits of immediate identities would mean taking responsibility for the postcolonial space of ex-imperial Europe. This would be to register conviviality in a differentiated but ultimately shared inheritance, sustained in a multi-accented, stratified, conscious and unconscious, communal memory as Sreten Ugričić, one time director of the National Library of Serbia, suggested in a MeLa Brainstorming meeting in Glasgow in April 2012.

→ OUTSIDE MEANING

Knowing is not so much about the assemblage of existing knowledge as it is about recognizing our constitution as “ourselves” within the fragments that we process as knowledge; “hailing” and being “hailed” within the discourses that produce us and the narratives we spin; directing our socially, culturally, psychically and spiritually marked focus of attention upon that which we appropriate as “data” or “evidence.” Hence, “data” are neither more nor less reliable simply because of the nature of their source: whether the source in question is autobiography, biography, history, religion or science. The boundaries between cosmology, history, religion and science are far from clear-cut as they are no more, and no less, than different ways of trying to know that which defies transparency. For example, what is ‘history’ if not an on-going contestation of the very terms whereby the term itself emerged as a technology of the Eurocentric gaze.

Avtar Brah (1999)

At the end of the day how do we propose to show this postcolonial configuration of modernity? And how are we to learn from these other, subaltern and silenced histories? Beyond the authority of neo-classical museum buildings (or the glass and steel of their contemporary rejuvenation), there also exist the lighter technologies of display and representation where the fabrication that the museum engenders might be extended to the building itself. This could be a migrating museum, technology in a tent: a museum on wheels dependent on laptops, portable projectors, canvas screens and the infrastructure of digital archives.

As a provocation, a “TAZ” or “Temporary Autonomous Zone” (Bey 1991), such a museum would permit a transitory renegotiation of its institutional logic and logistics. On the other hand, an altogether more stratified landscape, peopled by absences, silences and interruptions, raises all sorts of serious questions about permanency and historical time, complicating understandings of place. The landscape itself is transformed into a lived and living archive activated by the transit of the mobile museum whose passage maps memories and histories in a dynamic framing that promotes routes through the roots. This interruptive and interrogat-

ing gesture insists on a discontinuity that promotes a non-linear conception of the space of knowledge, representation and its reception.

Such a proposed institutional discontinuity is perhaps most sharply concentrated in the poetics of present-day postcolonial art. Via the repetition and renewal that conjoins representation and repression, postcolonial art operates a critical cut that leads towards what the anthropologist and curator Tarek Elhaik calls a contemporary ethnography where the anthropological and the aesthetic entwine. Let us consider the moving image: from cinema to the contemporary video installation. Here there lies something more than the mere historical testimony of the voice and vision of subaltern authenticity. There is a cultural and historical movement or dynamism induced by the image. The veracity of the image is perhaps to be located elsewhere; it is no longer a simple support—realism, mimesis—for narration, but rather is itself the narrating force. There are not visual and auditory images of life, but images as life, a life already imagined, activated and sustained in the image. There is not first the thought and then the image. The image or the sound is a modality of thinking. It does not represent, but rather proposes, thought. This—to combine the work of Jean-Luc Godard (1998), Gilles Deleuze ([1985] 1989) and Georges Didi-Huberman (2000)—is the potential dynamite that resides within the image, the sound, cinema, and music: it both marks and explodes time, not to destroy it, but to renew it.

This, then, is the unhomey insistence of the artwork, its critical cut, and its interruption. Here in the movement and migration of language, denomination is sundered from domination as it races on, along an unsuspected path through the folds of a de-possessed modernity. This is to pro-

IMG. 05 – Tate Modern, London. © Iain Chambers





IMG. 06 – Northern Territory, Australia. © Iain Chambers

pose history not from a stable point of authority but through a movement in which historians, no longer the sole source of knowledge, emerge as subjects who can never fully command nor comprehend their language.

For in the end what we see commences not from the eye, but from the external light of the world that strikes it; that is, not from the mind, but from the images, sounds and sensations that affect the body. In this eco-critical perspective we do not inaugurate the movement and mutation of the world; it is we who are inaugurated by it. The extra-territorial supplement suggested by the extra-human and posthumanist appropriation of an ambient that does not necessarily reflect and respect our world is ultimately a potential that displaces and deconstructs the humanism that disciplines the museum space.

In the unexpected encounter between the wolf and the cyborg, between what we call “nature” (perhaps an illusory humanist extension that seeks to bring the extra-human world into our rationale) and technology, there emerges a critical scenario that is more than human, or, in becoming

“other,” exceeds the human (but not the terrestrial or animal) frame. In the same vein, we do not research the past; the past researches us. This is to engage with a history composed of intervals and interruptions. It is to understand cinema, music, the visual arts, displayed objects, as critical instances that, awaiting a renewed critical narration, propose a past that comes to meet us from the future. In this repetition and return, we touch the powerful challenge of postcoloniality. An emerging poetics disseminates an unsuspected politics that seeds a discontinuous history: always out of joint with the synthesis required of an epoch that seeks only the self-confirmation of its will.

It is no longer a question of seeking to represent the “other,” or nominate a space for a separate historical, social and aesthetic category. Within a multiple modernity the other refuses precisely to be that “other,” and thereby drops the “burden of representation” (Mercer 1994). There is no “other” space, but rather the repetition of modernity and the doubling of its languages, technologies and aesthetics. This is not in order to create a copy, but rather to elaborate a repetition that stretches and tears the codes of realism and refuses simply to reproduce the previous economy of representation. As a self-reflexive and subversive mimesis, what “passes” here breaches existing boundaries. In the space of this critical interval, and its renouncement of “critical distance” and the teleology of “progress,” we can begin to think not of images to be catalogued and explained, but rather with images that propose an elsewhere and another accounting of modernity.

The exhibition space—the art gallery, the museum—clearly articulates a problematic scenario, and hence a profoundly critical one. As many critics of museums have taught us, this is also an inventive space. Here the power of objects and images encounter the power of place. In such encounters, both staged and contingent, the coordinates of culture, history and memory acquire both an undisciplined thickness as well as multiple scales of perception and reception that consistently pose the question of whose space is this. Given the centrality of the museum to the self-

IMG. 07 – Piazza Borsa
subway station, Naples. ©
Iain Chambers



fashioning, imaging, imagining and narration of identity formations and the nation, how is such a space to be conceived critically; that is, in a more complicated, open, freer and democratic manner? Considering this space in order to go beyond it we come across the historical and cultural membrane of a migrating modernity. In this heterotopia, the cultural canon is crossed by other memories, other stories, by others. The museum loses the stability of a storehouse of institutional memories and shifts into a more fluid, de-territorialised and re-territorialised configuration of both the represented and the repressed. As a site of memory, the museum potentially promotes a troubled, even traumatic, trafficking between multiple pasts and futures: between those that are recalled and recognised, and those to be registered and reprieved from oblivion. In this manner, the museum is transformed into a transgressive and emergent space of historical and critical discontinuities: a potential laboratory of a modernity still to come. This implies the break-up of the monumental Archive of History and Culture into smaller, multiple depositories of specific critical histories that are simultaneously enmeshed in common planetary coordinates. It is precisely these differences and their itineraries that potentially cross the communal heterotopic spaces of the museum today.

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**The Borderlands
of Memory, the
Margins of History**



A Museum on the Margins of the Mediterranean

Between Caring for Memories and the Future

→ ALESSANDRA DE ANGELIS

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→ ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to suggest that the Lampedusa Museum of Migrations, created by the Askavusa Association with the Lampedusa-based artist and musician Giacomo Sferlazzo, is an example of a migrant and “in-between” space of contact and contamination between cultures, stories and life conditions. Born on the threshold between the Italian Mediterranean and Africa, this small museum hosts the remnants of the African transit to Europe. These items, findings, and small souvenirs, salvaged from the island dump, are then collected and artistically reworked by Sferlazzo, who creates his works of art from these residues. At the same time, by accepting the necessity of “contamination” for human and spiritual growth, the museum gives testimony of the cosmopolitan, hospitable, permeable, and anti-racist nature of an island that lives “on the margins.” Museums’ vocation can thus shift from the past—the collection of remains—to the present and the futures of distant locations, bearing witness to the inevitable permeability of cultural and memorial institutions towards the many asynchronous and untimely present-day realities that complicate their role as preservers of memory and identity, moving towards a margin where the very notions of memory, citizenship and humanity are questioned.

PREVIOUS PAGE –
Photo courtesy of the
Askavusa Cultural
Association (Lampedusa)

→ ASKAVUSA'S "MUSEUM OF MIGRATIONS" IN LAMPEDUSA

The Lampedusa Museum of Migrations was born with Askavusa (literally, "barefoot"), an association born in 2009 after the protests against the establishment of a C.I.E. in Lampedusa (Centre for the Identification and the Exclusion of Immigrants). With the intent of promoting initiatives for the civic and multicultural growth of the community, Askavusa fostered the encounter with the "others," namely the migrant Africans, mostly Tunisian and Libyans (and, since the Arab Spring of 2011, also from other places in Africa), who land on the island's shores to seek refuge. Giacomo Sferlazzo, Lampedusa-based visual artist, singer-songwriter, and musician, as well as an active member of Askavusa, has

IMG. 01 – *The Lampedusa Museum of Migrations*
© Giacomo Sferlazzo,
Askavusa. Courtesy of the
artist and Askavusa.





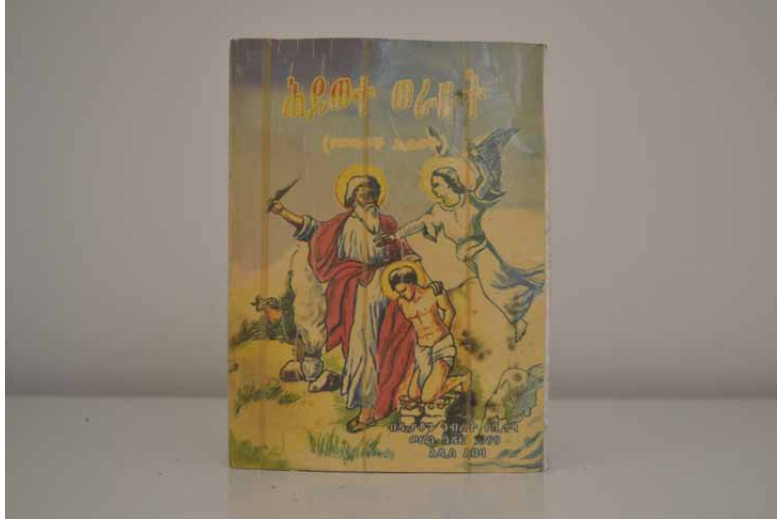
IMG. 02 – Sacred Texts © Giacomo Sferlazzo and Askavusa. Courtesy of the artist and Askavusa.

created this museum, where he assembles and reworks the objects found in the abandoned boats left in the island's public dump. He has literally salvaged, one by one, the remains of the shipwrecks and the landings that have happened on the shores of Lampedusa, in order not only to save the memories of the migrants from oblivion and carelessness, but also to use them in the creation of new works of art. The artist reassembles and reworks what he finds with incredible care, an almost loving devotion, always ready to find new meanings in the encounter between his artistic vocation and the others' desire for self-expression. His goal is also to give voice to the remains of a spiritual travel from both sides of the sea, which is confined to silence because of the political, pragmatic, and primary urgencies of the situation.

These remains are the tangible remainders of a humanity shadowed by an elaborated and ritualized process of “production of clandestinity,” which has reduced Lampedusa from a cosmopolitan port, an extemporaneous place of hospitality and encounters (and not only with illegal refugees) to a centre for the salvaging, confining, hosting, and rejection of difference, namely a technology of social control based on a complex series of double binds¹. The museum and the artist strive, conversely, to foster an inverted route, namely by transforming this material human waste into art subjects, producers of memory and new meanings, vehicles for the human, social, and spiritual growth of the island—as Askavusa and Sferlazzo insist. Sacred texts (mainly torn pages or whole worn-out, ripped Korans) and private letters, quotidian as well as odd and funny objects, are transformed into pieces of art and memory that come from the futures of a distant location that has already arrived to question our traditions, our pretences of being the “subjects” of Europe. They coexist in a disordered, but undoubtedly well-cared-for “tiny synchronic space” (Gatta 2012, 171), where the absolute lack of public funds or support, as well as of any kind of archival organization (except for the preservation of the most delicate, private, and subjective pieces of writing and objects),

1 For further details on the mechanisms of “clandestinity production” see Gatta 2010, 2011a, 2011b.

IMG. 03 – Sacred Texts (7-47)
© Giacomo Sferlazzo and Askavusa. Courtesy of the artist and Askavusa.



IMG. 04 – Sacred Texts (11-51)
© Giacomo Sferlazzo and Askavusa. Courtesy of the artist and Askavusa.



IMG. 05 – The Museum of Migrations
© Giacomo Sferlazzo and Askavusa. Courtesy of the artist and Askavusa.



does not impede the creation of a very ethical and aesthetic museum and memorial gesture.

As we can read from the website, “the museum is a space without boundaries, a fluctuating search. A meeting point in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, which witnesses the passage of human beings, animals, cultures, and histories, incorporating *transit* into the reality of Lampedusa” (emphasis mine)². Images and tangible remainders of transit are disseminated everywhere in the room, as well as on the island itself, but—unlike the Lampedusa port—without an apparent organization scheme at all. Odd shoes hang from a roof covered by a woven blue tarpaulin as if they were emerging straight from the deep blue sea, or sinking into it; on the wall, a white and red life buoy, salvaged from a boat: everything here brings travel to mind.

→ **IN-BETWEEN MEMORIES FROM THE FUTURES OF MIGRANT CITIZENSHIPS**

I was very impressed when I read the title of the paper Giacomo Sferlazzo and Gianluca Gatta proposed for our first MeLa Brainstorming session in Naples—³ “For a museum of migrations in Lampedusa: *the care of objects between art and memory*” (translation and emphasis mine).⁴ This last word, here, evokes an ambiguity—the dwelling “in-between” two or more options—which is impossible to eliminate, to catalogue, and to archive. Memories, as well as and their care/custody, come straight from this marginal place, as if they could only be thought, in migrant and diasporic times characterized by mobile fluxes of peoples, ideas and communication, in terms of transit, and dwelling in the “in-between” of the margins of citizenship, temporalities, borders, as well as power-relations. “In-between” is a word used by the postcolonial theoretician Homi Bhabha to face the migrant complexities of living, speaking and becoming subject in-between while also being subjected (Bhabha 2004). In-between memories, as I will define them following Bhabha, can not be fully enclosed into museums or archives; yet they can be translated. In this case translation means the intransitive act of “living migrant,” the sensation of being a “stranger to oneself” when confronted with the (assumed) “other from the self.” Such forms and modes of remembering dwell in a “third space” where the very concepts of citizenship, Nation-State and humanity are questioned and rendered problematic, as Iain Chambers

2 <http://www.museodellemigrazioni.com/> (accessed July 30, 2012).

3 “Museums, Migration, Memory and Citizenship,” March 14, 2012. The thematic session I introduced, with Sferlazzo and Gatta as speakers, was entitled: “Migrating Modernities, Mobile Citizenship.” Gatta is a member of the *Archive of Migrant Memories*, an association which collects written, oral, audio, and video documents of the migratory transit to Italy, aiming to narrate both migration and the Italian experience from the perspective of the “others.”

4 Strangely, for at least a week, I had not even recognized the *déjà-vu*: just a few months earlier I had written an article titled “Between the Intangible and Contamination: Museums, Futures, and the Custody of Memories” (translation; see De Angelis 2012). The term “custody” was an adjusted translation suggested for the Italian word “cura” (literally: “care”) in the English abstract, in order to emphasize the “archival drive” of museums projects. This article laid the basis for the larger essay written for this first MeLa publication in Naples, published here under the title of: “Recovering, Archiving, Contaminating. The Negotiation of Museums with Memory.”

suggests (1996). It is contemporary migration, legalized or illegal—or also “partially included,” as Gatta argues (2012)—that enhances such processes of recovering the traces that might function as witnesses to this asynchronous and dislocated humanity that is still perceived as uninvited, untimely and awkward. This enhancement functions to bring migration not only closer to us, but also to make it less homogeneous and classifiable, more disturbing; it brings it closer, but keeps it unfamiliar, in order to preserve its right to opacity and its freedom to be other than what we expect in our projections. Accepting this, we could shift our limits, moving our sense of being citizens belonging to a place (that consequently will belong to us) towards a “margin,” questioned and complicated by the uninvited. Diasporic communities, exiles, legal and illegal immigrants re-open such borders, shifting them and making them move. “Margins,” as bell hooks suggests, thus become spaces for the creation and the acceptance of the “new” (hooks 1991). Museum practices sometimes stem from there, even when they are places of “confinement” and “discipline,” as Gatta suggests, speaking of the Lampedusa Harbour (Gatta 2011b). They try, in such cases, to collect, preserve, and highlight the traces of a different humanity, to subvert the assumed humanitarian stereotypes of clandestinity, violence, frailty, and need. The un-invited, un-predictable, un-manageable (despite the attempts at managing, predicting, and enclosing), comes to muddle our story, our vision of the world and of the limits through which our citizenship and communality is constructed. The “margins” of our nations are rendered mobile and permeable, just like “memory,” which is also entangled by new instances coming from other places and other times, articulated in the “in-between” of multiple pasts, presents, and, above all, futures.

Remembering, then, is also contaminating and complicating, as Rosi Braidotti (2006) suggests when she writes of “nomadic memory,” and the “becoming minoritarian” of a memory that lies outside the dominant, institutional forms of remembering, of History and commemoration. Thinking and remembering according to intensive and minoritarian modes means opening, through the imagination, new spaces for creativity and movement—“deterritorializations” which render actual the congealed potentialities enclosed into linear and traditional definitions of the past (ibid., 168–169). Elizabeth Grosz (2004), too, describes the past as the condition that enhances infinite futures in duration, where tenses and times are interdependent and interwoven. Memory, thus, as Sarah Nuttal also argues (1999), is the infinite interrogation of new possibilities of reading the bygone, in order to complicate the relation with the contemporary. It is articulated in more complex constellations, demands and questions thanks to migration; it is itself a migrant memory, just like our human planetary condition. Always in transit, but above transited by a distance and another time that render it more similar to a deterritorialized space inhabited by the “in-between.”

So why not abandon for a while this often socially constructed idea that the “migrants” are “needy” human beings whose histories must be sal-

vaged and made public? Why not also start embracing this different concept of migrating memory, which is able to avoid this hermeneutic and humanitarian distance, not so different from the dualistic subject-object relation that has informed colonial relations of power? Inhabited by contemporary demands and emergencies, memory is multiplied through memories from other worlds, and crossed by others' stories. It becomes a foreign territory, transited by non-Occidental temporalities, narratives, and circumstances.

Yet, museums keep dealing with memory in terms of "protection" and "salvage" as if haunted by an obscure fear of "loss," of amnesia. Traditional memorial museums close their doors around the historical memory of trauma and the communities involved; traditionally experienced as temples of the accumulation, discursive, and taxonomic preservation of both objects and intangible heritage, they decide to confront memory in the form of the recovery of traces that would otherwise get lost. What is this concern about the loss of memory, and where does this process of mourning stem from?⁵ This is one of the challenges memorial museums must learn to answer, if they want to accept the responsibility for these different, both synchronous and asynchronous, temporalities that migration brings us from the distant location of other cultural modalities, as well as everyday emergencies that we have so far ignored. Because if this concern with the past and with the lost traces of civilization aims only at either reinforcing our sense of National self, to foster our loyal citizenship, or, conversely, at collecting and preserving the tangible remainders of other humanities that are pressing on our physical doors and mental limits, to enhance multiculturalism or constructed encounters with an assumed "other," then the potentiality of museums is lost, wasted.

→ BETWEEN CONTAMINATIONS AND BLESSINGS

Is the Lampedusa Museum of Migrations also an attempt at salvaging and fixing the traces of the exiles' transit? Or is it open to different meanings and aims? Here I maintain that the Lampedusa experience is an attempt at bearing witness not only to the humanity of the exiles, but also to a permeable Lampedusa community, different from the images promoted by the media. The museum performs a displacement—the place is rendered mobile, diasporic, and even "expatriated" by foreign demands, which enlarge the concept and feeling of "community." Although the museum assembles findings and "waste" materials—relics of the transit and rotten woods from the dump—it seems to me that the heart of this project is not properly the preservation of memory, but rather the testimony of the humanity of an island that Giacomo Sferlazzo and Askavusa recognize and promote as hospitable and open to the futures still to come, as a tribute to the many inhabitants who have not yielded to the culture of fear and racism, promoted by the Government and disseminated by the media, but have tried, conversely, to remain unconditionally open to

5 On this issue, see Rogoff 2002.

the other, as the protests against the C.I.E. demonstrated, refusing to accept the logic of confinement and expulsion, and with it the social engineering and technology of the construction of the “illegal migrant.”

What Sferlazzo defends as beauty—not only art, but also the care—can be figured as an attempt at opening the museum doors to geographical, creative, and genre fluxes, contaminating memory and history with diasporic and disseminated little memories.⁶ From one side, then, memory proves a loving and ethical caring gesture, which enables a reopening of the asphyxiating archives of Occidental modernity constructed on the representation, the confinement, and the management of the other as distinct from the self; from the other side, it is always on the point of slipping away, as if inhabited by a centrifugal desire to move outside and let itself merge and confound, operating on the principal of survival that lives on through contamination. There is an episode that sustains this idea: one day a young boy from Tunisia, hosted by Askavusa in the museum spaces, inscribed the word Allāh onto one of Sferlazzo’s artworks (see Gatta 2012). This gesture strikes me, because it speaks clearly about the subjective and creative desires of the migrants, who never give up hope on expressing themselves freely, even in the general name of their God, even in dramatic circumstances; such a desire has been satisfied by Askavusa, even at the cost of an apparent defacement, because this contamination was read by the artist as a benediction, a “blessing gesture” of cooperation of subjectivities, of acceptance and communication, thus fostering that “right to self-narration” that Bruna Peyrot (2006) recognizes as one of the pivotal requirements for the contemporary “right to citizenship” as well as for “citizenship as a right to exercise.”⁷

Contemporary museums, in times of flux, will face the “deconstructive performance” of wholeness and of the logic of “plenitude”—as Irit Rogoff suggests (2002)—rather than the staging of the loss (trauma, mourning), or with reparation and compensation of loss through a cure:

A critical perception of the possibilities for museums to engage with cultural difference must therefore recognize the shift from the compensatory projects of atoning for absences and replacing voids, to a performative one in which loss is not only enacted, but is made manifest from within the culture that has remained a seemingly invulnerable dominant [...] the encounter with cultural difference cannot be done by representing a loss or an absence, but needs to come about by the museum acknowledging and enacting a loss of some part of itself. (Rogoff 2002, 64)

6 See the video of an interview to Sferlazzo (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg6fOzYrYqI&feature=related>, accessed July 30, 2012), where the artist denounces the decay of the primary schools on the island, against the 20,000,000 millions of euro set aside by the government for the building of a great museum of migrations in Lampedusa on the basis of the project “Opera—Sui relitti della libertà” (“Work—On the Wreckage of Freedom”), promoted by ANFE (National Association of Emigrated Families). As Sferlazzo claims, the idea behind Opera was stolen from Askavusa’s museum.

7 I publicly asked Sferlazzo during the open talk at the MeLa Brainstorming, if he considers the boy’s inscription to be a blessing, or if he had considered the possibility that it was an act of protest against the museums speaking on behalf of the migrants through the migrant’s poor means.

The Lampedusa Museum of Migrations is coping with this challenge, refusing to stage the loss or to give compensation for it; by accepting contamination and participation by the African migrants, as well as by the African artists they are trying to involve in the project, the museum recognizes the holes in the logic of wholeness and in the discourse of cultural and national representation (of the self and of the other) that other museum projects still refuse to acknowledge.

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The Museum of European Normality

Contemporary Art and the Visual Construction of European Identity

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→ ABSTRACT

This essay presents a critical reading of the processes of the cultural construction of European identity, through the analysis of an artistic installation realized at Manifesta7 by Jimmie Durham, Maria Thereza Alves, and Michael Taussig. The Museum of European Normality exposes the paradoxes of the definition of a “European normality” through a reconsideration of the practice of “showing and telling” that is linked to museum display, in order to use the museum itself as a critical lever. This leads to a reflection on the historical definition of the museum as a “public sphere,” and on its role in the construction of an imagined (national, colonial) community. Further, this also creates the possibility of utilizing museum practices in a manner—in postcolonial contemporaneity and in a diasporic and transcultural public sphere—that privileges the emergence of the unspoken: what the archival system has obscured in the construction of a regime of visibility and memorability.

Where and what is Europe? It is a fat-looking peninsular protrusion on the west end of the continent of Eurasia. There is much confusion among the Europeans about their identity. One reason for this is that they were conquered by a small group from Rome who came to refer to the East as Asia. For some reason that made the group from Moscow call the lands east of the Ural mountains Asia also. This makes Europeans believe that Europe is a continent.

Jimmie Durham (2011)

There is a paradox in any attempt to define a “European” identity. A constitutive ambivalence becomes evident when one tries to single out a possible criterion of identification: territorial, cultural, ethnic, economic, political, religious.... This process of definition is continually staged in the public imaginary, across many chance rituals—from the world of international cooperation to the bureaucratic, biopolitical, or artistic spheres. At the same time, it is continually exposed to its own failure and confronted with the impossibility of avoiding one crucial issue: the relation with what from time to time was defined as “other,” and the related

IMG. 01 – Jimmie Durham: *The History of Europe*, 2011, stone, metal, paper, wood, glass, overall dimensions: 100×70×70cm. By courtesy of Jimmie Durham; kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Commissioned by dOCUMENTA (13).





IMG. 02 – Jimmie Durham: *The History of Europe*, 2011, stone, metal, paper, wood, glass, overall dimensions: 100×70×70cm. By courtesy of Jimmie Durham; kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Commissioned by DOCUMENTA (13).



IMG. 03 – Jimmie Durham: *The History of Europe*, 2011, stone, metal, paper, wood, glass, overall dimensions: 100×70×70cm. By courtesy of Jimmie Durham; kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Commissioned by DOCUMENTA (13).

ability to contextually define a sense of self. This issue makes any attempt to establish “one” European identity rather awkward.

In his recent artistic work, Jimmie Durham precisely penetrates this ambiguity. His aim, however, is not to unravel it. On the contrary, Durham wants to make this ambiguity visible and evident in the articulation of powers and knowledge that it explains: in the induction and repression of affects, in the way in which it silences certain conflicts or augments them, in the way in which it transforms imaginary fluctuations into identity rituals, private memories into monuments, personal stories into History.

Jimmie Durham is a visual and performance artist, writer, poet, and political activist. He was active in the US Civil Rights Movement in the early sixties, and the American Indian Movement in the seventies. He left the United States in 1987, arrived in Europe in 1994 and focused his work on the narratives associated with the nation-states. In particular,

IMG. 04 – Jimmie Durham: *The History of Europe*, 2011, stone, metal, paper, wood, glass, overall dimensions: 100×70×70cm. By courtesy of Jimmie Durham; kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Commissioned by dOCUMENTA (13).

The History of Europe

Where and what is Europe? It is a fat-looking peninsular protrusion on the west end of the continent of Eurasia.

There is much confusion among the Europeans about their identity. One reason for this is that they were conquered by a small group from Rome who came to refer to the East as Asia.

For some reason that made the group from Moscow call the lands east of the Ural mountains Asia also.

This makes Europeans believe that Europe is a continent.

An additional problem is that Christianity, and later Communism, made more East/West divisions.

There was a guy living in what is now Georgia about a million years ago.

His bones have been found, and claimed by Georgia.

This guy was not part of our crowd, however; he was some sort of Neanderthal.

We Homo sapiens – proper immigrated into Europe from Africa about forty thousand years ago.

EXHIBIT A is a primitive stone cutting-tool made in Europe about thirty thousand years ago.

Since that time several major and many minor groupings have formed, unformed and reformed. Europeans have had much trouble, perhaps because of unsanitary living habits, with

infectious diseases.

About four thousand years ago they learned how to capture animals and maintain them for food and work. At the same time they began to grow a few crops.

After beginning to trade with other more advanced peoples, they learned how to work with metals.

In the past three thousand years Europeans have had many adventures.

EXHIBIT B is a rifle bullet made in 1941.

It was never used because someone spilled car-battery acid on it, which ate into the copper-alloy casing.

he is interested in bringing to light the paradoxical aspects of the definition of identity in its relation to abstract and normative regroupings from the geographic, historical, cultural, political, and anthropological point of view—as in this case with European identity.

In his most recent work for *dOCUMENTA (13)*—on display at Kassel from June to September 2012—Jimmie Durham exhibits, in a display case, a small prehistoric stone, used as a cutting tool, made somewhere in Europe around thirty thousand years ago (Exhibit A) and a bullet from World War II, which was undetonated because acid had been spilled onto it (Exhibit B).¹ Next to this, in another display case, he exhibits a text that reconstructs “The History of Europe” in a few ironic lines, in the style of a school report. This text emphasises that Europe is not truly a continent (as it is in fact part of a much larger continent, Eurasia) but a political entity, an imaginary construction, designed—according to the artist—by small groups of people originating from Rome and Moscow, while “we Homo Sapiens—proper immigrated into Europe from Africa about forty thousand years ago” (Durham 2011).

This essay seeks to present a critical reading of the cultural and visual construction of European identity, through the analysis of an artistic installation realized at *Manifesta 7: The Museum of European Normality*. This installation was created by Jimmie Durham and Maria Thereza Alves, an artist living in Europe whose research examines social and cultural phenomena and frequently questions the social circumstances that we take for granted by looking at how we construct an identity for ourselves and the things around us. In their artistic research, Jimmie Durham and Maria Thereza Alves share a series of anthropological prospectives and methods, and it is not by chance that they created *The Museum of European Normality* together with Michael Taussig, an anthropologist from Columbia University.

1 The 2012 edition of *dOCUMENTA*, edited by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, was also extended to other parts of the world, beyond Kassel: Kabul, Alexandria-Cairo, and Banff.

What characterizes *Manifesta*—the European Biennial of Contemporary Art—is not only the fact that it is a touring biennial. More significantly, it is its consistent attention on work coming from each region that hosts it, as well as its critical focus on the apparatuses and cultural politics that link each specific place to a larger and more globalized context. In 2008, *Manifesta* chose Italy as its location—precisely the region of Trentino Alto Adige, a territory-bridge between the culture of the Mediterranean and that of Northern Europe. This choice already testifies to *Manifesta*'s intention of interrogating the vulnerability of European borders and identity. The cities of Trento, Rovereto and Bolzano—with their numerous zones of industrial archaeology—provided the venue for the Biennale: the knots of a micrological, open net that the visitor was invited to cross: “100 miles in 100 days.” The event thus transformed the entire regional territory into a vast space dedicated to expositions and collateral initiatives, with the goal of investigating the relations between cultures.

The installation that I will analyse belongs to the exhibit *The Soul (or, Much Trouble in the Transportations of Souls)*, which was curated in the city of Trent by Anselm Franke, the artistic director of the Extra City Centre for Contemporary Art of Anversa, and Hila Peleg, a curator born in Tel Aviv and based in Berlin, who is interested in artistic and cultural practices in the Middle East. This project explores the most intimate aspects of the construction of Europe, such as geo-political and cultural identity. First, it takes into consideration the construction of the “soul” as a cultural object—meaning an extended metaphor that brings to mind a fabric of social relationships woven by technologies of power, a kind of ritual channelled by apparatuses of control and, above all, of self-control. Not by chance, the installation takes place in the same city where the Council of Trent took place. In fact, the Catholic Church, directly following the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563), played an important role in the articulation of a new relationship between the soul and its representation in the sacraments. With the sacrament of confession, the Church expanded the spectrum of sins into the realm of thoughts, fantasies, and projections: the realm of potentiality. Here the project of constructing the modern self through the exercise of a disciplinary power over the body and its self-control is made explicit through the “invention” of the soul; just as the “discovery” of territories and continents actually suggests their “invention” through a birth ritual and the self-affirmation of the power of possession through the power of naming.²

Nevertheless the soul (this culturally dense object, a residual item that

2 It is not by accident that Giorgio Agamben, in his essay *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (2006)—translated into English as “What is an apparatus?”—speaks precisely of confession as one of the apparatuses (*dispositif*) of formation of Western subjectivity, “that both splits and, nonetheless, masters and secures the self,” and is fundamentally linked to the apparatus of penitence. These apparatuses, following the analysis of Foucault, tend to construct, through practice, learning and discourse “docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their ‘freedom’ as subjects in the very process of their desubjectification. Apparatus, then, is first of all a machine that produces subjectifications, and only as such is it also a machine of governance” (29-30).

shifts between material and immaterial, subject and object, conscious and unconscious) can tell another story, provided that it is considered in its emotional and projective aspects. It is a story that involves memory (public and private) as much as imagination and fantasy, as the site of shifting, fleeting places, inevitably subject to radical alteration. Constructed and represented as a cultural object, and therefore also as an allegory, the soul re-presents itself as an unruly object, constantly marked and threatened by its own alterity. In the words of the curators, the: “[soul’s] properties (emotion, memory, imagination, fantasy, self-consciousness) remain haunted by its own otherness, a minefield of displacements.”³ Thus the soul, understood in this way, is a “representation that ‘interprets’ itself” (Clifford 1986, 99-100); which means that it can tell us a story about *another story*.⁴ In the case of the exhibition, *The Soul* tells us a story about the construction of European identity, which was based upon the radical separation of body and mind, innocence and guilt (or sin), and on the individualization and the regulation of that internal alterity connected to the contemporary construction and normalization of an external alterity. These were both functions of the project of the colonial expansion of European modernity. In the words of the curators, this exhibition, “as an archaeology of reversals between inside and outside, self and other, individual and collective, follows the historical turning-inwards of the expansionist boundaries of European modernity and suggests that the production, mobilization, and representation of the inner self is a final frontier, a last outside.”⁵

In particular, the *dispositif* of the museum has historically provided imaginative and performative resources, cognitive horizons and useful practices for the exercise of power/knowledge through culture.⁶ The aim is to

3 *Manifesta7* website: <http://www.manifesta7.it/> (accessed July 10, 2012).

4 James Clifford defines allegory as follows: “allegory (Gr. *allos*, “other,” and *agoreuein*, ‘to speak’) usually denotes a practice in which a narrative fiction continuously refers to another pattern of ideas or events. It is a representation that ‘interprets’ itself. [...] Any story has a propensity to generate another story in the mind of its reader (or hearer), to repeat and displace some prior story. [...] A recognition of allegory emphasizes the fact that realistic portraits, to the extent that they are ‘convincing’ or ‘rich’, are extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent (theoretical, aesthetic, moral) additional meanings. Allegory (more strongly than ‘interpretation’) calls to mind the poetic, traditional, cosmological nature of such writing processes. Allegory draws special attention to the *narrative* character of cultural representations, to the stories built into the representational process itself” (Clifford 1986, 99-100).

5 *Manifesta7* website: <http://www.manifesta7.it/> (accessed July 10, 2012).

6 Here and elsewhere, I use the original French word “*dispositif*,” closely linked to Foucault’s thought. Foucault defines *dispositif* as a web that connects and articulates a completely heterogeneous grouping of discourses, institutions, laws, philosophical thoughts, scientific statements, and architectonic structures, in a strategic grouping of relationships of force, inscribed in the productive and conflicting game between power and knowledge. In deciding to keep the original French word I follow Giorgio Agamben’s viewpoint on the English translation of the word: “I am not satisfied with the current English translation of ‘*dispositif*’ as procedure or apparatus. And I would prefer to keep nearer to the French original. This is why I have proposed a probably monstrous translation as *dispository*. The term is in the English Oxford dictionary. It is an astrological term, the law of the sign and its relation to other planets. Thus the *depository*, being the lord of the astrological sign, embodies all the forces and influences that the planet exerts on the individuals, restraining them in all possible ways. This is perhaps a good translation for Foucault’s *dispositif*. By the way, questions of terminology are important in philosophy. [...] As a philosopher whom I respect very much used to say, ‘terminology is the poetical element of philosophy’” (Agamben 2002).

build—between outer and inner, self and other—the identity of the modern European citizen as universal subject (Bennett 1995). Not by chance the exhibit *The Soul* is revealed through the construction of five small museums, citing the role that the museum has played since its origin as a social space, a space of cultural and scientific representation, as well as a didactic and educational space intent on the changing of behaviours and the regulation of bodies through types of “evolutionary exercises of the self,” as defined by Tony Bennett (1995, 10). Each of these museums examines a different aspect of the construction of the self of the modern European citizen, connecting it in various ways to the contemporary scene. They play with the museum’s tradition and archival systems of classification, with the goal of making its dynamics explicit and thus allowing crucial questions to emerge.

The Museum of Projective Personality Testing, by Sina Najafi and Christopher Turner, displays an archive of projective tests, starting from the beginning of the twentieth century, when the inkblot test was produced by Hermann Rorschach. With this test, he sought to access the hidden motivations of patients, and thereby their personality, through verbal and visual intuitions originating from their free associations. The possibility for visitors to participate in the tests on display allows them to radically identify with the process of constructing and defining deviance. *The Museum of Learning Things*, realized by Brigid Doherty, presents an archive of illustrated books and other materials used between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century for “instruction in perception.” More generally, the exhibition develops an analysis of the representations, included also in the museum display, which were experimentally used in the field of visual education in that period.

The Museum of the Stealing of Souls, by Florian Schneider, takes the ancient belief that the camera steals the soul as its point of departure. It proposes a critical analysis of contemporary society’s systems of control via surveillance videos and data archives. Video surveillance and data archives are interpreted here as a kind of identity theft: the soul robbed by the snapshot thus becomes “the difference that repeats itself.” *The Museum for Franco Basaglia*, by Stefano Graziani, illustrates the impact that Law 180—passed in 1978—had in Italy. This law—also known as “Basaglia Law,” from the name of the psychiatrist who promoted it—called for the closure of mental institutions and psychiatric wards, denouncing how these were political and social centres for detention and control, rather than centres for care. This museum displays a part of the archive of the psychiatric hospital in Trieste, where Basaglia worked. It presents video interviews with subjects who were linked in various ways to the discussion of Basaglian anti-psychiatry, thus exploring a very animated debate that has taken place in recent years (and not only in Italy) regarding the importance of this law, and its application (which was only partial).

Eventually, the *Museum of European Normality* by Jimmie Durham, Maria Thereza Alves and Michael Taussig is a complex installation that focuses on exposing the paradoxes of the process of definition of a “European

normality.” The intersection of these five micro-museums unveils the history of the construction of European identity. Each museum proposes a different point of view on the same process, evoking micrological and incomplete stories that consider and express points of view that are alternative to the institutional ones. This is done by exposing the embodied and cognitive dimensions of power, and always explaining the dynamics of the *mise-en-scène*. To this end, the citation or the reconsideration of the practice of “showing and telling” (Bennett 1995, 6)—linked to the museum display (the exhibition of objects, works of art, or persons that construct and communicate specific cultural meanings)—allows for metalinguistic work on the language of the *mise-en-scène* as well as on the contents proposed by each museum. In this way, the museum is used as a lever, a critical instigator, a self-reflective allegory.

This practice suggests a critical reflection on the historical definition of the museum as a “public sphere,” which ultimately confronts the role that the practices of archiving, classification, and exhibition have had in the construction of an imagined community in the national and colonial sense, and highlights their paradoxical aspects. At the same time, this practice can also create the possibility of using museum’s practices and technologies in a different way—in a postcolonial or neo-colonial contemporaneity, and in a public sphere characterized by diaspora and transculturality. This privileges the emergence of the unspoken and the unseen: what the archival system and displays have blocked, made invisible, and dislocated in the construction of a regime of visibility and memorability.

→ REVERSING ETHNOGRAPHY

The panel at the entrance of *The Museum of European Normality* immediately alerts the visitor to what kind of museum s/he is about to enter. To quote the words on the panel,

[this museum shows] various artefacts, anthropological studies and philosophical musings on Europe and the Europeans, who some experts consider perhaps the most exotic and complex of any group of people [...] *The Museum of European Normality* is not a completed edifice. The habits and customs of the Europeans require further study and certainly more space. The normality under consideration at this point does not include historical factors, such as the many wars fought among those warlike peoples, nor the bizarre, almost universal criminality so prevalent during the period of “colonization” of other parts of the world.

The panel clarifies, from the very beginning, that the goal of the museum is that of examining “our own culture” through a process of critical inversion. This becomes immediately apparent through the prose of the panel, which is an ironic appropriation of the scientific language of anthropology traditionally used to describe the cultures of the “others” from the European point of view.

Anthropology’s process of self-reflection began in the seventies and

reached its climax in the eighties, with the famous interdisciplinary seminar that led James Clifford and George Marcus to publish *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986)—a book sometimes called “that damn book” for its controversial stance.⁷ Indeed, during the seventies and eighties, Anthropology began to seriously reflect upon its own languages and its own authority in representing other cultures “scientifically.”

An interesting precedent can be found in an essay by Horace Miner, entitled “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” (Miner 1956). In this essay Miner utilizes the classic rules of anthropological writing, describing the “mouth-rites” of the Nacirema population as follows:

the daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures. (Miner 1956, 503)

A careful reader will recognize something familiar in this formal and disembodied description. In fact, “Nacirema,” if read backwards, is “American,” and the “mouth-rites” to which Miner refers are simply a description of the daily ritual of brushing one’s teeth in the morning. Miner thus defamiliarizes the rules of classical anthropological writing (with its European and North American origins) used in the representation of other cultures, reversing its descriptive and objectifying language to represent a practice belonging to our own culture. The effect is ironic and uncomfortable, pushing the reader to question the language of representation itself, its authority and the articulation of the power relation between who represents and who is represented.

A similar methodology is utilized in *the Museum of European Normality*. The apparently literal citation of the modern museum’s apparatus of exhibition and representation highlights its political and epistemological texture. At the same time—through this process of critical inversion—the old and new forms of exclusion on which the modern museum’s apparatus was and is founded become immediately apparent. One of the installations conceived by Maria Thereza Alves for *the Museum of European Normality* seems to develop exactly from this ironic and provocative gesture of inversion. In the video *Male Display Among European Populations*, a woman, who is introduced as a young anthropologist, presents her research in a “typical European village” where she has come for the purpose of “investigating the custom of some European males to touch

7 George Marcus titled his preface to the Italian edition of *Writing Culture* “That Damn Book.” This is a reference to David Schneider, who, in his book *Schneider on Schneider*, wrote: “I don’t think Jim Clifford is famous for his monograph on Leenhardt. I don’t think that George Marcus has achieved some notoriety because he worked on Tonga. Indeed, I don’t know anybody who’s read the ethnography he wrote. In fact, I’ve often talked to people and asked them, ‘Hey, have you read George Marcus’s ethnography?’ ‘No!—but I read that other damn book.’”

IMG. 05 – M. T. Alves, *Male Display Among European Populations*, video, 2008 © M. T. Alves.



their testicles.”

The video is a document of the conversation between the anthropologist and her informant on the subject of this “ritual,” with the goal of revealing some secrets:

Anthropologist: Now, can you explain when it is important to touch your testicles and perhaps you can also tell us why?

EuroMan: A man must touch his testicles if someone says that another man is lazy. Or if someone says another man has died.

Anthropologist: And why would you do this?

EuroMan: To protect oneself from a similar fate. Or in case of an empty hearse passing with no coffin, then from a future fate.

Anthropologist: Are there any other situations... and can you show us how it is done?

EuroMan: If a black cat crosses the road while you are driving then you stop the car and let it pass and then you continue on your way... Or if a nun passes...or a priest... Or if a friend is having bad luck, let's say his wife is ill and his mother died, then...

Anthropologist: Any other situations you can think of?

Anthropologist: (to cameraman) Come closer, closer.

EuroMan: For good luck... If I am going to get married... If I am going to get a job... And I was forgetting other situations which can bring about bad luck... Crossing under a ladder... Then of course, for spilt salt... And breaking a mirror...

The gesture of inversion is crucial: the artist applies the anthropological method, at the heart of “Western” modernity, to a “typical European village,” thus presenting a context in which the relation between subject and object—and therefore the power of representation—is inverted with respect to their classical form. In this way, she turns anthropology’s logic of investigation and its language back upon themselves. Here, the object of anthropological study is generic European culture (and, more precisely, Italian) with its “bizarre” corporeal performativity, while the one who analyses—the anthropologist—is a “native” woman. She is Shirley Adilson Silva Krenak of the Krenak population, an indigenous people from the Minas Gerais Valley in Brazil. Shirley Krenak is a warrior: for three days, along with her brothers, she was able to block the Rio Doce Valley train, which takes minerals from the area that originally belonged to the Krenak people in the Rio Doce Valley (location of the second largest mining company in the world). In addition, she is the coordinator of



IMG. 06 – M. T. Alves, *Oculesics: An Investigation of Cross-Cultural Eye Contact*, video, 2008 © M. T. Alves.

a project that aims at documenting a History of the Krenak, along with their present condition, with the collaboration of Maria Thereza Alves's historical research. The film will document “the deaths and the various strategic ways the military, along with the colonizers who came from different countries, tried to exterminate us.”⁸ By presenting Shirley Krenak in the role of the anthropologist, Maria Thereza Alves ironically penetrates the insidious wounds of anthropological European representations of other cultures bound to imbalances of power (the power to narrate and to narrate oneself), thus bringing to light the ambiguity of this process and the possibility of diverse points of view emerging.

→ OCULESICS: POLITICS OF THE GAZE

Another installation by Maria Thereza Alves articulates the above-mentioned dynamic of critical inversion very well, as it provocatively frames the entire exhibit with the urgency of reinforcing a process of emersion of the invisible (the unauthorized) from the visible (the displayed). In *Oculesics: an Investigation of Cross-Cultural Eye Contact*, the viewer finds her/himself in front of a screen that shows an extended, silent game of glances between a man identified as “European” and another man identified as “The Rest of the World.”

The viewer immediately recognizes the dynamics of this silent game of glances, also thanks to the subtitles that articulate the silent thoughts beneath the gazes:

Euro

Something is wrong. Why is he avoiding my gaze?

World

Why is he staring? just staring...

Euro

Maybe he's shy... really really shy. But he doesn't seem shy.

World

⁸ All the above information was collected over a series of conversations with Maria Thereza Alves. Quotations come from the forthcoming documentary project *A History of the Krenak* (courtesy of the artist).

This is so stressful.

Euro

Could he be thinking that I'm trying to seduce him? Incredible!

World

Maybe he's flirting with me? That would be nice.... No, absolutely not.

Euro

Oh, this is complicated.

World

Strange, invading one's intimate space and not wanting any.

Euro

Why did he look down?

World

Eyes that sink into you.

[...]

Euro

Ambiguous eyes, shifting eyes.... he's lying.

World

Maybe he's obsessed with power and control?he keeps staring at me...

World

His gaze is such torture

Euro

He's dehumanizing me

World

Does he expect me to stare back?

Euro

He's making me uncomfortable

World

He's making me uncomfortable.

The artist here engages with the custom of looking someone directly in the eyes, generally understood in European culture as a sign of honesty, of transparency, of truth, and of good manners, but which can also have many other meanings for the character that the artist calls "the Rest of the World." The two men (and here, not incidentally, the gaze is a *male* gaze) are portrayed alone, frontally, clearly standing opposite each other, yet in a space that we cannot see. In fact, the actual exchange of glances is invisible: the viewer can perceive the tension, but the two subjects are never depicted *during* a moment in which they exchange glances from a third "objective" point of view—from the point of view of an external observer. Certainly this is the key to a paradoxical positioning of the viewer,

and for this reason it is very important: s/he is not placed fully within the scene, but is not entirely outside of it either. The artist asks us to interpret the game of glances, exercising the practice of *Oculusics*: the study of visual contact. Even better, she asks the viewer to practice a type of objective observation, while simultaneously making it impossible, since the only way to understand what is happening onscreen is to feel implicated—to involve one's own subjectivity, one's own gaze, and ultimately one's own discomfort in the process. What Maria Thereza Alves accesses in this video is the process of identification that is reached through the reciprocal gaze. It is a process of the creation of a representation of the other that can somehow absorb her/his irreducible diversity into one's own system of reference. The video comes to terms with all the possible ambiguities of this process.

Regarding this process, George Devereux, father of French ethno-psychiatry and a student of Freud, in his book *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioural Sciences* (1967) considers the fact that the encounter between the viewer-subject and the observed-object—between “self” and “other”—is first and foremost experienced body to body through the gaze. In this process both the “subject-viewer” and the “observed-object” find themselves needing to articulate their defences against the feeling of anxiety experienced in the encounter with the other—above all with the body of the other—in the moment of identification. “Observation” in this sense is always “meta-observation,” a process in which the subject and the object of the gaze—deeply unfamiliar as in the case of *Oculusics*—are always both reciprocally observers. They are forced to involve their own imaginative and projective baggage in the act of observing each other; they are pushed into overcoming the lacunae of consciousness. Observation is thus always a relational activity, which is at the same time reflexive: it is something that involves the self, to the point that the one who observes can “see” the other only if s/he is capable of observing her/himself.

Devereux interprets the objectifying and disembodied dynamic of observation and classic scientific representation (of anthropology, medicine or psychiatry) as an attempt to defend oneself against the sensation of angst, which is felt in the upsetting encounter with difference. This encounter places the subject in a situation of conflict, pushing towards the negation of emotions in their cognitive potentiality and towards the research of “an objectivity that inhibits even the creative consciousness of solidarity



IMG. 07 – M. T. Alves, *Oculusics: An Investigation of Cross-Cultural Eye Contact*, video, 2008 © M. T. Alves.

of the observer with the subject” (Devereux 1967, 277). Devereux provides us with a possible key to read this video: he urges us to use these situations of angst, which are traditionally understood as obstacles to observation, as instruments of knowledge. This implicates a necessary criticism of the positions of power regarding the interplay of these relationships, even to the point of acknowledging one’s own intimate discomfort.

The gazes of the two subjects in the video constantly and repeatedly fail to establish a secure distance from which to perceive the other as a simple, inoffensive *object* of the gaze, instead of a *subject* of the complex relational field that is “observation.” Rather, this is an experience of that peculiar form of insecurity that is located at the heart of the process of identification. It occurs in a certain cross-cultural context, as a demonstration of the way in which, in this particular context, identities often emerge in a paradoxical way, reconfiguring and complicating the territory of representation. In a general climate of insecurity and embarrassment around the “real intentions” of the interlocutors of the gaze, anxiety can surface and inevitably inform the relationship. The gaze thus becomes itself a display, a screen upon which fantasies, imaginations, fears, and desires are projected, balanced between narcissism and aggression.

The spectator, placed in front of the material screen that frames the close-up of the two subjects, is asked to identify her/himself with them, to assume alternatively, empathetically, the role of one or the other, finding her/himself involved in their discomfort, in a sort of mediated *ménage à trois*, or a powerfully affective “double bind” (Bateson 1972). In every scene the spectator identifies her/himself with the “other,” which looks and is looked at—which looks *while* being looked at. This kind of mirroring device—precisely at the moment in which it seems to hypnotize the three subjects in the endless game of reciprocal projections—frees difference from the enchanted mechanism of the stereotype, allowing it to circulate again. At the same time, it points out and makes visible the mechanisms of social control, thus rendering the space of representation vulnerable.

→ FAIR TRADE HEAD: POSTCOLONIAL ARCHIVES

In France, the long and controversial debate surrounding the restitution of sixteen Maori heads to New Zealand has only recently been settled. The Maori heads, like many other ethnographic “finds,” were taken, collected, conserved, classified, labelled, and exhibited in many European museums since the first expeditions of naturalists and traders in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. At that time, tattooed head traders reached such unhealthy numbers that the English government was forced to forbid the practice by law. The practice, especially in the nineteenth century, was not only scientifically justifiable, but was also one of the ways to enrich the “patrimony” of the Museums of Natural History or Ethnography.

Only very recently, France has officially agreed on returning the sixteen Maori heads conserved in its museum collections (seven at the Musée

du Quai Branly, and the rest in other regional museums) to New Zealand. The question of the restitution of the Maori heads from the European museum-institutions is the subject of Maria Thereza Alves's second installation for *The Museum of European Normality*, entitled *Fair Trade Head*. The installation shows an image of the head of a tattooed woman. Beside the head, there is a text that explains the sense behind the work. The text refers to an episode that happened in France in 2007, when the mayor of Rouen, Normandy, along with the director of the city's Museum of Natural History, decided to restore a Maori head that was held in the museum's collection (and was exhibited until the end of the seventies) to the Maori community in New Zealand. This was an attempt—they claimed—to redress the dehumanizing practice of trading and collecting parts of the human body. The then French Minister of Culture, Christine Albanel, reacted by forcefully blocking the process of expatriation of the remains. She filed a lawsuit against the mayor, who—she claimed—was attempting to “illegally remove an artefact of French cultural patrimony.” She also added that such an act would set a dangerous precedent—that today involved a Maori head, but tomorrow could involve a sarcophagus from the Louvre. In fact, the decision to restore the Maori heads was deemed illegal by the French Court, since the object, which was considered a work of art and thus part of the cultural patrimony of France, was deemed the inalienable property of the French people. Until the head was officially “declassified” from the status of “a work of art,” it would have been impossible to remove it from the public collection, meaning from French memory and cultural legacy. For the mayor of Rouen, Pierre Albertini, this was not a question of national patrimony but rather of bioethics: human body parts—he claimed—cannot be considered the property of a public entity, and thus their restitution is an ethical gesture based on the respect for world cultures and the dignity that every human being deserves. This became a political question in France, since most of the body parts in question were illegally obtained by the Europeans via terrible practices. The violence between different Maori groups was often intensified just to increase the trade of tattooed heads to the Europeans. When this strategy was insufficient to guarantee enough heads for the collectors, the Maori began to tattoo the faces of their slaves with meaningless designs, so they could later kill them and sell their heads as “authentic” Maori heads.

Paul Tapsell, director of the National Museum of Auckland, argues that the Maori heads have absolutely nothing to do with French patrimony. He insists that those are the heads of human beings, many of whom have descendants that await their remains in order to give them a burial. The descendants—Tapsell claims—cannot commemorate their dear ones, since their remains are considered to be a part of the cultural memory of others (namely, the French people). Maria Thereza Alves, in the text that accompanies *Fair Trade Head*, writes: “the French Minister of Culture's current policy supports the trade in human bones and defends colonial practices by declaring the Maori head as an art object and not a body part, and at the same time overrides ethical considerations in order to

‘guarantee the integrity of our national heritage.’”

French political culture therefore performs a paradoxical gesture by guaranteeing the integrity of the national (and colonial) patrimony through the dismembered bodies of others. This is accomplished via a double metonymic alteration. First, the bodily remains were synthesized as an absolute alterity, which guaranteed its authenticity; then they were redefined and sacralized as part of another generalized entity: Patrimony, Nation, Art. This is a colonial gesture, repeated and reaffirmed; but also one that is simultaneously presented under the guise of a defence of what is now “French property,” since the “object” has been collected—meaning possessed and cannibalized—in order to become part of France’s own national identity and memory. The “object” is crystallized in a museum display case as inalienable patrimony, unless—so the law suggests—it is declassified.

Indeed, for Georges Bataille and the surrealist ethnographers who contributed to the magazine *Documents*, the term “declassify” was intended to signify a procedure that introduces a type of metonymic shifting from whole to parts. In the case of the Maori head, declassifying a Maori head would therefore mean to stop considering it as a symbol of a generic idea of difference that belongs to the French cultural patrimony. On the contrary, it would mean to think of it as a human head once again, a portion of a corpse asking to be restored to the memory that seeks it.

IMG. 08 – M. T. Alves,
Fair Trade Head, diptych
photograph, 2008 © M. T.
Alves.



Bataille also suggests that “declassification” must bring with it a slippage of the logical order, which insures both a change, and an disturbance. With *Fair Trade Head* Maria Thereza Alves builds her provocation around a fundamental cultural feature of the contemporary European citizen: that of being a globalized consumer of culture. Penetrating this process, the artist proposes a head exchange program, which follows the criteria of Fair Trade. *Fair Trade Head*

enables the fair exchange of heads between indigenous groups whose descendants are being denied the return of their ancestor’s body parts with citizens of countries who are holding these body parts. Emilie, from Lille [the woman photographed in the display] is the first European to participate in the *Fair Trade Head* exchange program, by donating her head as a symbolic proxy of the Maori head held by her government, France. [...] Emilie’s head will be held in a ‘keeping place for remains’ and will return to her descendants in France when the French government assumes its ethical responsibility by returning the Maori’s head to his descendants in New Zealand. Europeans (particularly English, French, Germans, Spanish and Portuguese) wishing to participate in *Fair Trade Head* can contact for further information zerynthia@zerynthia.it. (Maria Thereza Alves, *Fair Trade Head*, 2008).

Thus, the artist suggests a critical rethinking of the museum display as an apparatus for constructing identity and imagined communities (national, colonial, scientific) by revealing all of its problematic aspects. She also asks us to experience it as a place that activates dynamic alternatives to national cultural politics, in a context that is so irreversibly trans-national and trans-cultural as to necessitate a redefinition of the very idea of “national” memory and of the role of the museum as an institution linked to its active conservation. With this installation, Maria Thereza Alves also suggests that the visitor should no longer be considered as someone who simply benefits from the museum operative dynamics in its final phase (linked to the display), but also as someone who is actively and consciously involved in the definition of their own cultural and exhibitionary politics. This type of experience of the apparatuses and practices of the museum can help identify new critical and practical articulations to ensure that level of representativeness and accessibility, which, according to Tony Bennett, constitutes the sense of the museum in its “public” role.

→ SHIFTING ARCHIVES

Many contemporary artists work with the visual materials contained in the historical, colonial, and national archives, considering them as forms of representational colonialism. Their work deals with the deconstruction of the apparatus of the archive itself, questioning its authority. Jimmie Durham, in his work for the *Museum of European Normality*, performs a “reversal” of the ethnographic gaze on the apparatus of the archive. He does this by penetrating it and desecrating it, especially its ethnographic method of appropriation through the gaze and its selective memorialization. Selective memorialization chooses what will be remembered. Simultaneously, it removes something else from future view and denies it

the possibility of becoming part of the subterranean scenes on which everyone—more or less consciously, more or less agonistically—stages her/his own connection with memory. This is how the critical work of the artist addresses the dominant narratives linked to archival apparatuses—the apparatuses' contradictions, their authorized visions, their suggestive erasures—turning them into translations and betrayals, ironic and positioned re-readings. The aim is to engage with their repertoires of fantasies, projections, and compulsive accumulations, which seem to evade legibility.

After the work of Michel Foucault, who has definitively cleared the field of whatever possible doubt remained regarding the presumed innocence of the archival system, it is possible to rethink the role of the archive not just as an institution—which is thus linked to the construction of the imagined community and national memory—but also as a dispositif of

IMG. 09 – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the Museum of European Normality, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.



Man sieht's

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The litigious war criminal

The SS man who fights his battles in court



Former Waffen SS captain Erich Priebke continues serving a life sentence under comfortable house arrest in Rome at a vigorous 94 years of age. In his spare time he opens lawsuits against writers such as myself. Three years ago, I received a nervous phone call from Garzanti, the publishers of the Italian translation of my book *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón's Argentina*. My jaw dropped. Priebke had appealed to a court in Milan, objecting to a chapter about his wartime crimes and Vatican-assisted escape to Argentina.

Priebke was living peacefully in Argentina until 13 years ago, when he was discovered and filmed by an American news team in Bariloche. The screening of the cold-blooded admission of his crimes resulted in his extradition to Italy, where he was convicted for his part in the massacre of 335 partisans, Jews and children at the Ardeatine caves in Rome in 1944.

Being sued by a condemned SS war criminal might appear laughable, except that he was deadly serious. Priebke was demanding €50,000 and the withdrawal of my book, *Operazione Odessa*, from Italian bookshops.



Adding to the worry, he enjoyed the favour of Italian judges. Since his conviction, he had been winning lawsuits against newspapers and relatives of Nazi victims up and down Italy, attending some proceedings in person.

Fortunately, my research proved more solid than Priebke's arguments and the judge in Milan distinguished himself from his colleagues by ruling against Priebke on all counts last March, ending the Nazi's winning streak and making me legally justified in calling him a "notorious criminal", the subject of one of his more surprising objections.

Yet Priebke and his lawyers were not completely defeated. Before the lawsuit, *Operazione Odessa* had inspired Italian parliamentarians to request the then prime minister Silvio Berlusconi to set up an inquiry into the passage of Nazis on their way to Argentina. But, with the lawsuit, the debate lost strength and there was barely a mention of Priebke's setback in an Italian press intimidated by his previous successes in court. Silence of a kind was imposed, damage of a kind was done.

Uki Gofii

IMG. 10 – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the *Museum of European Normality*, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.

an intimate and collective desire to remember, to construct private and public memories. As Arijun Appadurai suggests in his essay "Archive as Aspiration": "the personal diary, the family photo album, the community museum, the libraries of individuals are all examples of popular archives" (2003, 16). They are traces of a collective desire for memory, which—combatively or creatively—interweave trajectories with the visions institutionalized by the archive. In this way, "archives are not only about memory (and their trace or record) but about the work of the imagination" (24).

Jimmie Durham seems precisely to follow this trajectory by proposing a new series of different constructs of institutional and popular memory in relation to European identity, and juxtaposing them in a series of classic display cases. In this way, the spectator finds her/himself within an expository display that is absolutely in line with the didactic approach

IMG. 11 – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the Museum of European Normality, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.



24 Wilde Tiere und schöne Mädchen (im Foto oben Margit Nünke) bändigt Gerhard Riedmann in dem Film „Geliebte Bestie“, der am 3. April uraufgeführt wurde. Kurz vor der Premiere feierte der Hauptdarsteller in Wien seinen 34. Geburtstag. Seine beiden Evas (Foto rechts Eva Probst) gratulierten ihm mit einem Buch über Werner Krauss.

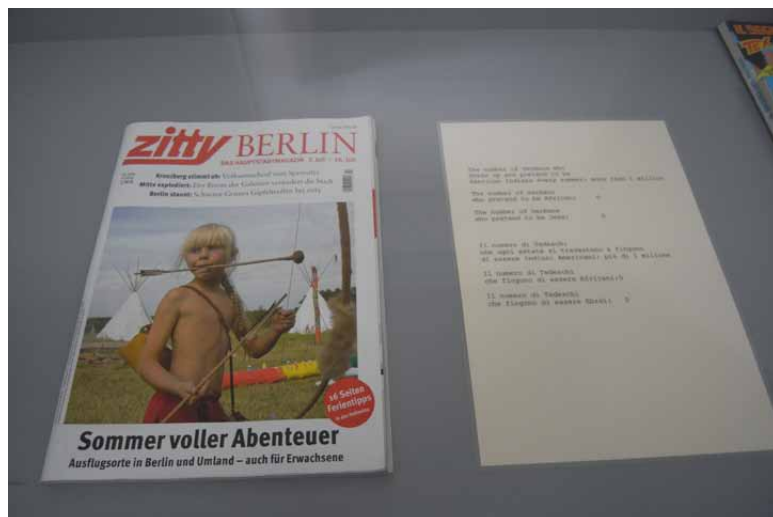
of the classic historical museum. We are confronted with an archive that contains the geopolitical representations of Europe, articulated through maps of various types from different historical periods. There is a geopolitical map of contemporary Europe and a map that divides Europe by ethnic and linguistic considerations. There is a map that reports the geographic distribution of world populations by dividing them into “uneducated, civilized and uncivilized.” There is a map of Belgium divided by population and set alongside a political map of Africa, which is divided into “independent states, Belgian colonies, English colonies, French colonies, Portuguese colonies, Italian colonies, and Spanish colonies.”

The artist places a “label” in the spaces between one geographic map and

the next. These labels are small texts or entire documents, available in English and Italian, that contain recent news taken from daily newspapers, entire treatises on the ethnic composition of European nations, or short texts that describe customs of certain parts of contemporary Europe—for example the custom of torturing animals to death, not for scientific purposes “as we might expect, but for delight... and for the excitement caused by adrenalin. Monica Matamoros, who was born in Madrid to parents who are both academics, is twenty-five years old and has been a bullfighter since she was eighteen. Monica says: “This is the joy of my life.”

Further on, an article from the newspaper *The Guardian* details the complex legal affair of Erich Priebke, finally sentenced by the Italian court for the Nazi massacre at the Ardeatine Caves after a suspiciously long court procedure, studded with unexpected rulings. Nearby, another article from the same newspaper, with sections underlined in the artist’s hand, reports of the 2008 ruling from the Italian Court of Appeals, which appears to legitimize the discriminatory politics of the Italian government regarding immigration, and which actually legitimized the discrimination of the Roma people—not because they are defined racially as gypsies, but, to quote the article literally, because: “all gypsies are thieves.”

Jimmie Durham further interrogates what we mean when we say “European,” and thus also interrogates different types of archives, choosing from each of them some important fragments and collating them in new combinations to exhibit them in an album of texts and images: a type of public family album, where “the family” seems to be the Europeans themselves. On the inside, the artist displays abstracts from anthropological manuals which discuss European ethnic composition, and these typological definitions are interspersed ironically with images from old advertisements from the beginning of the twentieth century depicting normative models in body, culture, ethnicity, and sex, or with contemporary photographs of celebrities who are carved into the mass-culture



IMG. 12 – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the Museum of European Normality, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.

IMG. 13 – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the Museum of European Normality, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.



imaginary, such as actors or soccer players. For example the caption: “the Herzegovina male has a very large head and is rather tall, generally blonde” is juxtaposed with an image of the football player Fabio Capello. Additionally, in the display case nearby, Jimmie Durham exhibits the cover of a recent issue of a German magazine that depicts a very young, blonde teenage girl dressed as an American Indian, accompanying it with this text:

The number of Germans who dress up and pretend to be American Indians every summer: more than 1 million.

The number of Germans who pretend to be African: 0.

The number of Germans who pretend to be Jews: 0.

The installation thus focuses on the space between the objects in the display case, or between the object and the text that accompanies it, and highlights the irony; for instance, this last example examines how the habit of cultural consumption and imaginative experience of one’s own identity is explained often through the cannibalization of a particular representation of alterity—a representation that must be extremely innocuous and detached from any sense of guilt, or the colonial displacement of “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989).⁹ In this sense it is possible for a German to play a carnivalesque game of role-playing only if the innocence of the game is continually reaffirmed. In this game no one can dress as an African, not to mention a Jew, since they would threaten the game by returning to seek justice.

Here Jimmie Durham exhibits his personal archive of European identity, which mingles public with private memories, and delves into institutional archives as well as methods of communicating, selecting, classifying, labelling, and locating different materials from the archive, with the aim

9 “Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior the intervention. [...] In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination” (Rosaldo 1989, 69-70).

of experimenting with the possibility of revealing a different story. The artist leaves the spectator with the final role of connecting the dots between objects, materials, and texts exhibited, entrusting them with the possibility of entering their own personal archive and developing their own story—in the process hopefully also recuperating the traces of their private memories of the public events noted in the exhibit. Above all, Jimmie Durham mobilizes the archives, be they private, public, institutional or popular.

→ ANTI-GUEST BOOK: INTERROGATING THE ARCHIVE

“All Europeans are not to be found in Europe,” begins the text that accompanies an old map on display, isolated from the other maps and placed in a separate display case, as if to emphasize the power of the questions that it poses. The title of the map reads “Migrating and Raiding Peoples between 1 AD and 700 AD.” The map itself shows an intricate tangle of migratory movements linked to the displacement of nomadic groups and territorial expansions all over that vast piece of land that, many centuries later, would be called Europe. The map raises a question: How is it possible to identify a singular European identity, and what cultural or ethnic criteria can we use to define the European citizen and her/his “normality,” once we acknowledge that the territory in which the European citizen lives has forever been entrenched in continual cultural crossings?

At a short distance from this map, we find a few excerpts from a 2005 speech delivered by Dr Iracema de Questembert at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil—entitled “Where is France”—Dr Iracema de Questembert is a completely fictional character invented by Jimmie Durham and Maria Thereza Alves. I would like to conclude with her words and, more importantly, with her questions. Dr Questembert states:

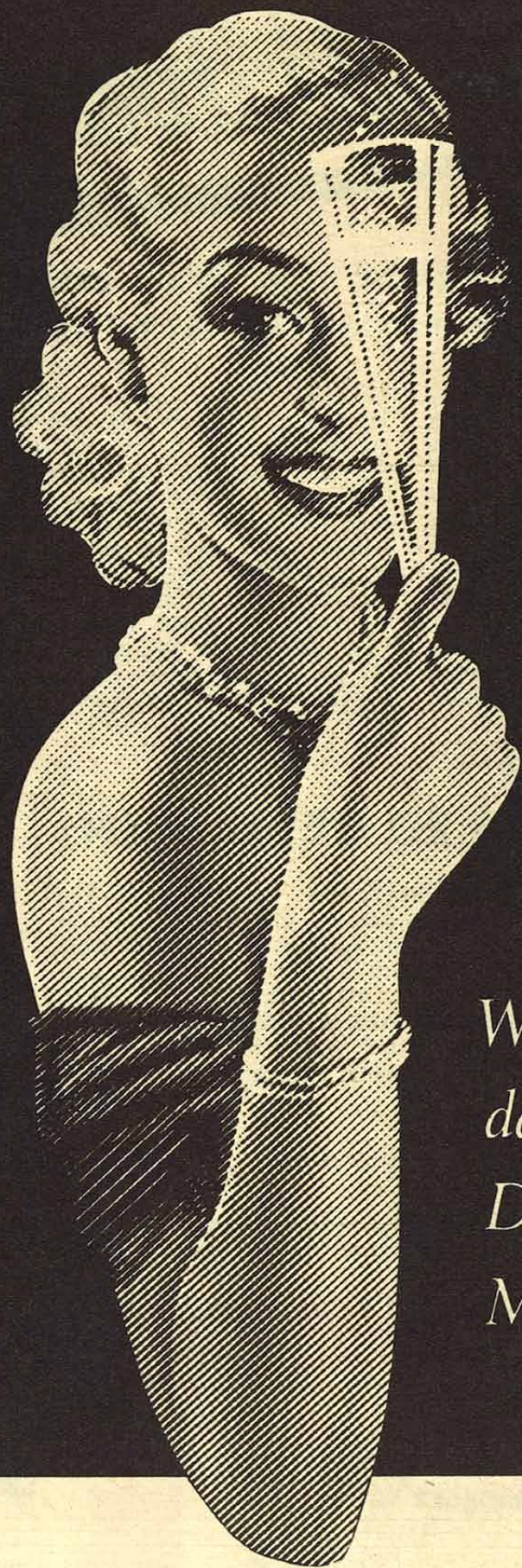
There is a country in Europe that is not really European. Some say that France is the heart of Europe. What France is that? Are the people of Guadeloupe part of the heart of Europe? Because of a brave fight for freedom by the people of Algeria, France has no more colonies, and has therefore joined the community of mature, non-criminal nations. If that is the case, then how shall we consider those islands in the Caribbean, in the South Pacific and in the Indian Ocean? They are not free, yet France says they are not colonies. Instead, according to France, they are “departments.” They are part of France in an integral way. If that is true, is it not necessary to say that France is not at all a European nation, but instead a trans-oceanic nation? Aren’t its closest neighbours Surinam and Brazil, instead of Spain and Germany? Aren’t its closest neighbours Fiji and Pitcairn Island instead of Italy and Belgium? But let us think of it this way: if all these overseas “departments” were truly part of France, if France is really a nation, which implies a certain moral distinction so that one does not equate the functioning of a nation to the functioning of any criminal gang; why are not the indigenous

NEXT PAGE – Jimmie Durham, installation detail, the *Museum of European Normality*, 2008 © Jimmie Durham.

peoples and the ex-slaves in the former colonies given first place, given precedence in all French agendas? For the sake of national morality, which is to say, of the needed definition of nationhood. So I ask “where is France” in a sense that combines geography with morality.

Right after the visitor leaves the room that hosts the *Museum of European Normality*, s/he encounters one final installation, perfectly camouflaged in the museum ritual that asks guests to leave a signature and comment at the end of an exhibition in an appropriate registry: the guest book. At the end of the *Museum of European Normality* the visitor encounters a very ordinary guest book of dark leather. Its embossed gold letters suggest one final shift of meaning, one last profanation that the artists-curators of this exhibit encourage us to participate in: the registry is entitled *Anti-Guest Book*. Opening it, the visitor will find not a simple journal with blank pages, signatures with polite notes from the visitors who have come before, but a long list of dates, numbers and descriptions such as the following: “08/12/2007. Name unknown (man). Unknown found in advanced state of decomposition on board a boat in Dakar on way to Europe.” The *Anti-Guest Book* is the registry that records all the people who have died at sea while attempting to reach European shores from their homelands. It consists largely of numbers and brief descriptions of the bodies, when possible; in rare cases a name and age is provided.

The *Anti-Guest Book* is an “other” archive, the archive of the ghosts who return to ask us to confront their tactile, violent relationship with the social and cultural politics of many European countries. It keeps track of and commemorates the people who will never visit the *Museum of European Normality*, since they have not been invited to take part in its memory. It is an archive that recounts the way in which institutional memory constructs itself, articulating a discourse of inclusion/exclusion, visibility/invisibility. It is a selective process that, in selecting what to remember, what to pull aside and conserve, at the same time defines what can (or must) be lost, drowned, voluntarily forgotten. But this is not a removal, rather a repression, a dislocation, a moving of the unmemorable to a state of temporary amnesia, which nonetheless can be profaned. For Giorgio Agamben (2005), the mechanism of profanation works by deactivating the apparatuses of power that formerly separated an object from its own context, collecting it in a normative order (religion, museum, archive). Profanation can also be attained through a particular form of ironic and enchanted repetition of this mechanism of separation, of playful re-use, such as we find in the *Museum of European Normality*. Here a network of meticulous profanations has been constructed—not so much as subversive strategies, but as tactics of deviation and disturbance. Implemented with the goal of making the museum apparatus vulnerable, its dynamics are exposed to allow what has remained invisible to emerge, commencing from the evidence of the display itself.



*Wir suchen
das
Deinhard-
Mädchen!*

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Fare Museo/ Making-Museum

A Curatorial Experience at an Art Centre close to the French-Italian Border

→ A.TITOLO

a.titolo (www.atitolo.it) is a curatorial collective that was established in Turin in 1997 by Georgina Bertolino, Francesca Comisso, Nicoletta Leonardi, Lisa Parola and Luisa Perlo with the aim of promoting contemporary art oriented toward the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the public realm. a.titolo curates public art and site-specific projects, exhibitions, workshops, talks, publications and experimental training programmes cultivating the dialogue between urban design and visual arts. In 2010, a.titolo was given the three-year artistic directorship of CESAC, the Experimental Centre for Contemporary Arts at Filatoio (the Spinning Mill) in Caraglio (Cuneo).

→ ABSTRACT

CESAC, the Experimental Centre for the Contemporary Arts at Caraglio, close to the French border in northern Italy, was founded in 1999 by the Marcovaldo Association and the Piedmont Regional Government. Since then it has pursued a mission of centrality in a geographical area that cultural consumerism defines as “decentralised.” These signals have become methodological guidelines for CESAC, which the collective a.titolo—Art Director of the centre from 2010 to 2012—has made its own. For this reason, Making-Museum—rather than “visiting a museum” or “being in a museum”—has involved developing a programme that could create a dialogue between local actors and the themes and languages of contemporary artistic culture and research, both inside and outside the exhibition space. The development of Making-Museum over the years has brought together different versions of a curatorial practise that, coming to terms with the ongoing transformation of the museum, have mapped out some lines of research: interaction with the physical, architectural and political territory, joint development of projects with active communities, developing a project-related dialogue among the various actors who critically involve themselves with the institution, and with its recent and future goals.

Museums have a social responsibility towards their local communities, and that responsibility is linked to the specifics of the institution and to its mission. In order to be able to play its social role, the museum must stand in an “open” position, one of “listening” to its reference community. It must ask itself about its role and rethink its function, in order to effectively interact with today’s reality, which is characterised by complex and dynamic elements. The cultural heritage can play an important role in society, combating various types of exclusion, and offering itself as an area for experimentation of new forms of cultural citizenship, promoting and sustaining social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the territory.

The “Education and Mediation” Commission, ICOM Italia (November 2009)

The notes that accompanied the first exhibition organised by a.titolo as Art Directors of CESAC (Centro Sperimentale per le Arti Contemporanee) quoted statements made by the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera that were published in *The Museum Revisited* special issue of the journal *Artforum* (2010). In the first decade of this century, she stressed the need to make the museum into a building “where things are not exhibited but activated [...], an occasion that is not a place to visit but a presence.” By this, she suggested the idea of the museum not only as a structure, but as a programme. Two years later, we are still following this idea. We also experience it as a responsibility: placing the research of contemporary artists alongside the context in which they have been called upon to work. CESAC, whose exhibition spaces are located in Europe’s oldest spinning mill, with its sixteenth-century northern Italian architecture, lies close to the French border. The local context thus comprises the plains extending from Cuneo to Saluzzo and the surrounding valleys—historically linked with the border—the forms of architecture that produced the silk mill where hundreds of women used to work, the local environment and the local culture. It is a vast and complex territory, forged by significant historical events and by outstanding personalities in Italy’s history, but that also suffers today, like many other areas, from a generalised lack of awareness of place: a lost sense of what these places mean for our habitat and for our history.

As in a strange play of perspectives, we sought work that combined geographical borders with moments of history, which linked both to the territory and to the common themes of international artistic production. We singled out works and projects capable of raising general questions, but that, scaled down, were also relevant locally: themes revolving around work, globalisation, the economy, politics, and, not least, to the environment, memory, and identity. Some of the exhibited works were placed so as to relate them to the history of the exhibition area. Conversely, other artists were asked to conceive site-specific images, and to do so without limiting or restricting neither their perspectives nor our own, but rather to extend and reposition the expectations.

In June 2010, in the rooms of the Spinning Mill, we proposed the theme

of the relation between work and location, and presented artist Tania Brugera's installation *Poetic Justice*, which belongs to *La Gaia* Collection in Busca. The theme was taken up again by Italian artist Cesare Viel in his personal show in the fall of 2011, in the form of three works conceived specially for the exhibition rooms. In the old weaving rooms, now the pilaster room, the artist's recorded voice evokes the movements of the "reelers," the women who worked at "reeling" the silkworms. Until the thirties, this was work that they had to do with their hands in hot water. *Echi di rumori scomparsi* (*Echoes of Vanished Noises*) is just a voice in an empty room; the artist's words retrace and echo the gestures of the past, creating a poetic flow that is interwoven with the sound of flowing water and the sound of the "throwing-machines," the old machinery now reconstructed and positioned in a wing of the Spinning Mill. Throughout his research, Cesare Viel uses words as a vehicle to link time and geography, thought and distant realities. Uniting the place with an "elsewhere," in another room at a short distance from the sound installation the Italian artist exhibited an image from a newspaper, which reported about a flood in India, as though it was a line drawing traced upon a large sheet of paper. The image showed the face of an old woman immersed in the waters up to her waist, and beneath it a single phrase: *Più nessuno da nessuna parte* (*No-one anywhere, any longer*). These words, drawn from a text by the French critic and semiologist Roland Barthes, were written for the death of his mother. Like an echo, the artist combined recorded words recalling the work of the women workers with the image of that isolated female figure, intent on resisting the force of the waters. The third work conceived by Viel for the Spinning Mill also stood as a poetic reference by combining places that are distant, but capable of creating a line of thoughts and images. It was commissioned by an Indian artisan and produced for the CESAC exhibition. Among the spinning machines the artist positioned a large carpet with the hand-woven words: *Solo ciò che accade, quando accade, se accade* (*Only What Happens, When it*



IMG. 01 – Meschac Gaba, Perruques-Architecture, 2002-2006. Performance and installation at the Caraglio Spinning Mill, June 27, 2010. Photo by Francesca Cirilli

Happens, If it Happens). After carefully observing the exhibition spaces and making numerous inspections, Viel thus brought together words, sounds, and distant signs that, for a moment in time, came together in the same place, exhibited as if on a page of writings and drawings.

Following a logical and natural progression, part of our proposal for the programme *Making-Museum* targeted the architecture and the environment surrounding the exhibition site. In June 2010, the *Perruques-architecture*, by Beninese artist Mechac Gaba, came from many different places, to reconsider some architectural and artistic forms of European modernity, such as embroidered sculptures. Conversely, French artist Olivier Grossetête presented very different forms of architecture at his first personal show in Italy. Alongside models of bridges suspended from huge balls, or video images of women trying to catch the moon, he continued his elegant play of equilibriums and proportions. At the Caraglio Spinning Mill, the artist triggered a network of “collective energy” involving more than 300 students from local schools in creating the modules of *Château d'eau*: a water tower made of cardboard, specially conceived for the exhibition. On the day of the inauguration these youngsters and their families, together with members of the general public, raised the structure to over ten metres tall in little more than three hours. They realised a collective sculpture in which, according to the artist’s intent, “what is needed is not strength, but the energy of all.”

For the section *Making-Museum-Archive*, in July 2011 we presented *Il popolo che manca* (*The People Who Are Missing*), by Andrea Fenoglio and Diego Mometti. Images and interviews from the film, and from the series of documentaries of the same name, were put together by the two artists after five years of research and work in the area around Cuneo. Through videos and testimony, the exhibition re-proposed a fresh interpretation of some of the places mentioned in interviews recorded in the seventies

IMG. 02 – Olivier Grossetête, *Chateau d'eau* (Water Tower), 2010. Collective architecture in cardboard. A CESAC production with the support of VIAPAC. Photo by Francesca Cirilli



by Nuto Revelli for *Il mondo dei vinti* (1977) and *L'anello forte* (1985), published by Einaudi. Distributed through four rooms, the work by the two researchers found a new form and presented the general public with a sort of archive of “everything that was left over”: materials not used in editing the documentary that won the Jury’s Special Prize at the Turin Film Festival in 2010. The research method that Revelli used was thus repeated at CESAC, becoming a path-finder to return to observe the territory: what it holds and what it tells.

→ STORIES, BORDERS, GEOGRAPHY, AND MOVING SPACES

From 2010 onwards, the works proposed by CESAC form a single sequence. Placed throughout the rooms of the Spinning Mill, they enable the viewer to revisit the site’s historical framework and that of the surrounding territory. Interwoven with methodological considerations concerning today’s idea of “making-museum” and, more generally, of art in the age of the “Educational Turn,” the result is a sort of relay of different viewpoints and overlapping reflections: our own, those of the artists, and those of the general public.

This proposal is also clearly represented in the video *Con la coda dell'occhio* (*Out of the Corner of My Eye*), by Alessandro Quaranta: a feature filmed in Valle Stura, close to Caraglio, shot in the summer of 2010 and then exhibited, in dual projection, at the Spinning Mill. *Con la Coda dell'occhio* records a mass action created by the artist, starting with his mental picture of the place where his family originated. In the two videos, projected face to face, the physical geography of the valley seems to be outlined by a sequence of lights flashing at one another, from one side to another side of the valley, from the valley bottom to the mountain peak. This was made possible through the action of a group of twenty “figurants” armed with mirrors people who live in the area and whom the artist involved in the project, proposing that they stand in different parts of the valley, miles apart, at different altitudes. With reflections from their mirrors they produced a kind of earthly constellation. The video and the actions that accompany it arose from the atmosphere of the tales his grandfather used to tell: the bilberries and raspberries that, until the early decades of the twentieth century, the local inhabitants would go out to pick at dawn in groups that kept in contact with one another through songs and calls. The same “dialogue,” proposed repeatedly over several years, intends to raise a series of points for meditation on the themes of communication, relationship, and the positioning of oneself *vis-à-vis* a place.

Continuing to reflect on the difficult relations between history and our “positioning ourselves” with regard to the present, in the year that was dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy we decided to propose a meditation on our country’s recent history. In 2011, at the invitation of Andrea Bruciati—then Director of the *Galleria Comunale d’Arte Contemporanea at Monfalcone*—we hosted the works of six Ital-

IMG. 03 – Alessandro Quaranta, *Con la coda dell'occhio* (Out of the Corner of My Eye), 2010. A CESAC production with the support of VIAPAC. Photo of the filming in Valle Stura. Photo by Stefano Degioanni



ian artists whose research had led them to cast doubt on some phases of a complex history. Following our suggestion, the same six artists then agreed to enter a wider field, placing their works alongside those by international artists belonging to the La Gaia collection in Busca, a small town near Caraglio. From this contrast, which involved artists, curators, and collectors, two exhibitions were born: *OO Italia, Non c'è un'ombra nella quale scomparire* (*There is no Shadow in which to Hide*), and *Esponenziale, Vedute dalla Collezione La Gaia* (*Exponential: Views from the La Gaia Collection*). Two exhibitions were presented at the same time, to propose new exhibition strategies to highlight the critical nature of today's cultural policies with regard to contemporary art in Italy: artist-related and curator-related practises based on an exchange of views.

The six works presented in *OO Italia, Non c'è un'ombra nella quale scomparire*, were selected from a sort of catalogue of more than a hundred works, compiled by two hundred artists working in Italy. This began with the project *OO Italia*, conceived by Andrea Bruciati for Italy's 150th anniversary. Six works were selected from the *OO Italia* catalogue to document one line of artistic research explored during the last decade, one that investigates and reinterprets situations and protagonists of Italy's recent history. Videos, photographic series, and installations dating between 2000 and 2010 took a detailed look at the country in the form of a dialogue between past and present: institutional views from the photographic series *Il Corpo dello Stato* (Armin Linke), the theme of work (Rossella Biscotti) or of cohabitating with migrants and refugees (Gianluca and Massimiliano De Serio). These lines of research were interwoven with other works evoking key personalities in the nation's history: Giuseppe Garibaldi (Sislej Xhafa), Aldo Moro (Francesco Arena) and Pier Paolo Pasolini (Elisabetta Benassi). Showing some of the catalogued works at the Spinning Mill, and activating a kind of "dialogue through images," a.titolo then asked the six Italian artists to make a further selection, from

the international works in the prestigious collection of Bruna Girodeno and Matteo Viglietta, which is located in our neighbourhood. *Esponenziale. Vedute dalla Collezione La Gaia* thus became an enriched meditation on the state of art. Beginning with the title, it implicates the potential extension, and the capillary nature, of the furrows that contemporary art can trace within the complex geography of the present, amplifying reflections on themes and forms of international artistic research, but at the same time taking as its perspective the viewpoint of Italian artists. The works by Francesco Arena, Elisabetta Benassi, Rossella Biscotti, Gianluca and Massimiliano De Serio, Armin Linke, and Sislej Xhafa were shown alongside those of Francis Alÿs, John Armleder, Miroslaw Balka, Lynda Benglis, Patty Chang & David Kelley, Sam Durant, Július Koller, Helen Mirra, Mike Nelson, Roman Ondák, and Gina Pane.

The methodology proposed by *Fare Museo/Making-Museum* thus gives central importance to re-establishing a relationship of trust between history, today's cultural research, and all the different visitors that a museum attracts in the early decades of this century. For this reason, inside the art centre, a.titolo also decided to activate an experience of the French public art programme *Nouveaux commanditaires*, conceived in 1991 by the artist François Hers and promoted by the Paris-based Fondation de France. Taking as its model the museum in the sense of a public space, and operating through meetings and workshops, a diverse group of people—teachers, students, men and women—took up the challenge of becoming the patrons of an exhibition of contemporary art, which was inaugurated in May 2012 with the title *Mente locale. Nuovi committenti per una mostra. (Concentrating Local Minds, New Patrons for an Exhibition)*. This was an exhibition that enabled us to look further afield, and imagine new directions: whereas the 2011 exhibition of contemporary artwork mainly tackled points of history, the 2012 exhibition directs its attention towards geography, the territory, and how it is changing as we move from the twentieth to the twenty-first century.

Can an exhibition be considered a public space? Above all, can it act as a space that is useful for citizens? These are the questions that opened the process between a.titolo and its group of patrons. The collective discussion, which began from an analysis of this context, and of relations between citizens and the territory they belong to, brought to light different notions of the border. These conceptions originated from biographical narrations, from descriptions and analysis of physical, human, and political geography—close to the Alps and to the French border, this is an area imbued with many different significances. The discussion was then extended to an exchange of viewpoints, including those of Luca Morena, scholar of analytical philosophy, and those of the artists who were invited to interpret what emerged in the first phase of the project: Marzia Migliora, Anna Scalfi Eghenter, Alessandro Sciaraffa, and visual designer Nello Russo. In its physical spaces, the exhibition housed works that incited discussion and material interpretations proposed by the artists who as-

simulated and reworked all the different concepts raised during the meetings. Not a treatise on borders, but rather a process of mobilising around them. Two special projects flanked the exhibition, and led visitors beyond the museum boundaries: *Passaggi a Oriente* by Enrico Tealdi comprised a series of papers and pictorial works developed for the old Hotel Oriente in Caraglio, which had been closed for many years. *Punta Venezia* by Hannes Egger was a project within an artistic operation on the geopolitics of borders, dedicated to the numerous peaks named “Venezia” in different parts of the Alps, from the north-east to the north-west. During a year of work with the programme *Nuovi Committenti*, beginning with maps, places, and biographical accounts, our aim was to give shape not only to an exhibition but to a working group that would be “competent”: capable to use a collective grammar, of designing a shared and recognised cultural proposal.

With the same intent of moving positions and borders, at the Spinning Mill an exhibition entitled *À travers la montagne* was staged simultaneously with the exhibition *Mente Locale*. This was organised by a.titolo and Nadine Gomez-Passamar, Director of Musée Gassendi - CAIRN Centre d'Art, at Digne-les-Bains. The exhibition showed some of the results of the programme VIAPAC - *Via per l'Arte Contemporanea (A route for contemporary art)*, a trans-border cooperative project between Italy and France.

Eastern Piedmont, the area where CESAC is active, and the Alps of Haute-Provence form a “middle earth,” split in two by mountains but nevertheless marked by the routes and crossroads of a shared history, composed of migrations, seasonal work, explorations, and conflicts. The project VIAPAC - *Via per l'arte contemporanea* asked artists to imagine and trace new routes, projects, and actions, stretching across the shared border. At the Spinning Mill some projects selected by the French artistic curators of *Via* were exhibited; this selection brought together contemporary art and real geography, to propose a map of a never-attempted journey from Caraglio to Digne and vice versa. The works, by Joan Fontcuberta, Paul-Armand Gette, Richard Nonas, Bernard Plossu, Andrea Caretto and Raffaella Spagna, Anne-James Chaton, and Abraham Poincheval, were the result of a network of contacts, meetings and relationships forged across the mountains. Thanks to an intense and active collaboration and cultural mediation, these artworks directly involved the locations and their inhabitants, as well as cultural professionals and administrators. The photographs, installations, sculptures, and videos that were exhibited in the spring of 2012 at the Spinning Mill, as well as the projects presented outside the museum, offered visitors a meditation upon the concept of border, route, territory, and landscape, while also raising questions about the future and past of places, and of the people who live in them—all together drawing a “comprehensive” and “emotional” map of the territory.

In our view, this infinite interweaving of meaning, which can cast a fresh light upon history and the present, local and global, I and we, moments

and movement, must have a central place in the programme and project guidelines drawn up within the activities of CESAC. And this must follow an idea of “doing” that aims—and it is certainly not easy—to reposition the works vis-à-vis the existent, contra that sort of constant divergence of meanings, directions, and images that has now become the skyline of our present. *Making-Museum* is thus an exhausting exercise, which obliges us to extend our horizons and then restrict them again, to be aware of the importance of each person’s individuality in their present perception, but also to find a way of seeing with fresh eyes, even only temporarily, the social roles that we fill and the geographical contexts from which we come. And to try (not without difficulty) to keep our distance from the rationale of the “great event” and the quantitative measures that continue to accompany the production of the contemporary, even in times of severe crisis. That is, to opt for a museum that is capable of grasping this meditation and engaging in long-term dialogue; a museum that, starting from the sphere of contemporary art, is capable of measuring itself with the themes that culture is investigating in this specific and difficult phase of history. The plurality of positions and of viewpoints thus becomes fundamental, as it outlines a “terrain for experimentation” and “new forms of cultural citizenship.”

Note: The exhibitions *Mente locale. Nuovi committenti per una mostra* and *À travers la montagne*, and the special projects *Château d'eau* by Olivier Grossetête and *Con la coda dell'occhio* by Alessandro Quaranta, were conceived and funded by VIAPAC - *Via per l'Arte Contemporanea*, a cooperative project across the borders between Italy and France, promoted by the Piedmont Regional Government, the Marcovaldo cultural association of Caraglio, Conseil général des Alpes de Haute-Provence, and by the Réserve Géologique des Alpes de Haute-Provence, as part of the programme *ALCOTRA 2007–2013 Insieme oltre i confine (Together beyond the Borders)*. With the idea of opening up a road between Digne-les-Bains and Caraglio, passing through Seyne-les-Alpes, the Ubaye valley, and the Stura valley, VIAPAC uses contemporary art as a resource to enrich the territory, transforming it into a tool for reading, interpreting, and expressing the cultural identity of the Alpine border and of its surrounding areas.



Crossing and Creolising the Archive

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DO8

New Aggregators of Meaning and Practices in the Contemporary Metapolis

→ **DANILO CAPASSO**

Architect, designer, and artist Danilo Capasso is a PhD candidate in “Urban Planning” at the University of Naples “Federico II.” His research investigates the relations between urban planning, public art, cultural practices and new media. He is the founder and curator of the N.EST Napoliest project (www.napoliest.it). From 2002 to 2005, he was the curator of the Sintesi Festival of Electronic Arts in Naples. Founder of the nonprofit organization MAO Media&Arts Office (www.mediartsoffice.eu), in 2008 he created the Questions of Space Studio, a professional hub that involves with the fields of architecture, landscape urbanism, new media and design (www.danilocapasso.eu).

→ **ABSTRACT**

Nowadays the “contact zone” can be viewed as a multi-dimensional relational zone, where relational space extends from the physical urban domain to the digital domains of the networks. This essay tries to foster the discussion starting from the idea of the contact zone, and connecting it to the domain of relational and public art with its role in contemporary urban society. Moreover, the web sphere has pushed this process ahead, de facto creating an infrastructure, where different contact zones can emerge as points of condensation in the urban texture. Museum and cities are no longer only physical interfaces. If art is heading towards a new destiny—to serve urban society and everyday life—then the relational potential of the internet could serve to provide this new layer of connection. The case of N.EST Napoliest will set an example of hybrid practice, pioneering the idea that a participated digital collection of site-specific contents archived on the web—created to address local issues about urban transformation and regeneration—could be an example of the multiple evolutions of the post-colonial museum: an extended contact zone for the diverse relational dimensions that a territory can activate.

PREVIOUS PAGE – N.EST tags, 2006. Courtesy N.EST, photography by Massimiliano Rianna

→ CONTACT ZONE, RELATIONAL AESTHETICS, CONTEMPORARY METAPOLIS

The “contact zone” is a concept that describes areas that allow for the intermingling of two or more cultures. The term was invented by Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and was used by James Clifford (1997) to rethink the role of the museum in the relation between cultures. This was at the beginning of the internet age, a moment when the concept of “relational aesthetics” was also taking shape in the art world, prompted by the art critic and curator Nicolas Borriaud (also co-founder of the Palais de Tokyo, opened in the late nineties).

In Borriaud’s theory, relational art is art that assumes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interaction and its social context, rather than the articulation of an “autonomous and private symbolic space” (Borriaud 1998, 14). Borriaud himself underlines how the urban dimension has pushed the urbanization of the artistic experience. The internet has done even more, somehow dissolving this experience in the digital fluxus. “New Babylon,” the Situationist city imagined by Constant Nieuwenhuys in the sixties, has never been so close to reality, even if mainly made of digital bits.¹ On the other hand, more than twenty years earlier, the critic and curator Enrico Crispolti, intervening at the Università Popolare di Napoli in 1975, claimed that:

art should be socially useful, and this was not resolvable within the realm of language, but had to extend to urban spaces. Such spaces were operational fields, perceived not only as physical collective areas, but also as sociological spaces, as mass communication networks, as social utilization and management of such spaces, to be pursued with the perspective of replacing traditional private use, with a new collective public use. (quoted in Piolselli 2008, 23)

Despite the fact that they share the same framework—that of the contemporary art context and its renewed attitude toward the urban space—Crispolti’s and Borriaud’s relational paradigms diverge. They both call artists to act in the urban space, but with different outcomes and from different standpoints. According to Borriaud, the outcome of the relational work is still embedded in the traditional museum space—the protected “white box”—and it produces a “mitigated” form of social critique. According to Crispolti, instead, the relational concept drives art practice out of the “white box,” in a non-protected field, where art can engage with reality and constraints. Finally, in 1995, before the publication of Borriaud’s book, the relational paradigm met the public art practice, paving the way to the concept of “new genre public art” (Lacy 1995)—an art practice that is socially engaged, process-based, and acts in the unstable context of everyday life. Here, urban space is considered as the stage to perform everyday survival tactics, and where the production of cultural practices—art among many others—takes place.

¹ New Babylon, the Situationist city, is the visionary architectural project developed by Constant Nieuwenhuys between 1956 and 1974: “[t]he project was concerned with issues of ‘unitary urbanism’ and the future of art in a technocratic society. [...] Several decades before the current debate about architecture in a supposedly placeless electronic age, Constant conceived an urban and architectural model that seems a physical embodiment of the World Wide Web” (cover synopsis from de Zegher and Wigley 2001).

Today we live in the social network age. Urban and social space is now a granular matter, bouncing between the digital and physical realm: network and city intermingle, pushing the identity fragmentation process increasingly forward. The museum space follows the dissolution and fragmentation of contemporary urban society. The urban sprawl is also a phenomenon of cultural sprawl, which implies concepts such as citizenship, migration, memory, identity, and space. Yet, although the network society has helped the global mobility of knowledge and information by adding a new layer to the relational sphere, fragmentation and nomadism have increased the sprawl of identity, generating a counter process and multiplying the local conflicts that are amplified by the global networks. These are the consequences of the strains between the forces of de-territorialization and re-territorialization, expressed by the multiple conflicts generated by religion, politics, race, poverty, and ignorance. At the same time, the web is a great opportunity to generate grassroots cultural compensation areas, and those have to be supported by renewed cultural and urban politics.

Therefore, what once was a space for the representation of power and national identity—the museum—becomes the new space for the negotiation and compensation between those old and new identities that exist at multiple scales within the city. Museums should be relational devices, devoted to social aggregation. They should become hosting spaces for cultural diversity, in order to create a common ground to foster a plurality of discourses across various areas: architecture, urbanism, culture, art, and politics.

Nowadays, the need for a permanent space of cultural representation can be questioned: every space can be seen as a space of cultural representation—where circumstances and instruments are temporarily merged to produce a cultural mediation and representation device. Such spaces should grow and develop organically, following the social and aesthetical tensions produced by the emerging conflicts arising in a certain place, in a certain situation. In this perspective, European Museums have to be active relational spaces—even if temporary, diffused or self-generated by cultural practices in the city—more than passive spaces for observation driven only by the view of the institutional curator. Yet, the emerging scene of multiple, undefined practices with no disciplinary bounds that occurs today in the public space—either coming from political activism, social engagement, public art, tactical urbanism, or performing architecture—defines a vibrant system of relationships between movements and events that are simultaneously interlinked and autonomous (Gausa 2003, 430).

Of course, these reflections are not aimed to contend that traditional museums should be abandoned. On the contrary, they suggest a form of parallel evolution of the museum concept, which is linked to the progress of urban life. A complete shifting of scale is taking place in our cities—from the metropolitan condition to the post-metropolitan condition. In François Asher's terms, we are moving "beyond" the metropolis itself, towards the contemporary "Metapolis." Indeed, the concept of Metapolis can be helpful to frame the spatial condition in which museums exist today. As

Asher points out, the Metapolis is a reality that transcends and comprehends, from many points of view, the metropolis as we know it. It fosters a new type of urban agglomeration made of multiple, heterogeneous and discontinuous spaces and relationships (Asher 1995). The Metapolis can be seen as a multi-scaled and multilayered city, in which a network of contact zones can emerge in the form of social and cultural “condensers,” thus creating a texture that infiltrates urban fabric with signs and with critical meanings, engaging art, people, and space. The Metapolis is

a changing scenario, which can be only represented by “opportunist cartographies” that refer to those appropriately implemented tactical aspects. A structure that is both analogous and different at the same time. A structure, in effect, of similar dynamics on a global scale and of different situations on a local scale, made up of collisions, encounters and intersections that eventually generate a great variety of specific and plural combinations. (Gausa et al. 2003, 430)

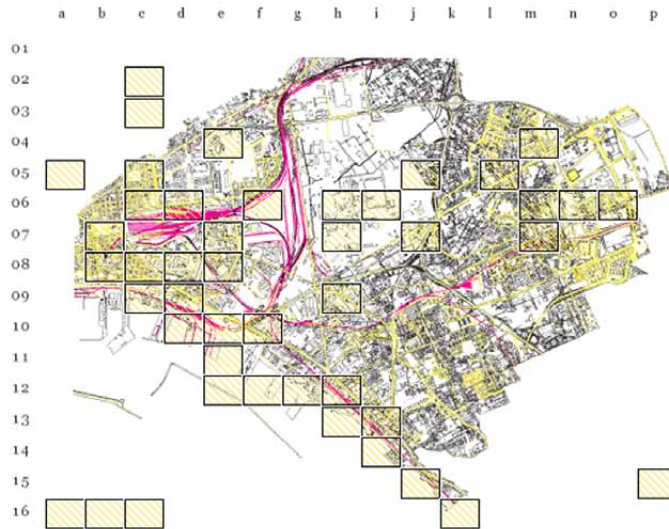
Thus museums should be conceived not only as permanent hubs, but as extemporary densifications of activities and uses of space, whether on-line or off-line, digital or physical, open source interfaces. In other words, they should be conceived as a multidimensional, exploded view of the former “contact zone” concept: new aggregators of meaning and practices in the contemporary Metapolis.

IMG. 01 – N.EST homepage and map, www.napoliest.it. Courtesy N.EST Napoliest

N.EST NAPOLIEST.IT

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HOME PAGE



→ THE CASE OF N.EST NAPOLIEST. ART, PUBLIC SPACE, URBAN TRANSFORMATION

We navigate the net like bodiless travellers. We cross high information density zones and horizontal networks that allow us to reach the periphery, towards new social forms. We inhabit the flows of data, places, and needs. This is the network—of knowledge, of work, of social gathering, of artistic production.

There is no such district as Napoliest—East Naples; yet it exists nevertheless. Spoken all in one breath, it is a conceptual and territorial *unicum*—from the Gianturco area, near the Central Station of the city, up to the eastern industrial periphery (Capasso et al 2006, 149). N.EST develops by induction, seeking a representation and mapping scheme of urban realities with a double goal: the experience of the city re-read through the internet; and the internet as a platform to develop solutions for the city itself. It starts from shared points of view and artistic gestures, architecture and creativity, which are authentically *site-specific* and *site-oriented*.

→ WHAT IS N.EST?

The N.EST/Napoliest project is a case study in which the idea of “contact zone” can be investigated in its different dimensions, starting from the extension of the physical urban space to the digital network space. A specific urban location is re-signified by its representation on the global map of the internet by means of producing site-specific artworks, archived and freely visible in a public database. Here the net and the database are taken as “meta-territorial” matter, addressing local issues on a potential global scale of discussion and knowledge:

there is a strong link between digital and internet cultures embracing creative interventions—extending even further to the Web 2.0 phenomenon—and the dilemmas facing the modern metropolis. The opportunity is present for cities to look to the inherent creativity of urban intervention as a type of street-level Research and Development into the individual’s creativity and their desires vis-à-vis design in the city. (Burnham 2008, 9)

N.EST is a project which focuses on the eastern industrial district of Naples, aimed to document urban transformation through art and new media. It is a mapping device that progressively evolves into a platform of creation, of production of artistic practices and projects for micro-intervention of urban regeneration dedicated to public spaces and dismissed areas. A condenser of collective cultural practices and ideas, the N.EST project was born in 2004 from an act of creative citizenship and from an urgency to engage with actual constraints. It was born outside of formal, disciplinary and institutional schemes, with the goal of contributing to the discussion about the transformation of the periphery into city. The project developed in a context of interrelation of cultures and roles, through everyday practice, within an informal pool of professionals who were part of the Neapolitan creative art scene at the turn of this most recent century. The N.EST practice is the outcome of a process of disorientation experienced by those who enact it, thus creating a content

device for mapping, as to provide knowledge of and orientation through the new urban reality.

The N.EST actors/citizens are driven by their choice of East Naples as a workplace. It is a cultural project in which, by means of tactical media and art, a “contact zone” is created: by re-connecting people and place, city and periphery, with the aim to re-think the criteria for the design and use of urban spaces. N.EST asks art to act as a guide for experience, and the web to provide a platform to contain it. Here the web is considered a space of “otherness,” where the present can be questioned—unveiling hidden potentials, highlighting conflicts, and developing strategies. It is seen as a space where different identities can meet to re-interpret a specific urban imagery by archiving memory and projects.

→ HOW IT WORKS

N.EST Napoliest is based on the mapping of twenty-five square kilometres of the city, which includes the eastern districts of Barra, Ponticelli, San Giovanni a Teduccio, Poggioreale and Gianturco/Zona Industriale. The project area is limited to these districts, a formal scheme that generates a relational link between the location and the *site-specific* constraints that the artists have to follow. The map of East Naples is also the user interface, corresponding to the website homepage www.napoliest.it. This map is divided into a grid of 140 modules, any of which constitutes a fragment of the city. Any module of the grid can host an undefined number of digital media contents in the form of artworks and projects. It is a database in which contents can be archived *site-specifically*, like in a regular cadastre, a friendly GIS (Geographic Information System) interface that indexes geo-referential materials module by module.

The internet database, therefore, is where all the contributions made by artists, creative thinkers, and common citizens are collected. These contributions are the responses to a call for entries, which is always active, and was published for the first time in 2004. As the call states, N.EST invites

artists and creatives, researchers, photographers, architects and urbanists to submit their works in digital format, to be collected and published on the internet. The N.EST database also accepts proposals for the publication of pre-existing contents and artworks that relate to the district of East Naples, as underlined by the project scheme. The territory can be considered from many different points of view: theoretical, physical, perceptual, or socio-relational. It can be portrayed and elaborated in an imaginary or evolutionary conception, but the materials proposed must always refer in some way to its topography. The essential requirement, asked of all participants, is to experience, investigate and discover the area; to identify with their sensibility and theoretical interests one or more places of that territory to be represented, studied or documented through collective projects, field research, or urban practices. All the works created and collected with and for N.EST will be freely visible on the official website.²

2 A full Italian version of the document can be found at <http://www.nestube.com/nest/>

→ BRIEF ARTWORKS REVIEW

Today N.EST's database contains works of more than fifty artists, photographers, architects, musicians, and writers, featuring elements of the area interpreted through different tools and techniques. Alessandro Cimmino offers sequences of photographs taken from the CCTV cameras of factories and offices. On "CCTV" Napoliest is seen from blurry black and white monitors, evoking a sense of separation from an inhospitable marginal landscape where life is closed off from the external world of the periphery.³ Bianco-Valente, with their work "Area," travel along the roads of the easternmost city limits, marking out the places that formerly belonged to the refineries, exploring the typical wasteland of a derelict industrial area.⁴ While in the work of Cimmino the statement can be applied on a general scale and resonates with other places—with other industrial areas and outskirts of the world—in Bianco-Valente's work the inspiration comes from the personal memory of the artists. One of them was born in the area of Ponticelli, near the refineries, which were still operating at that time, thus evoking the red foggy atmosphere of the time. "Sorvolando Napoliest (1975)" by Antonio Niego uses poetry and photographs from an unpublished 1975 aerial shooting of East Naples.⁵ He combines a series of captions, one for each photo, in a perverse and loud interplay. These captions and images witness to the brutal and stratified disaster that mankind provokes onto nature and cities. Florian Huettner's vision of the Vasto district, "The Great East of Naples," is instead composed of photographs and writings drawn from an art residency programme in the area, in a work that recalls the travels of the *Grand Tour*: fiction with a Germanic flavour, coloured with romantic overtones.⁶ The video by the art-duo Moio&Sivelli, entitled "Greetings," focuses on the silent but evident flood of migration of the Chinese community to East Naples after 1998.⁷ The Chinese community started to settle in this part of the city as a result of an international commercial agreement made by two big players in the container shipping market in 1998: the Chinese COSCO and the formerly local MSC Aponte company. Within a few years, the Neapolitan commercial harbour would have become one of the most important hubs for the distribution of Chinese goods in the Mediterranean—a situation well underlined in the first chapter of Roberto Saviano's book *Gomorra*. Another interesting project is the docu-reality film directed by Vincenzo Cavallo "24 hours in Napoliest."⁸ The film is based on the experience of living in the periphery for twenty-four hours, no-stop, and tracing all the possible emotional feedback coming from the

elenco_call.php?lang=0. Accessed July 8, 2012.

3 http://www.nestube.com/nest/scheda_autore.php?lang=0&id=10&lang=2 (accessed July 8, 2012).

4 http://www.nestube.com/nest/scheda_contributo.php?lang=0&id=47&lang=2&lang=0 (accessed July 8, 2012).

5 http://www.nestube.com/nest/scheda_autore.php?lang=0&id=22&lang=2&lang=0&lang=2 (accessed July 8, 2012).

6 http://www.nestube.com/nest/scheda_autore.php?lang=0&id=9&lang=2 (accessed July 8, 2012).

7 http://www.nestube.com/nest/scheda_contributo.php?lang=0&id=133&lang=2&lang=0 (accessed July 8, 2012).

8 The complete documentary is visible at <https://vimeo.com/11755890> (accessed July 8, 2012).

IMG. 02 – Moio&Sivelli video artwork for N.EST, still frame. Courtesy N.EST and the artists



city. It starts with a bike tour of East Naples made by a group of artists that have published artworks on the project database, and then continues, hour after hour, with other histories, other places: writers, street educators, transsexuals, flea market vendors, Chinese wholesalers, marginalized Ukrainian street merchants, post-modern farmers (Capasso et al 2006, 150).

As a way to conclude, I will end this essay with a few lines from a work realised with the Neapolitan artist Marco Zezza, in which the artist himself becomes the fictional narrator of a urban tale about East Naples, where traces of his experience with N.EST and his life mixes with other histories related to the project experience.

Middy is the moment I like best, if I'm in southern climes. When the sea is at its brightest, even in winter. Everywhere, from the oily waters of Vigliena to the azure of Capri, from Corsica's deep blue to Turkey's emerald green... Behind the main train station of Naples... I never went there as often as I do now. I remember that chunk of periphery stubbornly trying to become part of the city. I started exploring the streets three years ago, wandering adrift, without any particular destination. A map on the web to be filled with my emotions, to describe where I am in this world and what direction my city is taking, starting from its tangled and bitter periphery; to see what art can do for life. I'm going through right now. (Zezza, quoted in Capasso and Marone 2008, 237)

To sum up, the N.EST project can be seen as a participatory relational museum—without a permanent physical location but with a clear *site-specific* attitude. Occasionally, when circumstances converge, the N.EST practice can “condensate” in the form of an extemporaneous *contact zone*: a happening, an exhibition, a call to urban action, a temporary museum, on the pages of a book, somewhere in urban space—possibly in East Naples, and more often somewhere else in the city, in Europe, and the world.



IMG. 03 – Monumento. Public artwork by Marco Zezza for N.EST, 2008, photography by Danilo Capasso

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Recovering, Archiving, Contaminating

The Negotiation of Museums with Memory

→ ALESSANDRA DE ANGELIS

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→ ABSTRACT

In this essay I analyze two very different memorial institutions – the Berlin Jüdisches Museum, and the Cape Town District Six Museum. The first deals with an archived and protected memory; it insists on “deconstruction” as a language for the contemporary architecture of trauma, defending the “monumental void” of the Holocaust Tower as an aesthetic device for memory. The second, a grassroots community initiative involving multiple memories, recovered and contaminated to foster political initiatives in the present, offers itself, on the contrary, as a critical interface between communities and the nation through the reopening and exposition of controversial tangible remainders from the apartheid era to the public, invited to take an active part in the project. Neither of these models can guarantee that the fissures of memory and citizenship will remain open to change, on these thin thresholds between aesthetics and ethics, protection and vulnerability, exhaustiveness and imperfection. Yet the challenges of memory in postcolonial museums emerge precisely around these difficulties and necessities, as they have to confront questions of memory/ies and its/their “archival” bonds with the future if they seek to enhance democratic processes and participatory citizenship, in addition to the shared, alternative aesthetics that contest the closure of collection and representation.

→ MEMORY, IDENTITY AND MUSEUM PRACTICES

By insisting that the events commemorated are part of a historical past, the museum cuts itself off from contemporary parallels and limits the range of our understanding of just how complex and far reaching those continuities might be.

Irit Rogoff (2002)

Memory is a complicated issue in museum studies, especially when it involves the traumatic memory of difficult past events. The ghosts of dramatic legacies—slaughters, devastating politics, great tragedies—haunt any attempt at handling display and commemorative practices in both present and future-oriented cultural politics; moreover, they coexist with the spectres of the same structure and discourse that belong to museums, language, and memory *techné*. Museum “poetics” and “politics” are interwoven in an extended network of signification,¹ a pervasive diffusion of discursive truths that have always been grounded in representation, and on the systematization of the relations with “the other.”² As a result, “identity obsessions” often emerge in the form of cultural and ethnically-constructed definitions—negotiable, of course, but nevertheless persistent—that sanction ‘sense of belonging’, exclusions, and invented citizenships. And since it is not an easy task to discard the strategies of power that inform culture and museum practices in the production of knowledge (discourse and *techné*), the issue is thus complicated by our own desire to avoid such traps.

Certain kinds of museums choose to escape marginalization and power/knowledge discourses by granting public access to curatorial and managing practices. As Sheila Watson (2007) explains, “museum communities”—a cooperative team of public, curators, organizers, founders, patrons, artists, and technical staff—work not only for the preservation of past heritage, which is sometimes considered at risk of disappearing, but also for the sake of the present and its cultural and political resources for integration and civic progress. “Memorial communities,” which take shape around historical interests and deep traumatic experiences as well as glorious pasts, are one of several kinds of museum communities that Watson singles out and defines. They all recognize the urgency of protecting civil rights, as well as cultural and political minorities, and strive for the valorisation of ethnic, but also class, gender, religious, and sexual differences; some of them achieve shared curatorial practices during all stages of the complex processes of collection and display; others promote a direct, almost symbiotic relation with the public. From the point of view of community museum studies, such practices could grant reparation for the exclusion practices that, since the beginning, have informed

1 For a broader definition of the terms “poetics” and “politics” in museum studies, see Henrietta Lidchi (1997). For another interesting contextualization of these terms, see Rhiannon Mason (2006).

2 See Michel Foucault ([1969] 1972); and Edward Said (1978).

Occidental classical, modern and even most contemporary museums. Yet, we might argue, this does not impact the fundamental questions connected to museum and identity representation practices, since the very language of museology, but also of “memory,” is based on the singling out, the selecting, collecting, defining and displaying of experiences, objects or human “types,” and this remains basically untouched. In this essay I will try to investigate this field through issues of language and memory, by introducing two different memorial approaches, one dealing precisely with a memorial museum, although not a community-based one, and the other with a grassroots museum initiative within a memorial community.

The memorial museums of the Shoah that proliferate in the European and North American countries—even though they are not community museums because their patronage and financial support comes primarily from the State, along with the donations of rich private institutions or individuals—are nevertheless based on shared experiences of trauma and mass slaughter. In this last case, a group identifies itself with a tragic and painful historical event, or with a place located in the past, and may risk closing itself into an imaginary self-definition, thus reinforcing the exclusionary practices that it seeks to avoid, which are at the root of representation.³ In such cases, memory becomes a tool for identification, especially when it concerns the integral recovery or salvaging of past traces that evoke a lost origin and are crystallized in the present as immutable. The risk is to muffle every debate on future projects and current possibilities of becoming, immolating them on the (assumed) intangible altar of trauma. The brutality of History must always be revealed, but not in opposition to the research of new meanings and strategies of coping with the past today; as Tiffany Jenkins clearly notes: “the past must not determine what happens” (2007, 451). Even when questioned by the needs of the present, the past nonetheless remains at the heart of a large number of conservation and curatorial practices that are hermeneutically closed, “monumentalized” and “promoted” against a philistine culture of oblivion, indifference, and what’s worst, revisionism.

To what extent do recovery and commemoration projects hinder present and future debates? If museums, in addition to the challenges of contemporary migration, are also to take into account the burden of connected memories that “come to meet us from the future” (Chambers 2012, 144)—that might somehow render migration more familiar to European historical traumas such as the Shoah and pogroms—they should also try to understand and complicate this question. Issues of memory, as well as of the monuments that represent its value and necessity, have informed twentieth century museums. This is especially the case since the Shoah, which seriously damaged and challenged memory as a testimony, a spiritual human faculty as well as a civic due, bringing it to its limits, and to

3 See Anderson ([1983] 1991), who describes the modalities that a community (mostly a nation) adopts in order to perceive and show itself as homogeneous, united and clearly definable, through imaginary processes that involve people in a common and shared representation of the “past.”

the limits of language itself. What cannot be said, remembered or represented—the unspeakable and the unfigurable—always threatens our attempts at naming, figuring and finding meaning to traumatic events that must not, and cannot, be erased from History; they are tangible signs of the human violence that we still try to domesticate and keep separate from us through social, religious, cultural, and commemorative rituals, as René Girard explains (1972). It is only by accepting what Giorgio Agamben calls the “lacuna” ([1998] 2002, 33, 38-39)—the non-language, the rupture, the voids, the irreducible otherness of language to meaning, communication, and conscious finality—that memorialisation and museums can be approached today, despite Adorno’s prophecy of culture impotence after Auschwitz.

Agamben’s articulation of the poetic word as unspeakable and unarchivable leads us to another issue: the infinite and constitutive permeability of memory for that which escapes its control and storage, for what cannot be said, registered, showed, preserved, stored, and yet that still is. As Jacques Derrida taught us ([1995] 1998), the archive can never be exhaustive, or “terminable,” unless we damage and lose what we are trying to save—namely the living language of transforming memory, which dies when confined into libraries, monuments, or is overexposed through commemorative rituals that invariably take the shape of obsessive rituals of remembering. The archive thus dwells on the threshold of an almost impossible aporia, caught in between its own “anarchivic,” “archivolithic” drive—the “archive fever,” which compels us to catalogue and enclose every experience, as if moved by a “death-drive [...] archive-destroying, by silent vocation” (ibid., 14)—and its conscious purpose of keeping memory alive by storing it. Archiving, with these premises, is impossible.

Both Agamben and Derrida confront us with issues of language: testimony, poetry and psychoanalysis (which is at the heart of *Archive Fever*)—prototypes of archiving and of *languages par excellence*. This suggests considering also the question of the museum as a problem of language, which interrogates the premises of museology—when organized into archives, yielding to a compulsion of storing and preserving objects, stories, and heritages (which are then exposed and consigned to a public that is eager to see it domesticated), museums may risk being experienced as mausoleums. Mausoleums are “death-driven places” meant to soothe the viewers’ desire to know—a desire devoid of passion, typical of contemporary “franchising museums”—and appease their sense of guilt for not being really interested in knowing about the contemporary cultural politics that inform the display devices and most educational institutions.

To allow for the recognition of such forms of politics and such disciplinary strategies power exerted also through museums and commemoration culture—memory as a mausoleum, identity as a privileged or minority construction, and display devices as spectacle—we need to radically rethink the language of museology by also taking into account its relation with memory. This relation is questioned by Jacques Derrida when he further

complicates the issues raised by one of the most beloved, contested and un-touchable museums of post-Nazi Europe: the Jüdisches Museum in Berlin.

→ MEMORY AS AN “INTANGIBLE VOID” IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE JÜDISCHES MUSEUM

Entirely dedicated to Jewish culture, history and heritage in the city of Berlin, this museum was built next to the baroque and classical Berlin Museum (the Kolliegenhaus, in the Friedrichshain area). The Jüdisches Museum was built as an independent extension, though it is connected to the main building (where the permanent collections, restaurant and other halls are located) by a subterranean entrance—the only one through which it is possible to enter the “Holocaust Tower,” which is arguably the most important and therefore most discussed site of the museum. This particular detail functions as a visible reminder of the subterranean, ambivalent, fecund, and symbiotic bond between German (or better, Berlin) and Jewish cultures. It constitutes a deep, longstanding tie that the city tragically broke in order to survive, but that, regardless, could not be removed nor abandoned. The institutional call that Daniel Libeskind, a Jewish-American architect and former musician of Polish birth, answered—selected for the competition from a large number of extremely qualified professionals—was about the construction of a building that would testify to this indissoluble bond, manifest the rupture, and avoid any consolatory or redemptive aesthetics.

Although the greater initial project had been reduced after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as for budget reasons, the plan and the interiors are shocking. *Between the Lines*—this is its title—is spread over an anomalous design, its plan suggestive of a thunderbolt (for which the museum is informally called “*der Blitz*” by Berliners). This shape, as Libeskind makes clear (1990), represents a broken Star of David, thus bringing to mind on the outside as well as the inside, this interrupted relationship and, more extensively, of the fissures and fractures of history, which led



IMG. 01 – Aerial view
© Guenter Schneider.
Courtesy of D. Libeskind
Stadium

IMG. 02 – JMB Next to the Original Baroque Building © BitterBredt. Courtesy of D. Libeskind Studium



a cosmopolitan city like Berlin to separation and violence. The architectural drawings are presented with notes written on a pentagram, with which the musician-architect also pays homage to some Jewish intellectuals and artists, as well as Berliners, such as Walter Benjamin, whose “inadequate ideology” and intuition of the chaotic forces of the present and future inspired the fragmented lines; Paul Celan, whose “last words” evoke both the unspeakable and the necessity to express it through art; and E.T.A. Hoffman, who, with his “mad science” questioned the pretences of western rationalism and historicism (Libeskind 1990, 48). Together with other cultural prominent figures such as Rahel Varnhagen, Arthur Schönberg, and Heinrich Kleist, these personalities “spiritually affirm the permanent human tension polarized between the impossibility of the system and the impossibility of giving up the search for a higher order,” thus constituting aporetic “critical dimensions that this work as discourse seeks to transgress” (48).

This tension and almost impossible impasse is thus materialized and rendered visible in the architectural star plan, an “irrational matrix” apparently impracticable, interrupted by sharp lines and acute corners, cut by bridges which intersect it along the whole way. The star design is incised and disseminated all along its Zinc exteriors, to emphasise its shape (see IMG. 02). “Between the lines” means both, metaphorically, what is to be deciphered and encoded in the linear historicistic hermeneutic of historical progress—to show the holes and the failures of the system—and, literally, what lies in between the two broken lines that cut the building, one “straight but fragmented; the other tortuous but continuing into infinity” (Libeskind 1990, 49). These two lines represent the difficult, interrupted, and yet interminable relation between Germans and Jewish-Germans, an impossible one both to recover and to let go, a challenge one must accept in order to continue forward. Between them,



IMG. 03 – *The Void* © BitterBredt. Courtesy of D. Libeskind Studium

“the void that runs centrally through what is continuous materializes outside as something that has been ruined, or rather, as the solid residue of an independent structure, as a *voided void*” (49, emphasis mine).

The building testifies as a witness—through this stuttering and interrupted language of impossible rationalization, we could argue, following Agamben—for those who cannot speak anymore, leaving space for their silence in history. This lack of words is kept preserved through the many voids that the lines cut through the museum, as in a ritual that is performed and epitomized within the Holocaust Tower, “*the Void*,” as Libeskind calls it: an emotional, sensorial Auschwitz which encloses the viewers in a type of cool, stiff shroud, making them feel what cannot be explained, making them aware of the horrors of history and of the individual responsibility present when facing trauma.

The museum does not offer any consolatory or redemptive interpretation; conversely, its shape, arrangements and layout are somehow disturbing.⁴ They preserve not only the Void, but also the impossibility of finding solutions to the tragedy, remaining “unfinished and undecidable, because in the unfinished there is always hope” (Allen 1990, 24). As Andreas Huyssen also points out clearly, the denial of healing and assimilation is a way to keep memory alive in order to enhance reflection:

By leaving this in-between space void, the museum’s architecture forecloses the possibility of reharmonizing German-Jewish history along the discredited models of symbiosis or assimilation. But it also rejects the opposite view that sees the Holocaust as the inevitable telos of German history. Jewish life in Germany has been fundamentally altered by the Holocaust, but it has not stopped. The void thus becomes a *space that nurtures memory and reflection* for Jews and for Germans. Its very presence points to an *absence* that can never be overcome, a rupture that cannot be healed, and that certainly cannot be filled with museal stuff.” (Huyssen 1997, 79–80, emphasis mine)

Whether memory in this museum is really alive and transforming or not, and whether different futures and new hope are really hosted inside the narrow and yet monumental walls of the Void that preserve the past, we will examine in the next section, following Derrida’s input (1997).⁵ What we must acknowledge now is that in the zigzag shape of the Jüdisches Museum Berlin architecture faces its antithesis: the negation of presence, of construction (Young 1998).

→ BETWEEN A CRYPT AND THE KHÔRA: A QUESTION OF MEMORY

James Young (1998) praises Libeskind’s project as a form of “memorial uncanny,” an “anti-redemptive” approach to history, art, and memory, which is able to manifest and almost verbalise, through architectural language, the “dilemma” of a city, Berlin, with “a self-inflicted void at its centre”: the murdered and escaped Jews (187). If Young puts forth an interpretation of the anti-redemptive and the sublime (namely, the “memorial uncanny”), Karin Ball (2009) is more cautious about this equation, underscoring how deconstruction seems to be the leitmotiv of the building, according to Libeskind theoretical assumptions and Young’s critical description. Both, however insist on an assumed identification between a minimalist architecture, anti-redemption and deconstruction, as well as between the anti-redemptive and the uncanny or the sublime. Libeskind, too, underlines the deconstructive aspects of his design: “*Fragmentation* and splintering mark the coherence of the ensemble, for it has come undone in order to become accessible, functionally and intellectually [...].

4 In the words of Allen, “this is a building that must disturb: out of disaster, laughter and ‘convulsive beauty’” (1990, 24).

5 As Libeskind claims, in the opening lines written on the pentagram: “a museum for the city of Berlin must be a place where all citizens, those of the past, of the present, and of the future discover their common heritage and individual hope. To this end, the museum form itself must be rethought to transcend the passive involvement of the viewer: it must actively confront change” (Libeskind 1990, 48).

The fragmentation is... the spacing, the *separation* brought about by the history of Berlin” (Libeskind 1990, 49, emphasis mine).

Spacing is the function of deconstruction, as Ball also observes (2009); the Derridian “*differance*” subverts time and space and their separation, inscribing difference, transforms and fractures what is in between. Libeskind has tried to go beyond the material, heavy limits of the discipline—architecture as the art of presence and materiality *par excellence*—to accept and manifest the unknown, what was thought to be impossible to achieve, represent, and even approach, in this field. This appeared possible to him only through the deconstruction of matter and coherence of any classical plan. Yet, all the tropes of deconstruction *aporias*—going beyond the metaphysics of presence, dislocation, ruptures, difference, non-synchronicity, multiple tenses and times—seem to be reduced and enclosed “between the lines,” in the voids preserved and archived by Libeskind. This is especially true in the Holocaust Tower, *the cripta* that keeps the secret saved, consigned as sacred words, as a ritual of purification that must be experienced with awe, but not diffused outside the narrow, breathtaking and asphyxiating walls of the “Void.”

It is Jacques Derrida, once more, who helps frame such doubts into clearer philosophical questions, precise, sharp and provocative. More precisely: does the Void mean to be a crypt, or can it aspire to become a *khōra* (Derrida [1993] 1995)? In the first scenario, the museum becomes a tool for archival and storage, which at the same time protects and exposes its memory, as if it were a tomb. In this case commemoration becomes a type of mourning, limited in time and intensity, as well as in space (literally, in this case). But if the Void truly wants to protect memory from compromise, and aspire to absolute honesty, it should, conversely, accept to remain open, unlimited and compromised. Because, as Derrida argues, Libeskind must have already accepted compromises in order to finish his project; he must have coped with bureaucracy, technical problems, and politics, at a minimum. Thus, his attempt at keeping the Void voided, as he himself insists, proves unsuccessful, and it would be better to leave it vulnerable to the uncontrollable encounter with the public, rather than somehow to enclose it, only to render the memory of the Shoah un-touchable. If the architect could accept this challenge—namely, to let go of its creation to see what happens—then, we could argue, following Derrida, that the Void could turn into a receptacle of “*in-becoming*” possibilities and potentialities, un-archivable and non-classifiable (Derrida [1993] 1995 and 1997), which might complicate and expand memory with questions concerning both responsibility for the present and care for the possible futures, rather than apparent solutions to past traumas.

Is preserving memory from all economic, political or, more broadly, from all current demands, a form of memorial excess? Or, rather, is it its apparent opposite, namely an “archivolitic drive” (Derrida [1995] 1998) that destroys all traces? As Achille Mbembe suggests (2002), national institutions approach memory according to two different modes. One is a

IMG. 04 – *The Void* © BitterBredt. Courtesy of D. Libeskind Studium



form of regulating the “ghosts,” the ruins, the sorrows of the past through the “chronophagic act”—namely, the destruction and the negation of memory as living and transforming through the archival excess meant as protection and storage of data (the archive, that eats at the same time what it tries to preserve, is therefore “chronophagic”). The other mode, conversely, is the institutionalizing and the publicizing—namely, overexposure, exhibition—through a memorial excess that Mbembe calls a “talisman” (2002). In both cases archiving is lethal—more than a protection or a talisman, it is a threat for a fecund memory. Libeskind’s work seems to oscillate between both terms of this equation: as a firm and resolute archive of the “Void,” it obstinately clings to preservation, while at the same time, as a talisman, it overexposes the crypt to mass commemoration.

To remain faithful to memory then, following Derrida's provocations, would mean to betray it, in order to save it from the logocentric drive of culture, politics and architecture itself, which would start refilling what Libeskind strives to preserve as empty, as a "voided crypt." It would mean to betray it, accepting that the museum might be contaminated by other questions coming from other times, other places, other disciplines and arts, other sounds, gestures, and images, so as to become *another space*, crossed by other demands and fluxes, more than a physical place preserved in a congealed tense; an *un-named space* open to other futures "to come," according to a *messianic* vocation that calls for the unexpected.⁶ As Iain Chambers puts it: "turning time around, the prospect of a past—negated, refused, and repressed—that comes to meet us from the future takes up residence in the critical, *heterotopic space* projected by the postcolonial museum" (Chambers 2012, emphasis mine). This archival "provocation" is not fully embraced by the architect, who keeps defending the value and strength of a void that is not at all voided, since it is so full of historical and memorial meanings. Instead, as Irit Rogoff makes clear:

The Berlin Jewish Museum building functions very differently. Its pleasure is that age-old moralizing panacea of 'doing the right thing' and it does so at two levels simultaneously—with displayed objects documenting an absent history and a provocative architecture which insists on the void remaining just that [...]. By fencing in and compensating for a community of victims who have been made invisible, the museum also dismisses the continuation of those communities in hybridized modes all over the world." (Rogoff, 2002, 65)

→ ACTIVE MEMORY AND SHARED CITIZENSHIP: CAPE TOWN DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

Museums and archives exist at a difficult threshold, between the different demands of protection (of the intangible voids and traumatic memories that must be preserved) and exhibition (mass commemoration). Here, many other possibilities complicate this balance—other forms of "participation" which help to free both poles from political, institutional, and cultural discourses. Other forms of "archival care" exist in these spaces, which for example involve communities that recognize themselves neither in state-constructed memory nor in the self-compulsion to remember. In such "open memory communities," as in the case I am examining here, what nourishes the archival attempt is neither the past as a crypt nor identity as a shell; rather, it is the need and the desire to work together in the present for the future. It is not about recovering a common, imaginary origin or root, nor an event to be celebrated and retraced across the slaughters and wounds caused by history. It is about retracing a different route in order to face new possibilities and potentialities in the present, through political cooperation.

Following Henry Bergson's intuition, we could argue that there is a

6 I take the word "messianic" from Derrida ([1995] 1998), to indicate the tension that pushes memory towards the future and the unexpected possibilities it offers to reread the past and memory and to reopen all types of archives.

quality in memory that has to do more with the future than with the past: memory, in this case, resembles that “spiritual energy” that Bergson ([1919] 2007) describes as a force, which enables us to face remembrances in order to nourish the present, as well as to find one’s way to the future. Memory, according to this point of view, is driven by a desire moved by the future rather than by past regrets; it is inspired by what has still to come, by new modes of living, different contaminations, forms of evolution, as well as by new experiences of living together (even after the many traumas of history), which are still to be invented. Here the archive—its process and discourse, but also its materiality—is one with the desire for cohabitation and shared organization. This is an aspiration to become community, to summarize with Arjun Appadurai, who discusses digital and virtual archives as a potential for “molecularly” freeing and multiplying knowledge, shared politics, and social practices (2003). The Internet, according to Appadurai, proves a fertile ground for the desire of community and subjectivity beyond the material limits of the migrant and/or clandestine condition. Yet I believe that this intuition of shared memories on a “common platform,” so to speak, may also include other realities, even those that are neither migrant nor virtual, but strive for shared memorial and museum projects. These benefit from the freedom to participate and cooperate implied by the internet, in order to aspire to different and more realistic “inclusive citizenships.”

Although community museums risk falling into the narcissistic temptation of displaying shared and agreed-upon values, as well as homogeneous narrations of histories (and thereby falling into the trap of identity construction), there is also an attempt at discarding such fixities, critically working from the margins, the fissures, the obstacles, and the challenges that community museums must face, and thanks to which they are most commonly found at the margins of national demands, state funds, tourist guides.⁷ The District Six Museum in Cape Town is precisely one of these museums at the margins: a critical interface, a platform for discussion, co-participation, and a place to take care of both memory and the present. It is quite a different kind of memorial museum—architecturally open, it seeks participation and interaction from visitors and local communities, as well as from the academy and the international organizations that might help it grow.

The history of the museum dates back to the anti-apartheid revolution times in Cape Town. In the post-apartheid era the reconciliation government of South Africa wanted to resettle and repopulate District Six, an old, prosperous, and lively area of Cape Town, well-integrated and heterogeneous, which had been emptied of its inhabitants, the “Cape Coloureds” since the very first years of the segregationist regime, and

7 See Ivan Karp et al. 2006. In this collection of essays all the authors examine the contradictions, frictions and paradoxes through which museums must go when trying to cope with, and avoid, tourist labels and national or institutional demands to preserve their independence and intellectual freedom.

converted into an “White Only” residential suburb.⁸ According to the new government plans, the old houses and the huts, that had been razed to the ground by the bulldozers in the 1960s, were to be rebuilt in the old fashion. The people were therefore at risk of another social and urban engineering, imposed on them in order to erase all the awkward and troublesome traces of the bygone apartheid times, as well as the scars and the wounds of the racist devastation.

District Six Museum Foundation, established between 1990 and 1994 as a political association at the time of the new Republic of South Africa, is one of the non-governmental organisations that preserved the multiple and often dissonant memories of the district. Thanks to the Foundation, the museum was inaugurated in 1994 with an exhibition in the Freedom Church, once a place of worship for the descendants of slaves, and later the centre of the anti-apartheid movement in the area. This site inherits the political legacy of the location, confirming it once more as a place for union, community care and civil rights. The Foundation’s work has not only been to recover the memories or the remains of the place, but to support land restitution, hosting the hearings and the proceedings of the Land Claims Commission, while keeping the pressure on the government, asking fundamental questions regarding the meaning of restitution, repopulation and cohabitation.

If the museum, as Ciraj Rassool argues, is a place for forgiving, as well as for the healing of difficult memories and traumas, it is also a critical space in which to gather, not merely to look at, or react to, an exhibition, but to “think together” about the sense of citizenship, community and politics (2006). Here visitors, local people, artists, scholars, and curators who sustain the project strive to recover and investigate the individual and communitarian memories of the past. It is not only about exhibiting photographs, art objects, discoveries, installations, or films, but also about hearing histories, testimonies, voices, and fragments of speech via a sound archive spread throughout the building. These windows excavate the past, interrogating and questioning not only the sometimes a-critical reconciliation of national politics, which proved strictly limited by the necessarily objective limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but also the easy and sometimes stereotyped representations of the Cape Coloureds of District Six—the appealing tropes that mass tourism keeps saddling to the area, encouraged by the national economic politics that promote it in order to launch the new, but economically devastated South Africa on international routes.⁹

8 “Cape Coloured” is a phrase used in South Africa to define the black people of the Province of the Cape of Good Hope.

9 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission—organised, led and sustained by the Archbishop Desmond Tutu—collected testimony and evidence from both victims and perpetrators of the apartheid crimes and the violation of human rights that happened between 1960 (the date of the Sharpeville massacre) and 1994 (when the New Republic of South Africa was born, and Nelson Mandela of the ANC was elected for President). The TRC (its acronym) did not have any penal power to condemn criminals, but it could grant amnesty in case of full confession. Its primary work was with the hearings of the victims—during which horrible and still unheard crimes and violence were publicly revealed—and with

For District Six, the challenge is to avoid the clichés of a picturesque museum, one that would evoke imaginary multiethnic and harmonized, yet pacific and homogeneous, past deeds. The District Six Museum lives on and grows as a space for communality but also contestation and conflict, precisely in this zone of friction, rather than contact.¹⁰ Friction between independence and criticism of easy political idealisms (which materialize in economical support for only certain kinds of cultural projects, such as national museums), and the difficulties of resisting, of counting only on private funds from international communities and academies, and from the community and from visitors' personal support. As a matter of fact, the museum does not rely on national government funds, not so as to renounce its political intent—namely, its interest in fostering and monitoring the process of land restitution and asking for respect for the area—but to escape the politics of mass-market tourism, as Leslie Witz underscores (1996). As James Clifford (1997) argues, in “contact zones” (in postcolonial but also post-apartheid areas, I would suggest) a heated, although apparently hidden negotiation takes place between local communities and fundraisers (anthropologists, art curators, archaeologists, museum staff and so on) when a great number of different necessities are at play. Indeed, as Clifford suggests, the collection of material, immaterial and cultural heritage is not only a question of the past (to save a culture from oblivion, whose artefacts are to be exhibited according to certain criteria), but of the challenging demands of present economic politics, and future perspectives. All of these three tenses (past, present, and future) are involved in such negotiations, revealing “contact” as a form of conflict and active participation in the cultural as well as economic process connected to “musealisation.” Following his discourse, we can recognize how also District Six proves to be a space for resistance, which tries to survive as a critical and hybrid platform, sustained by different motivations and interests. Here the critical gesture, as Rassoll claims, breaks Orientalist tropes and schemes that promote a homogeneous, tranquil community, to which the “father-state” should return the former (imaginary) “integrity” of the past (2006).

“Digging Deeper” is one of the first exhibitions of District Six, which all aim at expanding reflection and debate, as well as the social and political network beyond the borders of local community.¹¹ It is through collections, installations, and projects such as “Digging Deeper” that the museum strives to dismantle the barriers that delimitate histories and peoples, identifying them into separate units. Working in symbiosis with

their difficulties in accepting and understanding “reconciliation” and forgiveness when the criminals negated or denied their guilt. Its most difficult task was with the criminals or the former supporters of apartheid crimes, who sometimes refused to accept responsibility for the violence they perpetrated, and often claimed to be bothered and even harassed by the “confessional attitude” of the Commission.

10 For a study on museums as “zones of contact,” see Clifford 1997. The term comes from Mary Louise Pratt 1992.

11 For further details on “Digging Deeper,” see Annie Coombes (2004), who also published a good selection of photographs from this and other projects of the District Six Museum.



IMG. 05 – District Six Museum, Antiquity Box
© District Six Museum.
Courtesy of the District Six Museum

the local artists (sculptors and woodcarvers, principally) and the public, especially with the former residents of the district, the museum strives to expand the work on apartheid diaspora into other South African towns and districts as well. The hidden lives, the physical and psychological private spaces, the sorrows, the disgraces and the shame, as well as the contradictions in and between families, have been investigated and excavated not to find an assumed truth or to provide confessions, but to dismantle the romantic ideal of an idyllic interracial life in the district before apartheid state-violence. This process thus questions fantasies of national reconciliation that might be based upon ideas of unity, rather than on concrete financial manoeuvres which would heal the district from the devastation caused by the regime's economical politics. The up-keep of memories, at the same time, is a loving gesture that preserves all the little fragments of daily life—the smallest and largest remnants and memories from an area that is at risk of disappearing, with all of its scars and its signs of life, after the urban reorganization by the government.

A loving care is taken with these disordered memories, neither catalogued nor archived, but re-composed and reassembled without erasing the signs of destruction. This model inaugurates a new way for the community to live together, even beyond the limits of the district, by using the past as a means to weave a different present. Old remnants and materials that survived and were salvaged from the forced relocations (such as street signs, documents, artefacts, etc.) set up the very heterogeneously reassembled fabric of a broken community.¹² Memories are incomplete, fractured, suspended and wait for the current public's intervention. This is not about nostalgia, the return to the dream of an interrupted community, but instead about the unprotected, vulnerable exposition of past sorrows and scars in order to rethink both the present and the nature of

12 As for example in *Retracing District Six*, the first opening installation and exhibition in 1994. See Coombes (2004) and Rassool (2006).

IMG. 06 – Digging Deeper Exhibition—Floor Map © Paul Grendon. Courtesy of the District Six Museum



memory—which is also incomplete, vulnerable, and imperfect—and needs the “here and now” of the encounter to come alive. Here, the distinction brought forth by Svetlana Boym (2002) between a “restorative nostalgia,” woven by a discourse of power that clings to the past and to imaginary exhibited communities, and a “reflexive nostalgia,” which is open to the holes, the fissures and the non-exhaustiveness of memory without filling them, helps us reach an understanding of how the District Six Museum strives not to dwell in the past, even as it recovers it.

A huge map of the area (as it was before the removals) lies on the floor of the main hall, as an interactive element between the public and the museum staff; visitors can modify it at any moment, being the map covered by a plastic transparent film which allows for change, rather than



IMG. 07 – Digging Deeper Exhibition—Floor Map © Paul Grendon. Courtesy of the District Six Museum

protection. A long calico cloth functions as a “memorial diary”: visitors can write on it, leaving messages, signatures or whatever they think might assist the museum in its work. Together, they recreate a non-pre-determined, heterogeneous, and contemporary fabric of memory. Thus, as Rassool observes, the space is reconfigured as interactive and public, creative, more than aesthetic; it has a quality of “desire,” open as it is to a possible future of cohabitation, contaminated rather than nostalgic for an intangible and immutable past (2006).

Here the protagonists are the living and present social practices, the “non-material heritage” that Françoise Vergès, writing about a Creole museum on Reunion Island, recognizes as the principal challenge of postcolonial museology.¹³

→ DESIRE, NOSTALGIA, REMEMBERING. THE CHALLENGE OF POSTCOLONIAL MUSEUMS

The path towards a real communitarian opening and a real “creolization” beyond easy identity obsessions is truly arduous for the museums that are not working with contemporary art. It is not always about witnessing and fostering a pre-existing contamination, as in the case of the Reunion Island project, planned and realized by Vergès for a pre-existing Creole community. “Minoritarian” museums are at times prone to isolation in order to protect their histories and freedoms from new attacks and expropriations. On this thin threshold between negotiation, exposure to the external world, and the defence of values, there are important ethic and aesthetic issues at stake. The postcolonial challenge of museums happens precisely here—in the “here and now” of the living, the “happening memory,” on the frictions and the obstacles that museums must learn to overcome.

13 “Non-material heritage cannot be limited to memory or tradition. It is by definition alive and belongs to social practices” (Vergès 2008).

Art is still a paramount releasing and subversive tool, which pushes us beyond all kinds of political, psychical, conceptual or discursive barriers; it brings us towards a “de-territorialized” territory of an elsewhere, which is always in the here and now of political awareness. For this reason we usually think of museums as places of and for art.¹⁴ Yet, museum studies confront us with a reality different from the art gallery and the elite, as well as from the virtual archival possibilities of the digital era. Some museums face this challenge—the reopening of old archives—working in and out of fields that might seem as narrow and sometimes even as asphyxiating as the old epistemologies from which they are trying to free themselves (such as the very notion of community). This happens especially in some “marginal” realities from ex-colonies, which offer themselves as a physical place to dismantle and question old colonial conventions, a place to react to the old as well as to the renewed exclusions from political decisions. They try to function as a critical interface, to participate in politics and culture with creative, fresh answers and proposals, beginning with the place, the community and the social network. Here, subversion is the common action, a gesture that is artistic and civic at the same time. It deals with memory, starting from the needs and the demands of the present and future, even reinventing itself if necessary, beyond linear and temporal constraints.

This challenge is a tricky one, because it risks falling into the trap of ethnic or social identity, of community meant as a material object, with fixed borders to define the inside and the outside. Yet, it is worth taking the risk, accepting it with a certain suspension of disbelief, while waiting for a new horizon, a new time for liberation and change that might let go of old concerns about the recovery of dispersed traces, the restitution of stolen lands, or the preservation of both these absences. A “messianic” time to come when, once the most urgent political-economic necessities are satisfied, and the disasters caused by the inequalities that have marked both colonial and European relationships based on their marginalization (the “othering,” and the expulsion of differences) are at least partially adjusted, museums will be able to concentrate on the potentials of transformation and desire.

Since today’s museums inherit these circumstances of inequality and trauma, they are compelled and called to take responsibility for them—and, if possible, to take care. This happens not exclusively through art or the state politics of integration and “multiculturalism,” but also through a civil art of communitarian memory that might become a path to the many possible futures yet to come.

14 I quote the term from Marco Baravalle (2009, 76), who defines art as a “tool” for dismantling identity, de-functionalizing subjectivity, and questioning society as well as the organization of labour. The term “deterritorialization” comes obviously from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ([1980] 1987).

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Dispersed Webs

Consciousness Raising in the Digital Age

→ FEDERICA TIMETO

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→ ABSTRACT

In my essay I compare the work of the subRosa cyberfeminist art collective and the Women on Waves activist group to reflect on the conjoined virtual as well as material practices of consciousness raising in the digital age. subRosa is based in the United States and its activity dates back to the late nineties. Its work addresses the condition of the “distributed body” inside the transnational networks of technobiopower, employing biotechnologies in order to unmask the production of science, and the construction and exploitation of contemporary subjectivities. subRosa’s work is performative and “site-u-ational,” since it aims at involving local audiences by means of participatory workshops, lectures and other unconventional methods. The collective parallels offline activities with online ones in the form of webworks and documentation websites, which in turn work as a locus for an expanded consciousness raising. Women on Waves (WoW) is a non-profit organization founded by the gynaecologist and feminist activist Rebecca Gomperts, which operates on a ship that sails to countries where abortion is illegal, and provides safe medical abortions in transnational waters as well as sexual education with advocacy. WoW also works via a website (Women on Web) offering counselling and the possibility of sharing one’s experiences.

In 1998, the feminist artist and activist Faith Wilding established a study group on “Sex and Gender in the Biotech Century” at Carnegie Mellon University to discuss the production and circulation of texts and images on this topic. The aim of the study group was also to discover the links between feminist art and the new fields of bioart, new media art and the art/science exchanges (subRosa 2011). Faith Wilding was one of the founders of the first Feminist Art Program at CalArts and a leading artist of the *Womanhouse* (1972) project. Together with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, Wilding was one of the most active figures in the collaborative restoration of an abandoned house in Hollywood in 1971. The house became the site of one of the largest-scale feminist installations ever made (Jones 1996). For about three months artists and students worked together at restoring each space of the house, which was called *Womanhouse*, assigning a specific feminist theme to each room. The installations and their final presentation combined a use of low media, craft practices, and performances, with the chosen themes—which played on stereotypes of femininity (such as housework, nurturing, domestic labour, and makeup) in order to articulate not only the condition of women, but also of women artists, in a continuing hierarchical and exclusionary patriarchal system. On that occasion, Faith Wilding created the *Crocheted Environment*, also known as the *Womb Room*: a sheltering crocheted tent foregrounding the issues of dwelling and self-healing, which was considered the result of hard, collaborative work and was represented here by crocheting, traditionally considered a feminine craft.

What this work visualized was also the feminist practice of creating connections through weaving (Plant 1995), which, as Donna Haraway affirms, continues to be the metaphor of networking for oppositional cyborgs against (and within) the strategies of the “integrated circuit” (Haraway 1991, 170). An integrated circuit—an expression which Haraway borrows from Rachel Grossman—is a web of medical, military, labour and informational power forces where women and other subaltern subjects, as well as animal and plants, are valued and exchanged as commodities. Both the actions of subRosa and WoW, engaging in a dialogue with the tradition of feminist activism, focus on these forces of power and their material and symbolic effects on what can be defined as the “distributed body” inside the current transnational scenario—a body that cannot be identified along singular coordinates but manifests simultaneously as the “medicalized body, socially networked body, cyborg body, citizen body, virtual body, labouring body, soldier body, animal body, and gestating body” (subRosa 2011, 16). They reinterpret and actualize the feminist strategies of weaving, so as to act inside the augmented dimension of the digital web too, as an interwoven space of consciousness raising, connectivity, and political advocacy. Moreover, although initially operating in different fields—subRosa is an art collective and WoW an activist group—both continually push the boundaries of institutional and closed fields of action, so as to create a common interstitial zone where theory and practice, imagination and materiality cannot be easily disjoined.

Both collectives, then, work online and offline, and sometimes both ways simultaneously, thus involving material as well as virtual audiences in a dialogue that gains a reciprocal echo from the several different ways in which information is acquired and disseminated. For example, the website of WoW, together with the group's Facebook page, offers women from different countries a safe, common "space of navigation" in different languages to access information on chemical abortion and the possibility of buying online abortion pills, as well as medical counselling, if needed.

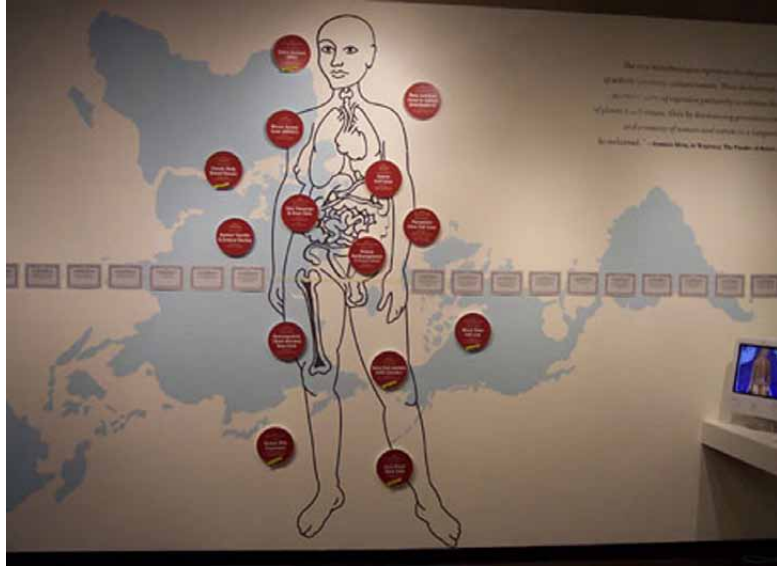
subRosa appeared on the scene for the first time in 1999, with an intervention at the Next Five Minutes Festival in Amsterdam, which can be considered as the official birth-act of the group.¹ The name "subRosa" refers to the expression "under the rose," describing the practice of hanging a rose over a meeting as a symbol of confidentiality, and is also an homage to the feminist figures named Rosa, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Rosa Bonheur, Rosa Parks and so on. The themes addressed by subRosa are biotechnologies, environmental studies, sex and work exploitation, and the multiple ways they affect our lives. The questions that the subRosa collective poses through its practice can be summarized as follows: "what counts as collective knowledge production?" and "what apparatuses [...] counter the sharing of [...] contemporary knowledge?" (subRosa 2011, 20).

The link between art and science and "the constitutive practices of technoscience" (Haraway 1997, 35) is at the core of both subRosa's and WoW's works. subRosa foregrounds the embeddedness of scientific practices inside the material and virtual networks of technobiopower. It blurs the boundaries between the subject and the object of technoscience, and evidences first how bodies are materially, as well as symbolically, in the making and second, how science, rather than being the approximation or uncovering of an essential truth, is also a set of performative practices that change through time and space. Analogously, WoW's "moving" actions deal with the contextual construction of women's bodies through scientific discourses whose absolute validity the group endlessly question with its "navigational methods".

subRosa enacts the theatre of technoscience (Timeto 2010) and its production of truth by introducing the audiences "into the lab" (subRosa 2011, 20). The collective usually creates performative environments that enhance participants' understanding of the politics and effects of new technologies on our lives, while at the same time providing them with tactical means of resistance. subRosa's "site-u-ational" approach (subRosa 2004)—which finds analogies in the modes and scope of the "recombinant theatre" of the Critical Art Ensemble (2000)—aims at involving the audience in a public debate on these themes, so as to counter the idea that knowledge is private property. In subRosa's works knowledge is a common experience: it cannot be bought or possessed, but can only be acquired and disseminated through a practice of sharing.

1 For the description and visual documentation of the works mentioned, see the official subRosa website: www.cyberfeminist.net (accessed July 29, 2012).

IMG. 01 – subRosa,
Cell Track, multimedia
installation, 2004.



Cell Track (2004) is an installation and a website investigating the privatization of human, plant and animal genomes. In the installation, a body combining male and female parts is mapped with a dymaxion map, and a timeline on which important moments in the history of patenting are pinpointed horizontally bisects it. The website also offers a great number of source materials, including a booklet that can be downloaded for free (*Cultures of Eugenics*), a glossary, didactic animations, and the *Manifesto for a Post-genome World*, which suggests that a contestational biology—in which difference is evaluated but not fetishized, and responsibility is equally distributed—is still possible.

Retracing the tradition of situated epistemology and situated knowledge, subRosa acknowledges that, to use Haraway's words,

because science is part of the process of realizing and elaborating our own nature, of constituting the category of nature in the first place, our responsibility for a feminist and socialist science is complex. We are far from understanding precisely what our biology might be, but we are beginning to know that its promise is rooted in our actual lives, that we have the science we make historically (Haraway 1991, 45).

This also implies a reworking of the boundaries from within—that is “refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and [rather] embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts” (ibid., 181). Only “in this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see” (ibid., 190). Science is a recombinant practice, and so are our bodies: this is the meaning of the use of cut-and-paste and editing techniques in a participatory performance like *Epidemic! DIY Cell Lab* (2005). In this performance the audience is taught how to streak a Petri dish and how to make yogurt—with the help of the collective’s



IMG. 02 – subRosa, *Epidermic! DIY Cell Lab*, multimedia installation and performance, 2005.

members doing “bench-side work” (subRosa 2011)—with the aim of demystifying the myth of science and its “alchemical imagery.”

The celebration of partiality is part and parcel of the meaning of subRosa’s performances. Following the tradition of feminist art, subRosa’s performances deal with the provisional and the partial in order to contrast the fantasies that surround the feminine body and the work of art, which are often accompanied by the desire to possess them both. The methods employed by the artistic collective—such as conviviality, collective action and an enlarged version of consciousness-raising through panelling, networking, and leafleting—are not very different from those of many feminist artists of the seventies. However, whereas in the seventies the stress was on feminine experience, and female identity and corporeality were still very often essentialized as dimensions to be authentically rediscovered, subRosa reframes these issues according to a postcolonial, transnational perspective (Fernandez and Wilding 2002)—one which requires the consideration of the hybridity of the female body not only as an empowering condition, but also as the result of several overlapping powers and their unequal effects. This is the reason why subRosa also returns to parody and mimicry, once again following the tradition of feminist art—as in performances like *Sex and Gender in the Biotech Century* (2000) and *Expo Emmagenics* (2001), in which some members of the collective pose as corporate or government delegates while they actually involve the audience in the discovery of what Assisted Reproductive Technologies are. Specifically, they focus on how the rhetoric of choice and the manipulation of feminine desire are conveyed through the neutral and normalizing language of technoscience, which actually disguises very different narratives that are always class, race and gender targeted. At issue are the ways in which women, notwithstanding appeals to individual freedom, are still addressed as objects of investigation and

consumption—their bodies treated either as laboratories or resources, according to uneven routes of mobility that very often follow colonial and eugenic ideologies (subRosa 2002).

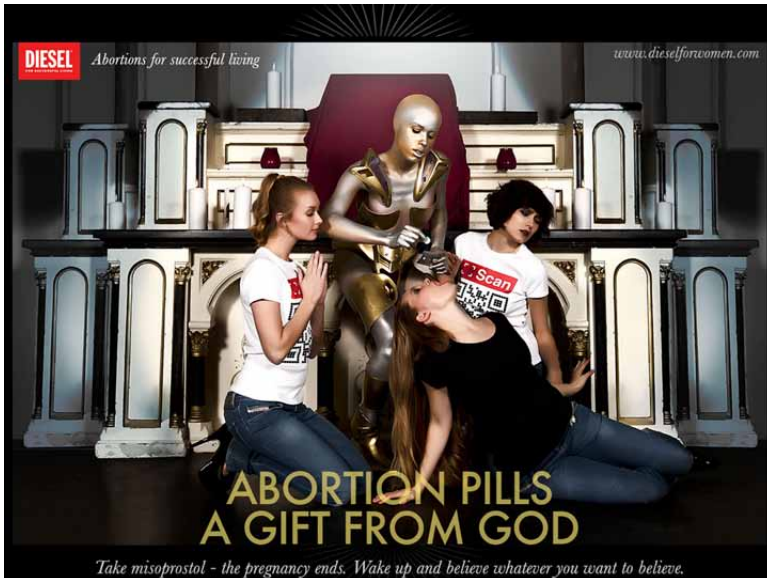
To conclude this brief review of the work of subRosa, I will now discuss a work that shows many similarities with the WoW's hoax campaign I will present in the conclusion of my essay. The work I refer to is entitled *Can You See Us Now* (2004): an installation in which subRosa maps the intersections of both affective and material women's labour in the former manufacturing and mill town of North Adams (Massachusetts) and in Ciudad Juárez, a town on the Mexican-US border that is an infamous theatre of violence against women. Tracking the history of North Adams' Sprague Electric Company, which boomed with the production of capacitors for civilian and military use during World War II, subRosa follows the transformations of a family business gone global. As a matter of fact, most of Sprague Electric's manufacturing has recently been relocated right to Juárez, where the maquiladora industry has grown drastically since the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994, instituted to guarantee tax-free zones for foreign owners and investors in cross-border areas. The effects of global economy on affective labour, manual work, service and care industries, tourist economy, health conditions and reproductive technologies are all randomly mapped on the walls and the "forensic" floor of the subRosa installation, and they need to be connected by the visitors. At the same time, this mapping allows another history to emerge: one of solidarity, struggle and resistance, where autonomous zones such as education and support centres attempt to build another—unfortunately equally silenced—history of the two towns. At the entrance, the installation also includes a map where visitors can pin the label of their clothes to visualize the trajectories of objects in the garment industries and the way these intersect with human mobility.

In a sense, although focussing on the promotion of Misoprostol for a safe abortion, the most recent WoW's action, launched in February 2012, also addresses the violation of women's rights in the garment industry.²³ The target of the campaign is the fashion brand Diesel, chosen as an example of exploitation of women workers, who are forced to live under unhealthy conditions and whose wage is far below the legal minimum in the garment industry, particularly in developing countries. The fake press release and the fake ads realised by WoW imitate the glossy style of Diesel's campaigns, using supermodels in rarefied ultra-tech settings, and inviting the viewer to visit the campaign's website (which is a mirror site, along the lines of activist groups like the Yes Men, who incidentally took part in the creation of the website). The fake press release reads as follows:

after launching Diesel Island, Land of the Stupid and Home of the Brave, Diesel now creates Misopolis, a factory where brave female workers can have

2 All the written and visual documentation can be found on the WoW website: www.womenonwaves.org (accessed July 29, 2012).

3 All the names quoted (except Misopolis) are names of real and sexist campaigns by Diesel.



IMG. 03 – Women on Waves, image for the hoax campaign “Diesel for Women,” 2012.

happy accidents without consequences. Misopolis will be the least fucked-up fashion factory in the world. But this is not just another factory—it is a destination that finally grants them real autonomy.

In one of the spoof ads created by WoW we read, for example, “Say goodbye to coat hangers.” In fact, coat hangers are not only used to hang clothes: they are also infamously known as abortion tools. In this spoof ad, a group of women stands around a table holding a bunch of coat hangers. On the table another woman partially lies with a blood stained t-shirt. The barcode on the tees of the women in the group, if scanned, offers information about Misoprostol. Everything is clearly extremely “staged,” but since this is the tone of the Diesel pictures as well, the difference is hard to recognize at first sight. Another ad shows an altar where a woman in a futuristic golden outfit (the “Immaculate Conception”) feeds a girl an abortion pill rather than the Host. In each of these images, the actual Diesel slogan is repeated with only a slight difference, so that we now read “Abortions for successful living.” Reality, by the way, is of course very different from the carefree and glossy one depicted here. As we read in the WoW press release—following the letter from Diesel that threatens to take legal action—the hoax “intends to show that violations of human rights never happen in isolation and that the right to a safe abortion is connected with the broader framework of social rights, workers rights and the right to autonomy” (WoW 2012). In fact, between 75% and 90% of garment industry workers are women, very often young and uneducated, forced to work for many hours without a contract. They are also subject to sexual harassment and rape, and consequently exposed to unwanted pregnancies, without any right to maternity leave. These female workers often fear being fired if they reclaim their rights; also, they often live in countries where abortion is illegal, like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Guatemala—to cite only a few.

WoW, then, like subRosa, uses parody as a way to turn the strategies of corporations upside down; more importantly it also offers an alternative to this strategy by disseminating information and connecting with women either through material or digital networks. This is therefore another example of the feminist practice of weaving in the digital age, where the feminist subject of knowledge and responsible action can only work in a multiple web of interconnections—being, as Rosi Braidotti contends, “non-unitary, non-linear, web-like, embodied and therefore perfectly artificial” (2000).

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Museum Practices of Resistance

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→ ABSTRACT

This essay does not intend to describe a paradigm of the museum, but to use the museum as a “concept,” to problematise it, in order to take into account its mutations today. Can the museum be a space where artists and artworks really promote change, and not only provide new content to be included within the walls of the institution? Through concrete case studies and theoretical intuitions the idea of the museum can be reconfigured in the light of the complexities of a transnational and transcultural world. The museum becomes a site of intervention, where a collective project of memory can be produced. Some curatorial practices and contemporary artworks suggest a compelling way to reconfigure theories and have a strong impact on the questions of memory and archives. Moreover, the examples mentioned in this essay concretely contribute to the evaluation of the consequences that interdisciplinary strategies and multilayered artworks have for meaning and value in social contexts. Here, in particular, the focus is on the systems of interpretation and analysis in the context of the museum and other cultural institutions.

Art is the opening up of the universe to becoming-other.
Elizabeth Grosz (2008)

According to the International Council of Museum Statute—adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna, Austria, in 2007—the definition of “museum” is: “[a] permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM 2007). Why do we need to speak of the museum? The approach behind this essay does not aim at describing a paradigm of the museum—for example in terms of what the ideal museum in the contemporary age could be, and so forth. I do not intend to speak *of* the museum, but to use the museum as a “concept,” to unfold it in order to think about its unavoidable transformations today.

How can we take account of the museum’s mutations today? This paper takes inspiration from Stuart Hall’s contribution to the ongoing discussion about the problematization of the museum. Hall proposes what he defines a “relativisation of the museum”—that is the fact that the museum can only be perceived as one site among many others in the production and circulation of artistic practices (Hall 2001). This does not mean the end of the museum: the “museum remains a very privileged, well-funded site, which is still closely tied to the accumulation of cultural capital, of power and prestige” (14). Art history has provided it with its principles of curating, exhibiting and collecting. However, in the attempt to understand the proliferation of artistic practices today, it is impossible not to acknowledge the fact that the museum is “only one site and no longer enjoys the privileged position that it had historically” (ibid.).

Moreover, any kind of meditation on the museum is unavoidably linked to the question of art, and in particular to the difficulty of framing art practices. The act of classifying seems too often an authoritative act that tries to systematise artworks according to a logic. And this systematisation sometimes risks missing a critical problematization that is essential to the artists’ practice. Art suggests a compelling way to test and reconfigure theories: we can expect from it not only practical outcomes, but also “enhanced perception, aesthetically satisfying experiences, and expanded and more critical thought” (Doy 2000, 214). Probably, even more than written texts, artistic works are able to achieve ambiguity, indeterminacy and disorientation.

The feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz defines art as experimentation with reality and the material forces of the world rather than a mere representation of the real (quoted in Kontturi and Tiainen 2007). Artistic practices are the sites of imagination and possess the potential to change the world. Following the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, Grosz states that all of the arts express the invisible and unheard reality of things. Art can be explored in a more compelling way if one thinks not in terms of repre-

sensation—the transmission of meaning through language—but in terms of force and intensity. This is also the intensity of critical thought—according to Grosz, “thinking gives us joy, perceiving gives us joy” (ibid., 225). For the theorist, we need to affirm the joyousness of art and the pleasure of critical thought: these can be forms of self-understanding and ways to resist the oppression that comes from everywhere. As she claims, “the point is the way in which the new world is produced is precisely through revelling in the affirmation of the strengths that art gives us. The only way we can make a new world is by having a new horizon. And this is something that art can give us: a new world, a new body, a people to come” (ibid., 256).

Instead of thinking in terms of how artistic practices reflect reality and how transparent this reflection has to be, Grosz invites us to consider how art intervenes *materially*. In other words, art contributes to the very process of construction of the reality and—we could say—of the museum. This is why this institution cannot be just the place where art is contained. Rather, the museum is concretely affected by artistic forces. Instead of conceiving the museum as the place of mediation between a subject and an object, and a place where this object can be exhibited, now—more than ever before—we need to focus on the capacity of art to enable changes that have effects on everything. As Grosz claims, “art is the place in which we experiment with qualities” (ibid., 247). The artwork cannot be too oriented to how people will understand it. When art is oriented towards educating or informing an audience, its imponderable nature is reduced to a lesson. Therefore, artworks are not to be read and deciphered. They do not “signify”—they are able to affect in an unforeseeable way: “we don’t know how to interpret art in advance; only attunement to its specificities gives this to us” (251). Interpretation comes always too late.

Thus this essay does not intend to explain the potentiality of art, rather to explore what is unexpressed in an artwork, and yet so powerful and displacing for the cultural politics of the museum. Artistic production is therefore not the object of a political and social analysis, but the site where previous statements are questioned. Art is always political: “art is intensely political not in the sense that it is a collective or community activity (which it may be but usually is not) but in the sense that it elaborates the possibilities of new, more, different sensations than those we know” (Grosz 2008, 79). The horizon drawn by art brings us back to the first question raised in this essay: a meditation on the museum. How can art—considered in terms of process and practice—engender material becomings? By “becomings” we do not intend narratives and evidences of a past to be collected, but the elaboration of alternative perspectives in the context of the museum.

The cultural potential of art, indeed, can address problems and provocations. As Grosz suggests,

it is for this reason that art is not frivolous, an indulgence or luxury, an embellishment of what is most central: it is the most vital and direct form of

impact on and through the body, the generation of vibratory waves, rhythms, that traverse the body and make of the body a link with forces it cannot otherwise perceive and act upon. (Grosz 2008, 23)

Thus art has much in common with philosophy: it is not the elaboration of abstract concepts, but the capacity to broaden the horizons, by enabling the potential to frame and to be framed differently. From this perspective the artistic production can open new worlds. For Thelma Golden, director and chief curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem, art can change the way we think about culture and ourselves. Her overall project is about artists—such as Glenn Ligon and Kara Walker—who question the authenticity of historiography and rewrite history from within the narratives of the art world. The artists Golden is interested in really concretise the essential questions she wants to bring to the fore as a curator. As she explains:

I was interested in the idea of why and how I could create a new story, a new narrative in art history and a new narrative in the world. And to do this, I knew that I had to see the way in which artists work, understand the artist's studio as a laboratory, imagine, then, reinventing the museum as a think tank and looking at the exhibition as the ultimate white paper—asking questions, providing the space to look and to think about answers. (Golden 2009)

The point Golden raises is extremely important: artists can provide a space to work and to think through art in the ever-evolving field of the museum. The context Golden refers to is Harlem, one of the centres of the Afro-American struggle for representation and the major centre of creativity during the so-called “Harlem Renaissance.”¹ In the exhibitions that she organises she tries to express the ways in which art can provide a space for dialogue. Also, she tries to articulate the way in which the museum could be the space for these ideas. For her, the Studio Museum embodies the possibility that the museum could really become a catalyst in a community, and a site where artists could be seen not as content providers, but as real agents of change. Instead of organising exhibitions to display artwork, Golden works in a constant state of discovery, thanks to her interactions with the energy of young artists:

So, what do I discover when I look at artworks? What do I think when I think about art? I feel like the privilege I've had as a curator is not just the discovery of new works, the discovery of exciting works. But, really, it has been what I've discovered about myself and what I can offer in the space of an exhibition, to talk about beauty, to talk about power, to talk about ourselves, and to talk and speak to each other. (Golden 2009)

The power of the images becomes a way to think anew about ourselves and the world. For example, contemporary artists such as Isaac Julien and Zineb Sedira, who work with audio-visual installations built with

1 “Harlem Renaissance” refers to the neighbourhood of Harlem in New York City during the twenties and thirties, a time when literature, theatre, art, and music flourished in the black community, and these works were then shared with the world. As Rau explains, “African Americans wanted to create a new identity as a people [...] The Harlem Renaissance was an exploration of ideas” (Rau 2006, 5-6).

multiple screens in museums and galleries, do not intend to transmit a narrative reading of the content of their artwork. The term “installation” is linked to concepts such as intervention, interaction, project, and event. Some of its fundamental characteristics include: the immersive aspect (a challenge to the traditional perceptive habits of the audience, realised through images and sounds that go beyond the physical limits of space), the tendency towards a negotiated collaboration between artists and curators (in order to build a critical platform of discussion and transform the museum institution into a cultural laboratory), the centrality of themes such as “temporality” and “memory” that question official narratives and historiographies, and the crucial role of the spectators (their body’s orientation in a space that displaces the traditional division between the subject and the object) (De Oliveira, Oxley, and Petry 2003).

In this way, also digital technologies intensify experimentations and contribute to the questioning of traditional considerations. In an installation the artwork is transformed into an open and processual structure that engages the viewer/participant in the same way a performance would. As Christiane Paul suggests, “the public or audience becomes a participant in the work, reassembling the textual, visual, and aural components of the project” (2003, 21). Thus contemporary art—in particular through audio-visual installations—challenges easy categories and proposes alternative curatorial practices.

In this context, an example of best practice in Italy is the art gallery SUDLAB in Portici (near Napoli). SUDLAB was established as a local research centre focusing on the cultural context of contemporary art and new information technologies. It provides an open structure in constant progress, based on accessibility, association, free cooperation, and knowledge sharing. SUDLAB does not present itself as a permanent infrastructure, but as an exhibition space/location, which aims at anchoring volatile and temporary interactions in space/time. Moreover, its physical space and temporary locations offer a place for consultation and access to latest information technologies in order to reduce the exclusionary practices of the digital divide. SUDLAB represents a reality that responds to a broader mutation of visual culture, from the diffusion of digital technologies to the proliferation of screens in our daily life.

In the words of its president Antonio Perna, who took part in the MeLa Brainstorming held in Naples on March 14, 2012—SUDLAB is always looking for collective cooperation and alternative strategies to create an international and interdisciplinary network in visual arts and digital cultures. These perspectives question institutional barriers, definitions of art as entertainment, and those crystallizations of the meanings of the art practices that confine cultural contexts to exclusive and exclusionary spaces. Furthermore, SUDLAB is a space for exhibitions, projects, events, workshops, and seminars—in other words a site for creative and interdisciplinary interactions and a global platform that disseminates cultural contents and artistic contaminations in the public space both of the museum and the internet.

IMG. 01 – SUDLAB, Portici, Napoli. Courtesy of SUDLAB.



An example of an interdisciplinary event that was organized at SUDLAB is the workshop “Mediterranean, Migration, Music,” which took place on June 8, 2011, around the core theme of the Mediterranean. Through the evocative texts read by Iain Chambers and the unsettling sounds of Mario Formisano’s electronic music, this event created an immersive environment in the space of the gallery. Moreover, the workshop was characterized by the projection on the walls of some images realized by contemporary artists who deal with the question of migration, in particular the crossing of the Mediterranean—bodies that traverse the fluid space of the sea in search of a better life. Intertwined histories of men and women, fragments of traumatic memories, and traces of the daily experiences of migrants helped the audience to experience the artwork in a different way. The spectators felt disoriented by the materiality of sounds and images. They perceived an alternative modality of thinking both the Mediterranean and the transnational process that is migration. In the meanwhile, on a huge image of a sea surface, the Neapolitan artist Lello Lopez wrote with a red ink the names of the many immigrants who died in the desperate attempt to reach the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Beyond the logic of cataloguing and exhibiting, SUDLAB curatorial practices propose combination, manipulation, and collective rewriting, in the attempt to produce mutable interactions in space/time. This art gallery constitutes a compelling way to reconfigure the boundaries between media and disciplines, through the promotion of alternative curatorial practices inspired by the very process of art practices. Furthermore, its approach suggests a relation with architecture, namely the construction of the space, elaborated by the same artists who take part in the event/exhibition. In the context of contemporary art and curatorial practices, the case study represented by SUDLAB does not intend to point out a



IMG. 02 – Lello Lopez, *A mare*, 2011, SUDLAB, Portici, Napoli. Courtesy of SUDLAB.

dichotomy between the museum and the public space. On the contrary, it creates an interesting continuum between museum, artists, and audience. This gallery/research centre constitutes an example of a “migratory aesthetics” that acknowledges the difficulty of framing the artistic event. In this sense, SUDLAB actualizes the critical perspectives of contemporary art, in particular of those audio-visual installations that express the cultural complexity of the contemporary world.

Indeed, artists such as Isaac Julien and Zineb Sedira live in the interstices between cultures (Anglo-Caribbean for the former, French-Algerian for the latter). Their recent artworks—primarily audio-visual installations—appear in the political, historical, and theoretic conjuncture of the diasporic experience. The emergent space and interpretive frame of the diaspora—as Hall highlights—is rooted not only in earlier imperial settlements and older structures of power, but also in the experience of vulnerable minorities and the conditions of refugee camps, detention centres, and invisible economies of the advanced world (2012, 30). Moreover, the idea of the diaspora “troubles the notions of a cultural origin, of ‘roots,’ of primordial identities and authenticity. It unpicks the claims made for the unities of culturally homogeneous, racially purified national cultures and identities” (ibid.). “Diaspora” is also where the politics of gender, class, and race form together a new, powerful and unstable articulation that does not provide easy answers, but raises “new questions, which proliferate across older frames of thought, social engagement and political activity” (ibid.)

With regard to artistic practices, the artworks realised by Julien provoke a different configuration of modernity—a liquid one, based on the centrality of transits and transcultural movements. In his multi-screen work entitled *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* (2007), the materiality of the images emerges through the bodies of the immigrants who cross the

IMG. 03 – Workshop
 “Mediterranean, Migration,
 Music,” June 8, 2011,
 SUDLAB, Portici, Napoli.
 Courtesy of SUDLAB



Mediterranean. The disturbing geography expressed by this installation is a meditation on migration, but it also allows for the “migration”—the transit and transformation—of previous statements in the context of the museum and the curatorial practices. How can we deal with artworks that express a blurring of boundaries and a fragmentary narrative? Museums are not neutral spaces: their narratives construct national identity and legitimise groups. The idea of authenticity is an illusion, an idea conceived in the late eighteenth century—around the same time when the museum was conceived. According to Marstine (2006) we need to deconstruct the neutrality of museums and their packaging for a new museum theory, a critical museum theory that addresses decolonizing and cross-cultural exchange.

In conclusion, the curatorial practices inspired by the complexity of the artworks themselves and by a real interaction with the artists disclose an alternative space inside the context of the museum. The examples explored in this essay reconfigure the idea of the museum in the light of the complexities of a transnational and transcultural world. Here, the institutionalised space of the gallery appears as a map of memories. Thus, the museum as a site of intervention becomes a collective project and a space where artists and artworking practices promote change, and not simply provide a “content” to be included within the four walls of the gallery.

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Othering Spaces





Spaces of Invention: Between Delegation and Capture

→ MARIANGELA ORABONA

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→ ABSTRACT

Through a rearticulation of the critical role of black artists in the museum, I consider the aesthetic forms of bioracism as instruments of the inclusion of racism within the mechanism of power both for modern and neoliberal States. In particular, I examine the artist’s role within the museum, in terms of the production of her/his subjectivity in creating an artwork that refuses to be labelled. Through the concept of the “burden of representation” (Mercer 1990), which includes the double meaning of “representation, delegation or substitution” (Gilroy 1988a and 1988b), and through a reflection on new forms of capitalist capture of difference, I interrogate both the role of the artist—representative of an imagined community—and the role of the museum as a modern institution able to welcome the same idea of community. How much does the museum invest culturally and politically in the artwork or rather in the artist’s name? If in contemporary art there is a will of governance, which considers contemporary art as an instrument of capitalistic power, the other side of the coin shows a group of creative singularities creating spaces of invention in order to live the ambiguity between delegation and the new modalities that capture difference.

PREVIOUS PAGE –
Kara Walker, 1999, African-American. Courtesy of the Artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co. Gallery.

My worry is to only be seen to be speaking on African-American and women' things.

Kara Walker (quoted in Fusi 2011)

Art can teach how to wear the mask of power, appearing in constitutive circuits [...] subverting the functional language of reticular capitalism and giving it different, satirical meanings.

Brian Holmes (2009)

The materiality of the black body enters the arena of the museum as a prolific and attractive element, especially since black artists both in the United States and Britain have re-questioned the politics of the representation of racial difference. An entire generation of black artists—such as Coco Fusco, Isaac Julien, Fred Wilson, Sonia Boyce, Renée Cow, Renée Green, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Yinka Shonibare—have worked on questions of race and gender as ontological dimensions, hoping for a culture of difference that is able to translate the political and social aspirations of different ethnicities both in the United States and in Britain (Fusco 1988; Gilroy 1988a and 1988b; Hall [1986] 1996).

During the eighties, as denounced by Kobena Mercer (in Julien and Mercer [1988] 1996), curatorial supremacy ruled in the British artistic milieu. The artwork was of secondary importance and critics' attention focused on extra-artistic issues, such as cultural identity and racism. In this atmosphere the public role of the black artist seemed of great importance because it represented the salvific, struggling aspirations of the various communities working against binarisms and institutionalized dichotomic oppressions. Every artistic experience seemed to be carried forward by the urgency to critically confront the racism that regulated the visibility of the black presence in the public sphere (Mercer 1990).

On the margins of public space, the black artist lived both the impossibility of speaking for an entire community and the constant pressures and expectations of the community itself. Paul Gilroy's reflections on the extra burden of black artists as community representatives—a burden to put up with, that includes the double sense of representation and delegation (or substitution)—were connected, in the late eighties, with an anxiety of assimilation and a desire to vehiculate one's gaze to the other. Such a desire had contributed to a growing manipulation of the same gaze, which was focused on the artist as a racialised body rather than on the value of her/his artwork (Gilroy 1988a). Together with Gilroy, Mercer defined this attitude as “a burden of representation,” where the public role of the artist becomes that of representing a presumed and imagined community and where the cultural expectations are by tacit agreement behind a concept of delegation. As denounced by British artist Isaac Julien, in that period black artists felt almost forced to speak for a whole community (Julien and Mercer [1988] 1996). The black artistic

productions of much independent art of the eighties tried to break this logic through some important artistic experiences, such as the Sankofa Project—renowned for their courage to speak within that independent movement and not for the whole black British experience.

As a modern institution the museum welcomes, produces and supports the idea of the burden of representation as a juncture between the exhibited artwork and the representative artist. It is the artist who becomes the icon and the totem of museum discourses, the fetish object whose visibility is regulated by the museum or the representative institution. The artist lives the anxiety of her/his political and cultural influence—a constructed feeling induced by the discursive expectations of a social model based on the biopolitics of racism. It is the artist who has to come up against and call into question the homogenization of different communities labelled and assimilated as the “Other.”

Today the postmodernist debate about the escape from binarisms and identitarian restraints experienced by Black British art—which Mercer interpreted as “the complex situation” of the last decades of the twentieth century—is far away. Or, simply, it has been transformed into something else. What Paul Gilroy defined as “*modernist populism*” was the necessity for black artists to rearticulate a populist modernist aesthetic, allowing an autonomous incursion of non-European cultural traditions in the political and cultural fabric of the Western world. From this point of view modernist populism, guiding a black aesthetic in different milieus (visual art, music, and popular culture in general), makes the contradiction appear—black artists participate in Western modernity as either defenders or detractors of modernism, aware of the exclusion of blacks from the Western aesthetic politics. The racist dispositifs exposed through Mercer, Gilroy, and Julien’s critical reflections on the public role of the black artists as someone compelled to be the representative of an imaginary community seem to be the background to a new form of racism. This contemporary form of racism is what Maurizio Lazzarato defines as “the capitalist capture of difference” (2009).

The Italian philosopher reflects upon the cultural, political, and economic changes taking place inside the artistic institutions that have in some ways influenced the rules of the game in the art world. How has the situation changed with respect to the issue of the delegation imposed on black artists, considered as agents of “representation” in the public sphere? What big changes have taken place, compared to the forced delegation and the representative burden of the eighties? How have curatorial practises shaped racial issues and their cultural processes? Can we consider “post-black art” as a new form of re-appropriation and subversion of Western hegemonic power? Moreover, how can we interpret the exhaustion of a certain kind of political form of racial representation? How is it possible to deal with new institutional aesthetic forms of bioracism at work also in prestigious and well established Western museums? What does it mean to talk about art in terms of “governance”? All of these issues will be addressed in this essay.

A first step could be to question the role of the museum and its cultural politics as a modern institution, in order to reverse a monolithic idea of art. Time and again there is an urgent need to reflect both on the aesthetic forms of bi racism, considered as authorised instruments of the inscription of racism inside the mechanism of power of the modern and neo-liberal State, as well as on the role of the black artist in the museum, and her/his production of subjectivity to create an artwork that refuses to be labelled. Such an approach implies a denial of those dialogic assumptions insisting on the prominence of racial identity over any extra issue of artistic creation.

The most elitist museums seem to have the privilege of curating artists' exhibitions in between two or more cultures, often of African origins. Their growing interest for African, Caribbean, African American, and African British art, their Western-oriented reinvention and the growing attention toward the creative practice of reworking on the concept of race, seem to be translated into a wider political sign of governance, hidden behind a dated multicultural wish to pursue a utopian achievement of a post-racial society. Nevertheless, both the museum and racial difference are two realities created by modernity, two concepts not invented but politically constructed within the mechanisms of power—a process that can be understood by following the Foucauldian analysis of the role of biopolitics as an instrument of authorization of the inscription of racism within the modern State (Terranova 2007).

In postcolonial American art the generation between the end of the eighties and the beginning of nineties has two primary artists: Renée Green and Fred Wilson (among, of course, many others). Culturally and politically speaking, both artists gave a great shake at the institutional museum's structures attempt to rearticulate the politics of the colonial representation of the Other. They also impacted on the political and economic power of the museums as a device for capturing the difference. They are part of the generation that experiences and creates spaces of freedom within the museum, manipulating the modalities of enunciation, its political structure and its artistic devices.

Using different media and collecting different materials from the historical archive, Renée Green questions the European colonial model of the archive, dealing with the concept of affected memory. Her art exceeds the boundaries of representation, stressing the importance of art as a process, a continuous passage from the visible to the invisible realm of cultural and gender representation. Her experimental practice can be discussed in terms of a passage from a signifying practice to a territory of affection. This shift is also a new critical approach of dealing with the politics of representation of cultural and gender difference, and the crucial role of contemporary postcolonial art. Green deals with history through the sensorial decoding of its archives, as memory's wastes as well as "archaeological" strategies aimed at questioning the discursive systems that institutionalize disciplinary knowledges. Green's wastes dig into the archives of Western modernity. The artist

at creating events as turbulences, able to break the linearity of history and its representative places such as the museum. The event that creates turbulence is close to the event that interrupts the linearity of history, of what Foucault called the “phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity” (Foucault 1969 [1995]). In addition, in creating turbulences, the event disturbs the normative fruition of the artwork, allowing a creative reading of other possible artistic experiments. In Green’s *Anatomies of Escape*, the artist collects her material with care, jumping fiercely into the “memory containers” of human explorations into unknown territories. In her research she uses recycled material as a means to explain the different phases that bring explorers to the conquest of new territories, thus denouncing their colonialist intents. In the colonial era, the euphoric impetus generated by the conquest of distant lands was a collective adventure that involved explorers, missionaries, and also artists, yearning to represent and immortalize the most significant moments of their “civilising” mission. The artist succeeded in obtaining some journals of the Johnson couple, who lived in Africa for twelve years during the thirties. Daily journals and various images are presented as relics recovered from the past, and as traces of the violent experience of conquest. There are four display cases: the first, “Terra Incognita,” shows an old historical text about colonization, a circular representation of the world; the second case is called “Ways and Means”, the third “Date” and the fourth “Lost.”

The image of the world represented inside the first case, “Terra Incognita,” is a rolled-up paper, shored up with some nails and three pictures representing the “discovery of the other”—symbol of an overbearing form of power. It seems that the artist wanted to represent the world in its total suffering, using nails, symbolically, as displaced sites of mortified memory. The artist develops a personal visual narrative of the moment of the Conquest, recovering the monumental vestiges of the explorers. Through a camera exhibited in the display case “Ways and Means” Green reminds us how vision is strictly linked to colonial power. She underlines how photography means to appropriate the photographed subject/object, to establish a relationship with the world brought under the camera-controlled eye. The sheltered icons of “Anatomies of Escape,” which send us back to that Barthesian sense of “it has been” of the image (Barthes 1981) as a testimonial act of presence, are not presented as nostalgic forms to recover the past, but as dismantling acts of rebellion against the conquest. Homi Bhabha thinks that Green’s artwork participates in a wider debate regarding the politics of the representation of race as well as the anxieties of community agency. As he writes,

if Renée Green’s questions open up an interrogatory, interstitial space between the act of representation—who? what? where?—and the presence of community itself, then consider her own creative intervention within this in between moment. Green’s ‘architectural’ site-specific work, *Sites of Genealogy* (Out of Site, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York), displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed—Black/White, Self/Other.

IMG. 01 – Renée Green.
Sites of Genealogy:
Loophole of Retreat, 1990.
 Installation view, P.S. 1
 Museum, New York. Photo
 credits: Sites of Genealogy:
 Tom Warren. Courtesy line:
 Courtesy of the artist and
 Free Agent Media.



IMG. 02 – Renée Green.
Sites of Genealogy:
Loophole of Retreat, 1990.
 Installation view, P.S. 1
 Museum, New York. Photo
 credits: Sites of Genealogy:
 Tom Warren. Courtesy line:
 Courtesy of the artist and
 Free Agent Media.



Green makes a metaphor of the museum building itself, rather than simply using the gallery space. (Bhabha 2001, 4)

Sites of Genealogy: Loophole of Retreat, an installation presented in 1990, shows the artist on a scale watching outside of the window. The double sense of the word “loophole”—loop as a slipknot, and loophole as a possibility of escape—allows Green to propose an interpretation of the history of the slaves and their flight as a tense game of geometric confusion. Facing this installation, the viewer seems disoriented, participating at the same time in the disorientation of the artist, who places herself in the centre of a delicate and dangerous equilibrium.

Green stands on a vertical plane, occupying the exhibition space with her presence as a means of sharing with the viewer the delicate reflection on the significance of being in situ. In another work called *Partially Buried* and



IMG. 03 – Renée Green. *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, 1996-1997. Installation view. Secession, Vienna, 1999. Photo credits: *Partially Buried in Three Parts*: Pez Hejduk. Courtesy line: Courtesy of the artist and Free Agent MediaFree Agent Media.



IMG. 04 – Renée Green. *Partially Buried in Three Parts*, 1996-1997. Installation view. Secession, Vienna, 1999. Photo credits: *Partially Buried in Three Parts*: Pez Hejduk. Courtesy line: Courtesy of the artist and Free Agent MediaFree Agent Media.

Partially Buried Continued, the artist tries to contaminate the mnemonic residues of the past with a new “network of genealogical traces,” juxtaposing a set of different “sites of memory” placed into the exhibition space, questioning the presence of the racialized body in the exhibition space.

The manipulation of both the enunciative modality of places of memory and the presence of the racialised body inside representative space are also key features of African-American artist Fred Wilson. His contested art installation *Mining the Museum* (1992–1993) shows the artistic reality of that time period.

The artwork reveals a sharp form of racism in the museum where Wilson tries to create his space of invention. He develops a tension between the institutional device, the space of his installation (the Maryland Historical Society of Baltimore), the specific roles (artist, curator, public, and artwork) and the evaluation criteria for the meaning of art, as well as the re-

IMG. 05 – Fred Wilson. Metalwork 1793–1880, from *Mining the Museum: An Installation* by Fred Wilson, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–1993. Silver vessels in Baltimore Repoussé style, 1830–80, maker unknown; slave shackles, c. 1793–1872, maker unknown, made in Baltimore. Courtesy of the artist and The Pace Gallery.



IMG. 06 – Fred Wilson. Portraits of Cigar Store Owners, from *Mining the Museum: An Installation* by Fred Wilson, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–1993. Folk sculpture by John Philip Yeager, c. 1870s (except fourth from left: artist unknown). Courtesy the artist and The Pace Gallery.





IMG. 06 – Fred Wilson. *Cabinetmaking, 1820–1960*, from *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–1993. From left: whipping post, date unknown, maker unknown; armchair, c. 1896, maker unknown; side chair with logo of Baltimore Equitable Society, c. 1820–40, maker unknown; armchair, c. 1855, by J.H. Belter; side chair, c. 1840–60, maker unknown. Courtesy the artist and The Pace Gallery.

lation between his artwork and the community. The artist, well aware that the museum’s expectations are distant from his desires for a provocative involvement in the Baltimore community, denounces the museification of an American-saturated culture, aiming to hide its own memory from future generations in representative places such as the Maryland Historical Society (English 2007).

These two artistic practises are two clear examples for a better understanding of how today’s contemporary art is trapped into a newer form of racism. Does the museum—as an exhausted modern institution based on racism—invest more, culturally and politically, in the artwork or in the artist’s name? Foucault ([2004] 2009) employed the term “governmentality” as a way to describe the use of strategic power over the life of human beings, deciding who will live and who will die, a form of power that has influenced our lives in terms of bioracism. From this point of view, biopower strategies are the basis of the inscription of racism within the mechanisms of the modern State. Considering the important role of biology in the formation of the modern State, the postcolonial thinker Achille Mbembe investigates its ambiguities. In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state. It is, he says, “the condition for the acceptability of putting to death” (Mbembe 2003). In the art milieu, this tendency is persistent, since it is the Nigerian, African-American, or Kenyan artist with British, French, American nationality that is the real object of interest in many exhibitions dedicated to “other cultures.” Snatching her/his body, the strategies of biopower make her/his mobile and fluid identity the intensifier of a kind of racism still in action. Against this tendency a newer generation of black artists negotiates their positioning—for example Yinka Shonibare, who decides to cover the Britannia statue with batik fabric, announcing that he doesn’t want to be labelled on the basis of his African origins, defining himself both as a Nigerian and British artist (Wilkinson 2010).

→ KARA WALKER'S ENDLESS CONUNDRUM, AN AFRICAN ANONYMOUS ADVENTRESS

A resistant attempt at reworking the politics of race comes from African American artist Kara Walker. In a recent interview at the Mertz Foundation in Turin, addressing the audience Walker said: “people must learn how to deal with what they see, the landscapes I’m made of are formed by all these representations, both positive and negative, allowing an emotional and physical response in one’s reading of it” (quoted in Gambari 2011). Using the artistic technique of cutting and pasting black silhouettes on white or grey surfaces, the African American artist creates volatile visual narratives that expose different stereotypes of Black American popular culture and her own imaginary world. Walker’s critical approach is an exceeding and sometimes repulsive creativity, which goes from the representation of the “fetish object,”—the female body—to an affective modality of contamination between bodies—a passage from the remembered fetish to the dismembered one. She gives carnality to slavery, dismantling and recombining it again in a vicious play where the bodies are themselves contaminated. The result is a desire to reconfigure them as the incorporeal effects of such a contamination. In this passage, the body, which is more than a sign, becomes an event. The artwork is an endless search for the immateriality of the artistic form. It evokes racial stereotypes and pushes them to the limit of corporeal representation. Thus bodies find themselves in a liminal space, between fetish representation—which re-present an excessive and loaded memory—and the dismembered fetish sign, the body itself, as an incorporeal event which re-presents a traumatic experience by contaminating it with other stories, other images, other events. In this way, the fetish(es) become(s) an “incorporeal event” that traces the immateriality of the art experience and that is itself traced. In this sense, the silhouette discloses a sense of being on the border, of being a negated presence that believes in the becoming of its passage, its transformation, its movement, as an immaterial void that has generated the passage. The black empty spaces become the effects of bodies’ passions and actions over other bodies or, as Deleuze has argued, “incorporeal exterior surfaces” ([1969] 1990). The black empty spaces, animated by a volatile form that makes them unique, are also a bunch of shadows, appearing slowly as inorganic pieces of scarred bodies. Such an ephemeral quality doesn’t leave any trace on the wall gallery except the multiple, indefinite, evanescent shadows of the audience, together with the artworks. Through her visual narrations, Walker embodies the desire to struggle both against the formation of a unitary black aesthetics and against recent cultural re-appropriations by museological mainstream institutions. When invited to participate in the exhibition, she actualizes a variety of representations through her body. For the exhibition “Ornament and abstraction, the dialogue between non-Western, modern, and contemporary art: Runge, Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Stella, and others,” at the Beyler Foundation in Switzerland, together with Sol Lewitt and Walter Obholzer, Walker presented a solo installation entitled *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventress*. It consists of a group of different black silhouettes on a white background.

The Beyler Foundation is well known for the presence of primitivism in its collection and its ongoing search for dialogue between African and modernist art. The Foundation's collection is in fact a clear example of the obsession in modernist art for what Clifford defined as a rewarding Western enterprise, a legitimate concern within the Western attitude towards "the other cultures," especially considering the large amount of attention given to many exhibitions about primitivism—such as "Primitivism in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the tribal and the modern," hosted by the MOMA in New York in 1984. In Clifford's words:

Picasso, Leger, Apollinaire, and many others came to recognize the elemental magical power of African sculptures in a period of growing negrophilism, a context that would see the irruption onto the European scene of evocative black figures: the jazzman, the boxer (Al Brown), the savage Josephine Baker. (Clifford 1988, 197)

A modernist reading of African art implies a wider discourse on how artistic institutions today try to label a black aesthetic without taking into account questions of difference of gender and race. Clifford (1988) writes about the ignorance of modernist art towards black bodies and also emphasises the role that the modernist movement played in the creation of a sharp separation between the irrationality of primitivism and the creative enthusiasm of Western artists. Such an encounter also shows the dark side of the imperial violence of modernism. Here I am thinking about the "primordial forces" of those objects hosted in museums such as the old Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and the new stylish version of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. Those objects are naked before a colonial desire. But they also embody an unknown energy that has been neutralized by the museum. Is the museum's task to produce fetish objects, neutralizing their primordial energy? For Mbembe, museums provide a misappropriated representation of the object, neutralizing its vital energy and giving it a material value, participating in the process of "status-physication," which means the displaying of objects in a temple, as in the Quai-Branly museum.

During the twenties the black body as a fetish object among other objects was an ideological artefact, perceived as a material device of a sensual and primordial Africanity. This peculiar feature has been transformed by Kara Walker's *Endless Conundrum* silhouettes in terms of *excess*. The artwork within the white walls of the institutionalized European museum tells about modernist colonialism according to a dis-organic perspective. In *Endless Conundrum* Walker intentionally sows confusion, playing with the modernist obsession about primitivism. She plays with the idea of primitivism and Africanity by displaying its symbols—Josephine Baker among others—and its heros, from Freud to Brancusi.

The above figure of the artwork seems similar in some respects to Josephine Baker, the "totem-woman" of modernist splendour. The woman is at the centre of the scene, attracting many gazes as a divine icon, venerable as a transcendental religious creature. A desperate man seems to cry in front of her feet as if in front of a divinity on a religious altar.



The title of the artwork evokes the name of Brancusi's sculpture *Endless Column*, and it seems to be Walker's critical answer to the piece. The artwork is engaged in an ambiguous cohabitation between different displayed artworks and counteracts, as a critical response, both anthropological humanism and ethnographic surrealism. As it is highlighted by Clifford: "anthropological humanism begins with the different and renders it—through naming, classifying, describing, interpreting—comprehensible. It familiarizes. An ethnographic surrealist practise attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of the otherness—the unexpected. The two attitudes presuppose each other" (Clifford 1988, 145). Between these two polarities—the unexpected and the familiar—Walker creates her space of invention, a way to show the contradiction between two binarisms, dismantling the normative presumptions of Western modernity. For the artist, inviting her to participate in the exhibit at the Foundation Beyler was similar to inviting a clown to participate in the collection, especially because the colour of her skin acts as a surface that physically incorporates the problematic ideals of modernism. Would it be possible to consider Walker's invitation as an example of "delegation," or is it her "ethnicity" that is reworking itself through the art market? As Mbembe reminds us (quoted in Paulissen 2009) there are two main tendencies in contemporary art regarding the way in which artists of African descent are treated in art marketing. What he calls a "neo-liberal drive" is the attempt to market and privatise all forms of art and life. He states:

this has resulted in the endless commodification of culture as spectacle and entertainment. It comes at a time when global capitalism itself is moving into a phase in which the cultural forms of its outputs are critical elements of productive strategies. The capacity of art and culture to engage critically with the velocities of capital can no longer be taken for granted. (Mbembe, quoted in Paulissen 2009)

For Mbembe there is also another tendency in contemporary art, which recognizes in African art and the art made by people of African descent a communal sense of ethnicity, denying the power of individuality in the artwork. He continues:

African artistic forms are not aesthetic objects per se but ethnographic objects that are expressive of Africa's ontological cultural difference or "authenticity." It is this African "difference" and these African "authenticity" donors are in search of. This is what they want to support and, if necessary, they will manufacture it. (ibid.)

The organization of the exhibition itself at the Beyler Foundation reveals some contradictions: the questionable desire to put into dialogue the Western art together with a supposedly non-Western art, which suggests an omnivorous desire to capture the difference. According to the title of the exhibition: "Ornament and abstraction, the dialogue between non-Western, modern, and contemporary art: Runge, Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Stella, and others," Walker's installation plays a specific role: Frank Stella represents the international contemporary art scene, and then there are the others among which Kara Walker is included. It

IMG 07. – Kara Walker. *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventuress*, 2001. Cut paper on wall 191x453 inches (485.1x1150.6 cm). © Kara Walker. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

is this critical, mental and political space that Walker deliberately decides to occupy. A space of freedom where she can establish a distance both from a form of “ethnic” delegation and from a forced “capture” of her difference, creating a fracture between the modernist primitivism and her own narration of fragmented and discontinuous history. The fracture seems to be more evident when considering the vast division between the Western modernist production of subjectivity (Matisse and Picasso’ paintings, among others) and the tribal nature of the primitivist object. Walker’s silhouettes live that fracture, aiming at creating a sensitive matter and revealing themselves as a matter out of control. Her work raises many uncomfortable questions because it evokes the traumatic aspects of slavery through black and white silhouettes that speak in a shocking way.

Yet her presence among the most famous international artists raises several issues regarding the role of the black artist and the relationship between art, politics, and economy. Her detractors, including African American intellectuals and artists of older generations, discuss the “poor” nature of her artwork as a matter of concern because it gives African American culture a bad image. They say that her art is politically incorrect because she offers the viewer a distorted image of African American culture and its most representative characters, and by doing so she allows the perpetuation of stereotypes that always configure the black subject in opposition to the white one. This attitude sustains a popular rhetoric in the interpretation of art by some black intellectuals as well as by some institutions that tend to consider African American culture as a whole; but it gives little space to a kind of black art that sees in the concept of total darkness a strategy of resistance, both against the perpetuation of static icons of American black culture and against a contemplation of blackness as an expression of the universality of African American culture.

Essentialist behaviour once again asks the artist to represent a whole community, thus inhibiting a closer analysis of the creative power of artistic practices related to race and gender. Walker’s work is neither an ideological effect nor a racial identification, but rather a creative force, an operative relation, involving the forces in place and the relation between bodies. If we assume that power has no essence, as Deleuze emphasizes, its operational nature is clear. He states: “power has no essence; it is simply operational. It is not an attribute but a relation: the power relation is the set of possible relations between forces, which passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating, as both these forces constitute unique elements” (Deleuze [1986] 1988). This approach examines the Foucauldian matrix of operating power as it deepens into the relations of the different forces that take place between individuals. Far from being an art practice aimed at achieving recognition or a sense of belonging or identification, Walker’s artwork provokes the relational power between asymmetrical forces through an obsessive fantasy—along with an awareness to work within the institutional devices of the West.

If we assume that the term *device*, first used by Foucault and then by Deleuze, takes the form of a methodological framework for understand-

ing power, then we can say that Walker undermines the device of the museum with a strategy of biopolitical resistance. In terms of production of subjectivity, Walker seems to inhabit the antagonism between biopower and bio-political actions with a creative process emerging from the relation between the two—a biopolitical action escaping from biopower. Her work shows a material journey in the domain of the invisible, an evocative power of the imagination, a pervasiveness of the relation between bodies, which focuses on the failure of containing and affecting both the excess of the representation and the inability to represent the trauma of slavery. Through her space of invention, Walker mines the museum's role as a political and institutional entity and its role in accommodating the needs of aesthetic modernism and the racial disposition of the "exhibitionary complex," reflecting on the role of the neoliberal capitalist's "capture of the difference." While on the one hand there is a will of governance in contemporary art, the wish to consider art as a tool in the hands of capitalist power, on the other hand we see the creative singularities at play—the free inventive spaces that subvert the device, penetrating into the modalities of management of the capture of difference.

→ BETWEEN CAPTURE AND FREEDOM

If we look at the art world as an entity institutionalized by biopower, it seems urgent to highlight how the capitalist mechanism of "capture" illustrated so far embezzles the free spaces by trying to manage them. The coexistence between the two polarities—what Lazzarato (2009) calls the "molar dimension" referring to the art institution, and the "molecular dimension" in reference to different artistic practices—would seem forced. Nevertheless, there is an ambiguous conjuncture, a way of inhabiting the contradictions opened by the relation between the production of subjectivity and the capitalist strategies of capture or the pressure of hegemonic powers in general. A coexistence, as defined by Lazzarato, from which new and "exceeding" productions of freedom can emerge.

Judith Revel (2009) investigates how art can face capitalism by trying to subvert its rules through the production of subjectivity. For Revel capital can govern exceeding art practices, subjectivity production and new strategies of invention, even if it can't dominate them. All these new forms of existence and spaces of freedom are able to subvert the logic of capital power as well its established apparatuses. For Revel, although capture and subjectivity coexist, that does not mean that they are symmetrical. She uses the concept of the "common" to refer to a series of mutual strategies aimed at creating exceeding forms of creativity, languages and subjectivities that are unable to be scrutinized and dominated by the capital. In an ambiguous play, capital supports these exceeding artistic practices, by trying to suck their vital energy even if it cannot gain total control over them. In this sense, creating spaces of freedom can be a way to avoid a conflation of black ethnicity as a new form of racism within the museum context. Therefore, for the black artist, the process of inhabiting this ambiguous "conjuncture"—between the production of subjectivity and the capital-

ist capture of her/his difference—becomes a possibility of invention, in which the forced delegation becomes obsolete, as the artist prefers to live the capitalist excess as a source of freedom from within, and not in opposition to neo-liberal power. These artistic practices are always in the process of becoming—living the impermanence of the art experience, what Revel defines as “the systematic shifting of one own position, systematic deconstruction of the artist’s identity and of the artistic production, languages and representations, affects and experiments, inventions” (2009). This is a crucial point for understanding how freedom is produced today—its mechanisms and the different phases through which capital has transformed the process of biopolitical modernity, in which the museum appears more as a politically constructed space of modernity.

Culturally, the museum has always sanctioned and protected the power of the nation, while the concept of race had been seized and studied through representation by the institutionalized power of science and through the exhibitionary complex (Bennet 1995). The last century saw a proliferation of physiognomic studies, which tended to establish the superiority of the white race and the imperialist domination of Europe as a political and economic force. Today, this intensification of racism and the emphasis on Western superiority seems to have led to an anomalous situation in comparison with the role that museums have always had in the past. Namely, I mean their transformation from “the last resting place” to their identity as entities entrusted with an affective, nomadic, and migrant memory, reinforced by new forms of capture of the difference, and above all new relations between art, politics, and economy. On this last point Lazzarato (2009) is clear. He starts from a perspective already established by Felix Guattari: the relation between art, politics and economy is the background for the production of freedom. But what are the strategies of capture? How do capitalism, the economy and politics capture desire? How do they manage desire as goods of economic value?

Walker’s work is placed in a new ambiguous “conjunction” compared to Green and Wilson. She narrates stories that exceed the intersections between the lines of power: the dismantling, inorganic nature of her narratives brings back to life the sensitive materiality of her own body, shown as a “totem” in the exhibition space of the Beyler Foundation, redefining a new subjectivity through affections and contaminations with other bodies, other desires, other works, as well as with the audience. Similiar artistic gestures could be useful to help redefine the museum’s role in terms of “social technology,” ready to subvert and transform its biopolitical device of control, taking for granted that contemporary art is a powerful tool of governance. Nevertheless, biopower can only be understood in reference to life, to bodies and to desires that possess a counter hegemonic force capable of counterbalancing it.

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The “World-Museums” of Contemporary Art

Local Traces of Global Routes

→ CELESTE IANNICIELLO

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→ ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the way contemporary art has transformed the museum from the traditional Western place of construction and affirmation of national identity and superiority into a dynamic space of both aesthetic research and critical contact with the multiple and migrant realities of the modern world. Like the nation-state, the museum as a nationalist institution is facing an inexorable process of decline: it is becoming global. The analysis considers some artworks produced by the migrant artists Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira and Lara Baladi, which are all based on the idea of “trace,” “residue,” “presence-absence,” “transit,” “passage.” These works are considered as an example of how art may offer a possibility of negotiation between local and global, inside and outside, personal and collective, proper and improper, here and elsewhere, present and past; hence the possibility of both reconfiguring cultural memory and propelling it into a more worldly condition.

→ MIGRATIONS: FROM THE “NATION-MUSEUM” TO A RELATIONAL ART

The history should now be rewritten as a set of cultural translations rather than as a universal movement which can be located securely within a culture, within a history, within a space, within a chronology, and within a fixed set of political and cultural relations.

Stuart Hall (2001)

The museum, the institution of memory, is historically the place where identity is constructed. It was born in the West, precisely to generate national identity, to produce a knowability of one's own culture, and even the ability to overwhelm the other's culture. A harmonious alliance of three fundamental activities guarantees its existence: possession, conservation and exhibition. Traditionally, the museum is considered as the place of collection, where, as Mieke Bal observes, “preservation is the precondition of exhibition, as well as property is the precondition for conservation” (1996, 65), according to a system of subsistence similar and intimately linked to the nation. In the museums of collection the exhibited object has a holy aura, both as a “domestic product” and a gained good, and it is preserved through a careful activity of storage. For instance, as Remo Bodei observes, “museums represent a kind of big *templar* enclosure (*templum* has the Greek root *temno*, which means to cut, to separate) or a frame that, as in a picture, separates the aesthetic area from the unaesthetic one” (2004, 164), yet one whose symbolic and immaterial power invests both with a nationalistic yield. What is exposed to the public admiration is what the nation has been able to produce and win in terms of art, culture, technology, science. The function of the museum is based on a capitalist system aimed at a profit, above all symbolic, related to the nation's growth, power and superiority. In this sense, the exhibiting function can be considered the ultimate stage of the nation's colonialist mechanism of cultural reproduction, resulting from the public fruition of the conquered, accumulated, preserved, and exhibited objects. But, inexorably, the nation-museum is counted among the “victims” of the centrifugal currents generated by advanced globalization. The self-referential dream of conservation is destined to fade away, under the global backlashes.

The museum, as a nationalist enclave, is overwhelmed by different fluxes between nations, which Arjun Appadurai defines as the “diasporic, public sphere” (1996). Thus it loses credibility as the exclusive cultural reference frame of a nation.¹ In the global era, the museum stops being a reserve, a place of confinement, or a “heterotopia,” as Michel Foucault would say ([1967] 1986): a place where the visitor is isolated from the outer

1 According to Appadurai's well-known thesis (1996), postmodernity is characterized by a diffused and disarticulated deterritorialization of people, images, technologies, capitals, and ideas—which he defines respectively as “ethnoscapes,” “mediascapes,” “technoscapes,” “financescapes,” “ideoscapes”—which jeopardizes any form of cultural unity, presumably homogeneous and closed within spatially defined borders such as the nation-state.

world and its movements, finding himself imprisoned into an obsolete space-time category, in a naïve, anachronistic, or even worse, nostalgic, chronotopia. Compared to the kind of openness the current times now require, the museum, in its traditional form and meaning, can only be considered a tomb, a mausoleum, a mo(nu)ment of the past, re-collecting the ruins of itself and the nation. Here, the remains, the rest of, or, I would say, the limits of an entire culture are laid bare.

It seems that the museum—as the institution of national tradition, memory, and identity—shares with the nation a similar inexorable destiny of physical and ideological decline, which has lasted for many years now, as a consequence of the diverse processes of migration activated by the global economic system. In fact, the museum institution acknowledges its own precariousness and transforms itself. It is a process inaugurated above all by contemporary art, with its accentuated mobility, hybridity and lack of a definite centrality, as both a product and a producing agent of the modern deterritorialization to which Appadurai refers (1996).

The museum, in the European context, undergoes the erosive action of art, beginning with the avant-garde period in the early twentieth century, and continuing with the artistic movements of the sixties and seventies. In these periods, through its protesting flow against the political power and the bourgeois conformism, art aroused debates, controversy, and even violent reactions from both specialists and the public, precisely because it announced something that diverged from common sense and sensibility, consolidated styles and official contexts.² The implication for political and social dimensions, the protest against the institutional places and manifestations, with the subsequent questioning of their legitimacy and function, encouraged the museums to open themselves toward artistic research. It was, however, primarily the configuration of art as a relational experience (Bourriaud 1998), that was developed in the latter decades—with its emphasis on ethical responsibility, interactive opportunities, and the move from canonical places, such as museums, to the outer territory. In this sense, a creative confrontation with space was established (as the experiences of “Public Art” and “Environmental Art” testify), and new subjectivities were produced, which transformed the nature of the place for art, as well as the artistic object itself.

This kind of art lives outside of the traditional places of Art. It is itself able to create new relational spaces, enabling states of encounter, modalities of conviviality and social participation, where the interaction with the public is a substantial part of the artwork. Here “making art,” the “art working,” or the aesth-et(h)ics acquires a social dimension and value. This is a kind of art which involves, as Stuart Hall (2001) maintains, a transformation of the museum into a “post-museum”—that is a relativization of the museum, no longer perceived as the exclusive place for art, but just

2 In particular, I am referring to the Dada movement, with its emphasis on the identification of art and life, collective creation, public implication, hazard, desecration, parody, paradox, and critical creativity. I also refer to other movements, from Situationism to Fluxus, that have returned to, rethought and developed these themes.

one of the many places where aesthetic practices circulate (even though the museum's role in the production and reproduction of cultural capital still keeps its traditional power and prestige).

Yet, what can decisively contribute to the transformation of the museum that is already in place is the postcolonial art produced by migrant subjects, mainly coming from the Western empire's former colonies. This kind of "migrant art" produces a "migrant" and "postcolonial" sense of the world: an anti-nationalist, non-exclusive, non-possessive, non-binary and not rigidly defined sense of the world. The aesthetic of Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira and Lara Baladi powerfully displays the sense of an alternative reality. A dispersed, fluctuating, "uprooted" geography defines these artists' identity and insistently informs their art. The places the artists create evoke the heterogeneous, differential, vertiginously contradictory nature of being "in-between": between different histories, between different cultures, between different tongues, between different memories, showing how, beyond its traumas, the experience of migration inscribes border-crossings and engenders new relations along them. As Édouard Glissant puts it, "a tale of errancy is a tale of relation" ([1990] 1997, 143): a tale speaking about dislocation as well as relocation. The artists are in a certain sense able to reterritorialize themselves, yet they are irreducible to any instance of rootedness. Their aesthetics draw a personal territoriality made of the traces, the residues, the remains that their crossings have left behind, showing a life path beyond the borders of nationality and its delimiting identifications.

→ THE PLOTS OF RE-FRAMED MEMORIES

Mona Hatoum, a Palestinian and London-based artist, born of Palestinian exiles in Lebanon, creates art in which any biographical or even biological attempt to establish the borders of the self within precise identitarian definitions inexorably collides with the limits of the recognizable. This is the case in her installation *Recollection* (1995). The title refers to the faculty of remembering, and to memory; it also comprises the verb "(to) collect," that also means "gather," "pick up," "take in," "save"—thus suggesting that the act of recollection also incorporates an act of recomposition. Here the past is recollected, transposed in the present, and at the same time transformed: it is re-membered into something new. The entire semantics of remembering is wisely implied in this artwork. What is re-membered here are the traces of the self and the self as a trace, through a refined and intense resignification of the relationship between body and space, and a valorization of subjective vulnerability.

In this installation, the room is completely occupied by the blinding image of the grid, an image that is often present in Hatoum's artwork as a sort of *leitmotif*. Here, the grid is spherical and almost imperceptible, or "residual," given the material it is made of: hair. The artist has collected and saved her shed hair for six years, before using these personal relics as artistic material, and recombining them in her *Recollection*. Many little curled tangles are spread, like dust heaps, on the wooden floor, their

shapes mingling into its brown shades, and are almost invisible in the backlight. They adorn the windowsills of the hall's wide windows. Other threads of hair dangle from the ceiling, meeting the spectator, surprised from above by the light yet repugnant touch of that which s/he probably is trying to sidestep below. As s/he goes into this seemingly empty and bare room, from the bottom to the top, from the horizontal to the vertical plan, s/he slowly realizes that s/he has been caught in the web of a presence. An absent presence that is recollected and recomposed precisely through those bodily residues, usually cast off with disgust and repulsion, as they are associated with disorder and filth.

Counter to the predominately feminine practice of eliminating all hair from the body in order to make it presentable—according to masculinist as well as hygienist aesthetics—Mona Hatoum “collects” and saves her shed hair in order to present herself. She claims her presence by provocatively trusting herself to their improper, inapposite image. The artist “recollects” herself, tells about her life “collecting” the fragile traces of her body. Since the idea of being inappropriate or out-of-place is associated, as Georges Bataille argues (1985 [1967]), with the disorderly, then the excremental, the expendable, is better suited to the memory of her losses—expropriation, exile, dispossession—and to the fact that it is on them that the possibility of community is built. Community—and the nation, by extension—today more than ever are based on the expulsion of those who cannot be absorbed since they are considered improper; and for them to be made proper, to be possessed (both ethnically and economically) is an impossibility. On the contrary, in *Recollection*, Hatoum grants justice to disjunction and loss, to being “out-of-joint,” to the disruption of the ordinary. Here, recollection marks the return of something discordant that disturbs the accordant, the coming of an irregularity that unmakes every kind of purist geometry. The impure, the object becomes the matter out of which the self is reconstructed. In this sense, the contrast between this work and its setting is also significant.

Commissioned by the Kortrijk Kanaal Art Foundation in Belgium, the installation completely occupies the main hall of the centrally located, yet old and isolated building, which was once the seat of the *Béguinage*, a semi-religious congregation founded in the XIII century by women devoted to chastity and prayer, to writing and weaving. The *Beguines* (the French synonym for “bigot”) were inspired by a communitarian idea of life, and were free from private property and institutional rules.

Hatoum's installation thus evokes the activities of these “anarchic bigots.” Down the hall, on an old table, a loom shows a grid made of hair, visualizing through this fabric what is almost imperceptible in the room—a wide, irregular web created by the imaginary weaving made of the vertical threads of hair hanging from the ceiling, ideally conjoined to the spheres on the horizontal plan. The lightness of this hair design recalls the *Beguines'* spiritual, chaste and integral femininity, yet it contrasts with the feeling of disgust and repulsion evoked by that “waste material.” In this way, the ancient feminine activities of writing and weaving are evoked

by being confronted with their own re-writing. The spectator is caught in the “plot,” that is the narration and the web of an alternative femininity, in its mobile and open structure, in its enveloping yet soft fullness, in its impure, incomplete materiality that disturbs, decomposes, disorients, unleashes the im-possible.

The memory of the loss but also the possibility to transform that loss into a powerful creation is what is inscribed in another installation, *Interior Landscape* (2010), where Hatoum reproduces a bedroom. Here, set in an alcove, the bed without its mattress, showing its iron mesh with scraped paint, recalls a prison bed: the symbol of comfort and rest becomes a disquieting object. In sharp contrast with the barbed wire which makes the bed’s canopy, there is a soft pillow, on which the artist has drawn a map of Palestine with her hair. Some fragile traces of the self bear the mark of a persistent dream. Another map is hanging on the wall, produced by the reshaping of a pink wire crutch, a suspended and immobile silhouette, and it appears again on a perforated paper bag, which recalls a basket or a barbed wire curled up, like the one used to delimit the borders of the Palestinian territories. All the objects contribute to the transformation of the bedroom from a place of peace and relaxation to a discordant space, fraught with uncertainty and tension. In the art of Mona Hatoum the domestic space eludes any comfortable expectation of familiarity, revealing itself as an inhospitable space that, as Edward Said observes, “offers neither rest nor respite” (2000, 17).

The memory of Palestine, a proper space that has been torn, a landscape stubbornly denied, subtracted from the possibility of recognition, except as a cartography of immobility, drawn by barbed wire, or by some fragile bodily fragments that suggest the precarious condition of a population. This memory converges into the recreation of an *interior* space, divided and disturbed yet also disturbing and subversive. The inextricable link, already evoked in *Recollection*, between the personal and the collective memory, the individual and the common history, between geography and biography, manifests itself here more directly. More explicitly it brings to mind the impossibility of establishing a defined border between interior and exterior, inside and outside, self and other, familiarity and strangeness, proper and improper, concerning both the space of the soul, the body, the home, the community, and the exhibition space itself. It is precisely in the museum space that the porousness of the border is inscribed. The museum itself becomes the relational space of critical displacement.

→ THE ROUTES OF BORDER-CROSSING MEMORIES

A deep sense of displacement is also what emerges from the piece *Floating Coffins* (2009) by the French-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira. It is a video-installation composed of fourteen screens and eight round speakers and cables, through which the artist shows the images she has taken during her research on the coast of Mauritania—once a crucial place of maritime global trade, today one of the main points of departure for those seeking better opportunities for their lives. The name of the place ana-

lyzed by the artist is Nouadhibou, an old fishing port and an exit point for iron ore en route to Europe and the United States, which now it is the route for people emigrating illegally from Africa to Europe. This is a dangerous route, preceded by a journey in the desert, then a sea crossing on unsafe boats. Evoking the desperate clandestine migrations and the overbearing arbitrariness of the global capital to which they are directly connected, Sedira draws a cemetery of boats lying on Nouadhibou's shore, now useless and excluded from the international traffic. The Mauritanian seascape, similar to that of Sicily, is spread with boats whose lost functionality has transformed them into old rusty carcasses, abandoned on the waves, as *floating coffins*.³

These boats show a contrasting image of mobility and immobility, through which the memory of past movements is enabled by rests and arrests, by what remains of them in the present, forever immobile. However, what emerges powerfully through each screen of the piece is a profound sense of relationality. Images of very specific places on the Mauritanian coast are gathered in a set of fragmented views, thus inscribing a sense of motion and constant reconfiguration, evoking other places, times, and histories of migration. Additionally, there is the unavoidable reference to the personal history of Zineb Sedira, French by birth but of Algerian origins, the daughter of emigrant parents who arrived in the country across the Mediterranean the year after France officially became their ex-colonizer. Unavoidable is the reference to a culturally indeterminate perception of identity, as it is evident in the visual triptych *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary* (2000), where the artist draws herself wholly enveloped in her mother's *haïk*, in the total white of an immaculate vision, like the Christian Virgin Mary, yet contaminated by the Islamic "Algerian white."⁴

In the face of these unsettling visions, the colonialist will to frame and rule the cultures, identities, and movements of history is destined to be frustrated. If the nation-state, as Judith Butler maintains in *Precarious Life* (2004), seeks desperately to recompose its declining sovereignty through the exaltation of strength, solidity and integrity—materially translated into the erection of walls and barriers—Hatoum and Sedira's "uncanny" aesthetics, undermining the idea of sovereignty itself, grant value and recognition to precariousness, to the limits of translatability and appropriation, to the right to opacity, to the self as an impure, vulnerable, excessive, disturbing presence. Here aesthetics offers an answer to the awareness of vulnerability that is diametrically opposed to the one produced by the nationalist (and masculinist) rhetoric of Western sovereignty. Rebellious

3 Nouadhibou's shores, the migrants' journey to Europe, the cemetery of boats spread on the beach recall the tragedies of the Mediterranean crossings, which in turn evoke similar histories, though distant in time and space, such as the Atlantic passages of African slaves to European colonial plantations. These are the histories that Paul Gilroy gives an account of in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), which underlines how the presence of the (exploited) migrants, today as in the past, has been crucial for the construction of Western modernity.

4 In her book, *Le blanc d'Algérie* ([1996] 2002), dedicated to the memory of her Algerian friends killed by the integralists during the 1992 civil war, Assia Djebar explains that the color white does not stand for purity, but rather it is the sign of bereavement. White is the color of women's pain and silence.

IMG. 01 – Zineb Sedira. *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary I*. 2000. Triptych, C-Prints, mounted on aluminium, 170x100cm each. © Zineb Sedira. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris.



against every totalitarian pretension, this aesthetic answer recognizes in the partiality of the personal stories the possibility of narration itself: “without mystery, curiosity, and the form imposed by a partial answer, there cannot be stories. Just confessions, announcements, fragments of autobiographical fantasy” (Berger 1991, 71).

On the contrary, the obsession for borders, long afflicting the declining Western sovereignty, causes the people living beyond its borders to be denied any possibility of narration. As a result they become confined to their corporeality. Here the migrant body coincides with the national border. As Federica Sossi observes, “biography is at the border, it is the residue of the person, a remnant of no interest” (2006, 133).

This denial of narration is a strategy, an obsession of Power, which stems from a necessity of self-preservation and above all from a precise archival system, in conjunction with its role in the identification and arrest of unauthorized migrations. It brings people back to the traces of their passages in order to direct and block them. In this history, any space of individuality for the “borderless” is silent, “unarchived.” The archive, as the space of archivability and enunciation, the space resistant to History where narration is made possible from that which remains, is distorted by a power unable to recognize in the trace of individual life, in fragility and precariousness, any sign of positivity. As Sossi writes,

erasing or letting the traces of one’s self be erased, telling or letting one’s self be told about with a different name, abandoning or letting one’s own past be abandoned, are the current strategies of resistance or existence against a power that no longer archives the traces of the self, but just seeks to trace them (2006, 137).

Opposed to a power that refuses to give an account of the non-archivable histories within its linear narration, Hatoum and Sedira’s “deviant” poetics, with its emphasis on fluctuant, hybrid, and indecipherable visions, propels us toward alternative answers. Elaborating versions of the community and the self that resist the biographical capture of power, these artists evoke a narrative of interlaced histories, a dense plot where an instance of change and the possibility of a historical, cultural, and social reconfiguration can be recognized. A passage opens up: from a sense of the world declined in the masculinist language of sovereignty, domina-

tion, and imperialist power, which validates a closed ethics of bullying, to a different landscape, one based on an evocating and anti-authoritarian language and an open ethics of relationality and sustainability.

Hatoum's and Sedira's poetics, like an enveloping veil, woven with intercultural threads, unfolds strangeness and otherness; like a story coming from afar, it narrates unexpected and unauthorized arrivals. This is a poetics that overlaps with the experience of migration itself. The artworks that the artists produce, in fact, are not simply a reproduction of reality. They are not representative, but rather productive of new realities. They speak about us, or with us; they touch us, they touch our senses and affect us, and thereby generate a new sensibility: a movement of feelings, images, and thoughts. These pieces make us migrate and transpose us in a reality where we can recognize ourselves as "strangers to ourselves," in Julia Kristeva's words (1991), a condition that is now typical of the contemporary world. Through visions constantly recalling an elsewhere, we are transposed far from any sense of property, adrift, along with and beyond the artistic fruition. Once we are out of the expositive space, away from the museum, is it really possible for us to return to ourselves?

The precariousness of the self, displayed in this aesthetics of the inappropriate, directly questions the nation and its narration of the world according to pretextual, if not opportunist, divisions between citizens and migrants: North and South, West and East. It also questions the place and time of subjectivity, and those of art itself. Can the museum be a proper place for art? Can the contemporary be the exclusive time for art? Emancipated from its classic function of preserving, archiving, collecting, and exhibiting—as well as from the current function, concerning the museums of contemporary art, of artistic certification and global tourism marketing, as happens with "museum brands," such as the Guggenheim—the museum can be considered an open space for wandering: the site of a living memory, of narration, of conversation, of migration. This recalls the necessity, as Iain Chambers suggests (quoted in Rivera Magos 2009), "to reconfigure museology on a map exceeding the requirements imposed by a national, almost exclusively Western, point of view."

→ "WORLDING" THE MUSEUM: ON THE PATHS OF NOMADIC MEMORIES

The museum needs to give an account of historical movements and to itself become movement. An example of the museum as a space for movement, and vice versa, is provided by an artistic experiment conceived by the Egyptian-Lebanese artist Lara Baladi, whose biography is characterized, like Hatoum and Sedira's, by a multicultural in-betweenness.

In 2006, the artist conceived and organized an unusual excursion in the Syrian desert. A group of thirty people, among whom there were artists, journalists, writers, various activists, all coming from different areas of the world, spent seven days in the desert. Every two days they moved from one spot to another. The people involved in this project, called *Fenenim El-Rabbal*, which means "the Caravan of Nomadic Artists," were invited

to experience the crossing of the desert as an experience of creative nomadism. As Simon N'jami, curator of the event, says, they “participate[d] in an experience more focused on process than accomplishment, [which aimed] precisely at rebuilding what binds human beings alike all the while surfacing, without qualm or fear, what makes human beings unlike.”⁵ During the pauses in the tent, equipped with all the necessary supports, the participants visualized the attendant artist’s artworks, and discussed some themes inspired by nomadism, art making, and the Eastern desert. The desert was considered not as a sort of void land, or *terra nullius*; rather, in the light of its historical meaning, as the crucial space of border-crossing, cultural intersection, commercial exchange, and the point where Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Africa and Europe, meet. The desert becomes the clue which leads to rethinking such notions as “identity” and “territoriality,” underlining the importance that art may have in this relation. In fact, the contemporary artist embodies the nomadic spirit of the Bedouins: in perpetual movement around the world to make and exhibit her/his creations, aware of the fact that there is no place removed from the chaos of the world. In Baladi’s aesthetics the creative activity becomes one with this chaotic context, and such becoming is an event taking place in the re-elaboration of memory.

In this sense, the genealogy of this artistic experience is significant. Baladi was inspired by her collage *Oum El Dounia* (2000), “Mother of the Earth,” a reference to the myth of creation and to Lewis Carroll’s famous novel, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, reconfigured through an Orientalist perspective.⁶

Creation and nonsense. The ordering principle of reality, of regulation and establishment of the confines between sky and earth, between the mineral, the vegetal, the animal, the human, between dimensions of space and time, is put in relation with its opposite: the principle of indifferentiation and the intermingling of differences. Through an Orientalist dislocation of Alice’s story, Baladi appropriates the destabilizing power of Carroll’s paradoxes, extending their purchase beyond the geographical, cultural, and historical boundaries of the original text. The materials of collage, the artist’s privileged artistic technique, is here philosophy and culture. Far from the passive and capitalist collecting of the contemporary museum, and even from the cumulative logic of an easy multiculturalism, the artist shows how the activity of “picking up,” “collecting,” and “gathering”

5 From the artistic event’s website: www.nomadicartist.com (accessed July 23, 2012).

6 In *Oum El Dounia*, Carroll’s characters overlap with Orientalist images, which now represent stereotypes of Egyptian culture. The title of the artwork, *Mother of the Earth*, is, for instance, the name of Egypt par excellence. The wood where Alice loses her way is substituted by the desert, similarly peopled by “queer” and mutant subjects. In the middle of the desert there is the Sphinx, and the Nile’s Delta is drawn in papyrus, as in reproductions made for tourists. Everywhere there are the same characters that Alice bumps into, but here they are “hybrid.” Here the Queen of Hearts is a Bedouin walking with a turkey on a leash; a mermaid, her tail reminiscent of odalisque veils, is outstretched on the dunes. The Caterpillar on his mushroom is here a shell-man wearing a fez, and smoking the *shisha*; the White Rabbit, symbolizing fertility and time, has become a plush toy, transformed into its artificial counterpart. Moreover, the majority of the characters are drawn asleep, as is the case with Alice herself, under the palms, in a general ambiguity between dream and reality, as well as between East and West.



IMG. 02 – *Oum el Dounia*.
360x120cm. 600x10x15cm.
C41 photographic prints.
Commissioned by La
Fondation Cartier pour
l'Art Contemporain, Paris,
France, 2000. © Lara Baladi.
Courtesy of the artist.

can be a dynamic activity of composition, unlimited interpenetration and transformation, namely a constant “becoming other.” Baladi’s collages, as well as her desert experiment, show how the sense of life, world, and identity is not an effect of depth, closure, or accumulation. Rather, as Gilles Deleuze maintains, it is an “effect of surface”, that is composed of location and direction ([1969] 1990, 4). The sense “stops being Principle, Reservoir, Preserve, Origin” (60). It stops being an absolute alterity, but is rather a relative and relational one: a continuity between inside and outside, up and down, forward and backward; an Alice-like continual passage from one surface to the other, “through the looking glass” rather than remaining enchanted in its reflection. Alice’s tumble, therefore, consists of an ascent to the surface, a disavowal of depth—“depth unfolds on/as width, the deep stops being a compliment” (187)—recognizing that everything happens on the border of reality and common sense.

Thus, the activity of recollection becomes nomadic, too. Memory is never the same, never fixed once and forever. Rather it is fluid, opening unexpected possibilities, previously crystallized in the past and the self. Memory becomes a creative activity involving the imagination, and a relational activity involving one’s relationship with others. Memory is never a stark individual and isolated activity, to the extent that the time of the self is not only one’s own. Hatoum, Sedira and Baladi’s artworks show how the act of remembering can be an activity of re-composition, and reinvention of the self and others.

Talking about a nomadic memory means talking about memory in terms of transpositions, movements that produce bonds, generative interconnections, minglings, and thus producing multiple possibilities of expansion and growth between different units or entities. Nomadic memory coordinates encounters between subjects and communities. Here a dynamic and contemporary sense of memory emerges. A memory of specific places and times exists, and it still needs to be recognized and respected, not for what is circumscribed and fixed in its own specificity, but for what is considered in the possibility of connection with other places and other times. This means to consider memory in its trans-historicity, as a necessity which the processes and experiences of migration recall.

For example, Homi Bhabha (1996), analyzing the work of the poet and critic Adrienne Rich, speaks about a *trans-historical* memory enabling an ethical and affective identification with globality. Aware of the traumatic effect of brutal events such as war, the Holocaust, slavery, or displacing

IMG. 03 – From the series *Oum El Dounia*. 60x40cm permanent pigment print on somerset paper. Commissioned by La Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris France, 2000. © Lara Baladi. Courtesy of the artist.



IMG. 04 – From the series *Oum El Dounia*. 60x40cm permanent pigment print on somerset paper. Commissioned by La Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris France, 2000. © Lara Baladi. Courtesy of the artist.



personal experiences such as migration and exile, Rich activates a type of counter-memory of places and times, which takes into account the singularity of each historical event. Through the poetic instrument of memory, Rich's contributions create a profound sense of respect, identification, compassion, and responsibility, and hence a broader and shared sense of community. According to Bhabha, the value of Rich's work does not consist so much in her ability to highlight a historical and cultural connection between different places and times, but rather in the necessity, in light of that connection, to revisit and rethink what was considered one's own history, giving an account of it in critical terms. In this way, the historical conscience can become a fundamental factor of connection between the subjects that are able to share it, configuring as a form of intervention or collective participation in contemporary reality, which asks us to confront our condition of proximity as inhabitants of transnational spaces. For Bhabha, contemporaneity is a "*translational*

space" (201): a hybrid space, a space of transit and resistance, an interstitial temporality. In this space the return to an essentialist identitarian conscience co-habits with a tendency to a constant process of fragmentation and transformation, in a state of flowing interpenetration of the specific and the common, the local and the global.

Bhabha's analysis of the use of memory in Rich's work as a critical instrument for the achievement of a common historical conscience and the difficult negotiation between local and global can also be extended to Hatoum, Sedira and Baladi's art of memory, and the way it invests and overcomes the "museum." The latter, if it is understood classically as the place for the preservation of national memory, or in its modern configuration as a place of cultural hyper-consumption, can now be articulated as a space for historical storytelling: the place of narrative memory, of unlimited connection and sharing, of trespassing the physical borders of the location where the tale had taken place. The artworks of these migrant artists are able to give a dialogic and evocating value to the exhibiting space they inhabit, weaving bonds with the territorial reality, and also between the territorial and global reality. The museum becomes the space where it is possible to intercept, within locality, the traces of globality, and hence the opportunity to recognize and negotiate the threads woven in between close and distant stories, past and present, here and elsewhere, and in between common and personal memory.

A possibility opens up here: to apply the Gramscian invitation to "think globally" to the field of museology, to try to emancipate it from provincialism and nationalism. This would mean extending one's thought in a global sense, making our thought global rather than colonial, which only leads to further confinement. Instead, the Gramscian turn in our thinking should be processed in a postcolonial sense, that is by trying to stretch one's vision of the world beyond the limits of the "proper" (understood both as material and immaterial patrimony), until we welcome the eventuality of its radical questioning. It would involve transforming the traditional paradigm of the "museum-nation" into the postcolonial one of a "museum-world," namely a "becoming-migrant" of the museum, as it is precisely in this particular "becoming-minoritarian" that the museum can be defined as global.

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The Otolith Group's “Monuments to Dead Television”

A Suggestion for Museums in an Age of Migrations?

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→ ABSTRACT

“Monument to dead television” is the expression the British collective The Otolith Group uses to define its activity of recuperating long-lost quality films, and re-screening them in contemporary art museums and gallery spaces. These films were originally produced and broadcast by European national public television channels during the late eighties and early nineties. What these films—realised by the Black Audio Film Collective and Chris Marker—share is a complex approach to the question of memory and migration in Europe, and to the role of images as testimonies or documents. This essay explores The Otolith Group’s interest in such forgotten archives of modern television in order to unearth their significance for contemporary museums today. On one hand, there is the Group’s practice of appropriation and curatorship in terms of a “public service”—exercised in museum and gallery spaces—aimed at making important materials available that were otherwise inaccessible. On the other hand, there are the Group’s more ambitiously theoretical reflections on the changes that have occurred in the last three decades, and which have affected the relationship between TV and the museum as two “technologies” of memory and attention.

Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

Walter Benjamin (quoted in J. Fisher 2007)

“Monument to dead television” is the expression that The Otolith Group (2010, 6)—an artist-led British collective that gravitates around the theorist, artist, and curator Kodwo Eshun and the anthropologist, artist, and curator Anjalika Sagar—uses to define one of the most intriguing directions of its multiform artistic practice.¹ In fact, since 2007, the collective has been engaged in the activity of “excavating” and “reframing” (ibid., 1) long-lost quality films: recuperating and re-screening them in contemporary art museums and galleries. These films were originally produced and broadcast by European national public TV channels during the late eighties and early nineties.

In particular, the attention of the Group has focused so far on two major works of “excavation.” The first one is the retrospective *The Ghosts of Songs*—a re-presentation of the entire filmic corpus produced between 1982 and 1998 by the British experimental group Black Audio Film Collective, and originally broadcast (albeit not in its entirety) on BBC Channel 4.² The second—the artwork *Inner Time of Television*—is an experiment of re-screening of the thirteen episodes of the TV-serial *L’héritage de la chouette*, realized in 1989 by French artist Chris Marker for the French channel La Sept.³ What these films share is a complex approach to the question of memory and migration in Europe, and to the role of images as testimonies or documents. In these works, the authority of images is questioned and rendered vulnerable through a deep and innovative exploration of the audio-visual languages of their period.

This essay will explore The Otolith Group’s interest for such “forgotten archives of contemporary televisuality” (The Otolith Group 2010, 5) from the point of view of their implications for contemporary museums facing the challenges and welcoming the possibilities of “an age of migrations.” The specific reference here to The Otolith Group’s artistic-curatorial practice—amongst many other possible case studies that show a conceptual and operative affinity with the Group’s “excavation” pro-

1 The 2010 Turner-prize nominated collective The Otolith Group was founded in London, United Kingdom, in 2002 (<http://otolithgroup.org>). Although formally a duo, the Otoliths use the name “collective” to refer to their activities of global collaboration, in the legacy of the tradition of “integrated practice” first experimented with by the British art collectives of the eighties (Mercer 1994). Places their works have been presented include: *Manifesta 8* (Murcia, Spain, 2010), *Documenta 12 and 13* (Kassel, Germany, 2007 and 2012), the MACBA (Barcelona, Spain, 2010-2011) and the MaXXI (Rome, Italy, 2011-2012). For a critical overview of their artistic endeavours between 2002-2012, see: Italiano 2011; Ferrara 2012.

2 *The Ghosts of Songs* was hosted at the FACT (Liverpool, United Kingdom, 2007), the Arnolfini (Bristol, United Kingdom, 2007), and the INIVA and Whitechapel Art Gallery (London, United Kingdom, 2008). For the exhibition catalogue and project documentation, see: Eshun and Sagar 2007; The Otolith Group 2007.

3 *Inner Time of Television* was premiered at the 1st Athens Biennale in 2007, and presented at the 2010 Turner Prize and at the 2011-2012 *Thoughtform* exhibition at MaXXI in Rome, amongst other locations. For the artists’ book on this project, see: The Otolith Group 2010.

jects—is indeed neither fortuitous, nor gratuitous. In fact, a cautionary note is needed in advance.

The Otoliths are certainly not the first ones to propose such an operation of archival excavation and subsequent re-presentation, in the space of contemporary museums and galleries, of artistic materials originally conceived for the TV screen.⁴ Nor are the Otolith Group's curatorial projects the only ones that have acknowledged the importance of keeping alive the memory of such filmic works from the past decades, specifically for the fact that they foster a reflection on the unfinished business of identity and representation in postcolonial Europe.⁵ However, to date the Otoliths are certainly the ones whose curatorial premise inserts such a common practice of appropriation and curatorship within a broader and much more original frame: that of a critical reflection on the changes that have occurred in the relation between TV and the museum—as technologies of memory and attention—over the last three decades. As they write,

[our “monuments” seem] to be understandable as [acts] of appropriation or curation. [They seem] to be a matter of rendering previously inaccessible work visible. Indeed, [they] might be considered as a public service that parallels the kind of work made available on Kenneth Goldsmith's invaluable ubuweb site. [...] On reflections, however, ambiguities seem to emerge [...]. What becomes immediately apparent is that television [works] such [as these] could never be broadcast on British television today—[with their] seriously playful pedagogy whose scale, scope, aspiration and ambition has long since disappeared from high definition digital television. [...] [In the “monuments”] what was once routine and domestic returns [...] as an artificial encounter which makes visible the technical conditions of a now extinct form of mass spectatorship. (2010, 5-6)

This essay will thus explore this wider notion of the “monument to dead television,” or, in other words, its double character: on one side, an act of appropriation and curatorship of works in which the memory of migration is critically addressed; on the other, a reflection on the changes that have occurred in the visual technologies of memory, which inserts the Group's artistic practice also within the discourse of the critique of contemporary neo-liberal “attention economy.”⁶

4 I am referring here also to the diffusion in Europe of museums specifically dedicated to films and TV, such as the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin. It should be clarified that this is not the kind of museum where The Otolith Group's excavations have been presented so far. In fact, to date they have been primarily conceived for screening in contemporary art museums and galleries, or contemporary art study centres.

5 As an example, consider the screening of the Black Audio Film Collective's 1986 *Expeditions One: Sings of Empire* (1983), *Expeditions Two: Images of Nationality* (1984), and *Handsworth Songs* (1986) during the Tate Modern 2012 exhibition *Migrations* and on August 26, 2011 at the Tate Modern's free screening events following the 2011 riots in London. For critical documentation on these events, see: Carey-Thomas 2012; M. Fisher 2011.

6 The concept of “attention economy” has recently gained a significant popularity in critical theory. The expression primarily refers to the act of transforming into labour the human capacities for attention and memory. Here, and elsewhere in this essay, I will use the expression with a specific reference to a direction of criticism in which the valorisation of attention, affects, and memory is studied as a specific diagram of contemporary neo-liberal biopolitics. As in the analysis of Maurizio Lazzarato (2003), contemporary

The first section of this essay will therefore provide an overview of the specific themes and issues that make The Black Audio Film Collective's and Marker's works relevant to a reflection on European migration today. The last two sections will instead inquire more specifically into whether and to what extent The Otolith Group's projects of excavation of such works may prove to be a "best practice" for contemporary art museums in an age of migrations. Attesting to the central role of museums as public and pedagogical sites, and as technologies of construction of a memory of postcolonial migrations, the essay will thus propose some potential operative strategies relevant to museums, which emerge as suggestions from the Otolith Group's "monuments."

→ REMINDER: ACTS OF RETELLING

Throughout its three sections, this essay aims at unearthing three potential meanings of the notion of the "monument to dead television": a *reminder* of the past, a *memento* for the present, and an *homage* to the future. The first meaning—the *reminder*—hints at the ways in which the Group's monuments bring alive a forgotten moment in European cultural history: a phase in which an autonomous discourse about migration was articulated through the public apparatuses of mass spectatorship, which were committed to engaging with the risky processes of the re-narration—or better of the "re-telling," to quote Stuart Hall—of Europe.⁷

Indeed—as I shall explore in this section of the essay—what seems to motivate The Otolith Group's interests for TV works such as those by the Black Audio Film Collective and Chris Marker seems to be, first of all, the fact that they function as a *reminder* of a time when the themes of identity and postcolonial migrations in Europe were being articulated and developed by independent cinema with such a force, and to such an extent, so as to foster the opening of new public media circuits. Specifically, in these years new TV channels were inaugurated—that produced and distributed filmic reflections on urgent questions otherwise unable to be addressed on a national and mass scale. In this sense, the Group's project of excavation seems to have the first intention of circulating an otherwise forgotten memory of this experience, whose implications for contemporary Europe in the age of migrations are still very relevant. The idea of the monument as a *reminder* is therefore used here to suggest the ways in which The Otolith Group's excavations seem to be understandable as a way to carve out, in the institutional space of the museum, the ideal place of remembrance for a lost moment when critical public engagement with the open question of identity in postcolonial Europe took place through a capillary and mass-oriented media platform such as public TV.

biopolitics affects the population through acts able to "modulat[e] brains [...] by means of the occupation of memory and attention by signs, images and statements."

7 In Hall 1990, the concept of "re-telling" is used to emphasize the dimensions of invention and creation involved in the processes of subjectivity production. Practices of re-telling take place when the past is reactivated and critically elaborated; re-tellings work against any claim for an original purity to be rediscovered, and in favour of a concept of subjectivity as an open-ended production.

To explore these issues, I will first need to introduce the cultural and social climate which led to the emergence of new social forces able to put pressure on public media, as to foster the opening of new TV channels. As already mentioned, the specific moment in the history of public European TV, which *The Ghosts of Songs* and *Inner Time of Television* bring alive, goes from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. This was a period of experimentation for innovative ideas of film culture (both for the cinematic screen and for the TV screen), and for a new concept of cinema “as social practice on a national scale” (The Otolith Group 2010, 7).⁸ The new film cultures that developed in these years had a strong pedagogical and public commitment. This reveals how deeply embedded they were in the climate of the late eighties—a moment when concepts such as “canon, curriculum, common and culture [...] were disputed” (The Otolith Group 2010, 8). The “national scale” of the French and British cinematic independent enterprises was in fact everything but nationalistic. On the contrary, these experiments attested to a refusal to reinforce a clear and pure myth of “the nation.” They were an attempt to create alternate narratives, capable of fracturing the institutional frame of the nation, in order to expose it to the pressure of forgotten bodies, uncharted routes, and unregistered migrating memories, which spanned a global scale. To use Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray’s definition, these were the years of the “militant image,” which designates⁹

any form of image or sound—from essay film to fiction feature, from observational documentary to found-footage ciné-pamphlet—produced in and through film-making practices dedicated to [militant struggles]. [...] It refers not just to individual films but also to new modes of production, exhibition, distribution, pedagogy and training made possible by forms of political organization and affiliation. (2011, 1)

In countries such as the United Kingdom and France—where the Black Audio Film Collective’s corpus and Marker’s films were produced—the period of the “militant image” comes to designate a moment when the issues of migration had become pivotal. In both countries, this was a time when migration was a key topic in public discourse. In fact, in both the countries this was the moment when the confrontation with the respective imperial pasts and the dark legacy of colonialism were being brought up by migrations and their inter-generational consequences. And moreover, in both the countries this was also the period when new public TV channels such as Channel 4 (1982) and La Sept (1986) were inaugurated under the pressure of new emerging social forces.

8 Such experiments took place through the formula of the independent “artistic collective”—a phrase that is indicative of a specific aesthetic, political, and poetical practice. The model of the collective workshop—through which the activity of film-making was carried out—was in fact directly linked with those new forms of social use of time and space first experimented with in the leftist militant autonomous milieu of the late sixties and early seventies (Enwezor 2007, 113).

9 For the sake of clarity, it must be specified that the concept of the “militant image” is used by Eshun and Gray (2011) with a specific reference to the cinematic practices developed within the context of the tricontinental militancy for decolonization. However, their methodological stance is very apt to be transferred to the context we are writing about here.

The agenda of these TV platforms was to provide an alternative to existing channels, by broadcasting high-quality educational and artistic works. In the specific case of Channel 4—around which The Otolith Group’s attention is focused—this was programmatically aimed at being a platform for what were then called “the minority groups” (Brown 2007; Hobson 2008).¹⁰ However, the social pressures that led to the inauguration of TV channels such as Channel 4 emerged from what happened elsewhere—beyond the institutional media platforms.

As John Akomfrah of the Black Audio Film Collective recently stated in an interview with scholar Lindsay Dovey (Dovey 2010), in the United Kingdom these were in fact the years in which a younger generation of “black British” was struggling to articulate their multiple identities (of ethnicity, gender, and so on).¹¹ This younger generation of “hyphenated British”—as they were called to hint at their multiple identities—were the sons and daughters of the first immigrants who had reached the United Kingdom from the former British colonies after WWII.¹²

Since the late seventies, a mixture of unprecedented factors affected the life of this younger generation: the growing unemployment on the one side, the political ethos of the refusal to work on the other, the diffusion of personal media such as portable cameras, together with new forms of racialization, criminalization, and racism in the British urban centres. All these diverse factors would lead—at the very beginning of the eighties—to a season of unrest and creativity, of racial fear and cultural cross-pollination alike. A season whose main protagonist in the public discourse was the controversial figure of the “young black British” (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, and Clarke 1978; Gilroy 1987).

During these same years, the number of black British enrolling in university-level education also grew exponentially, and it was also within the educational context of art schools and the university that the season of independent cinema was born. It might be said that cinema (together with music) became, in these years, the preferred language for the younger generation to articulate blackness as a “zone of becoming” (Akomfrah,

10 It might be useful to clarify that there were very close contacts between the two channels. For example, when referring to Chris Marker’s *L’héritage de la chouette*, The Otolith Group has in mind the British broadcast of this artwork, which was presented in the United Kingdom in 1988 on Channel 4, with the title *The Owl’s Legacy* (The Otolith Group 2010, 5).

11 I maintain the definition of “black British” here in full awareness of its limits, and of the limits of any process of definition—as brilliantly exposed in Hall (1996b [1993]). In fact, I have decided to keep it precisely to evoke the timely critical mass that emerged around the critique of this definition. The use of the expression here is therefore not intended to suggest any monolithic conception of blackness, nor am I unaware of the many other issues raised during the season of independent black British cinema, such as those of queer or feminist cinemas. On the contrary, the use of term hints precisely at that historical moment when the condition of raciality evoked in the term became “a dimension of potentiality” from which many different singularities emerged (Eshun 2007, 75).

12 The generational gap which divided this generation from that of their parents—Akomfrah claimed in the interview—seemed to be unbridgeable. As the film-maker remembered, the history of this generational divide is to be understood within the history of the cycles of capitalism, which had first captivated parents’ aspirations by pulling them towards United Kingdom as racialized labour force, and then discarded the younger generation, who happened to grow up in a transition phase between industrial and post-industrial capitalism (Dovey 2010).

in Dovey 2010)—against a public discourse which *hovered* around them, but which inevitably forced them between the two monolithic discursive systems of *information* and *counter-information*.

From this specific point of view—in its attempt to escape the closed circuit of information and counter-information (with their obsession for the truth-value of images, testimonies, and documents), and to provide an alternative narration of identities in postcolonial Europe—the broadcasting agenda of TV channels such as Channel 4 and La Sept distinguished itself in a very original and significant way. The specific *artistic* character of the filmic works that were broadcast attested to an unprecedented emphasis on the role of imagination, fiction, and affect in the processes of subjectivity creations. It was along this common trail of poetics and politics, of imagination and narration, that diverse filmic languages, such as those of the new black cinemas and Marker’s “white and post-colonial” cinematography happened to touch and influence each other.

It should be however emphasized how the Otolith Group’s choice to dedicate their “monuments” to Marker and the Black Audio Film Collective does not imply the fact that, according to the group, Marker and the Black Audio Film Collectives could be considered as the perfect representatives of this season of European public culture. More precisely, what distinguishes the Group’s curatorial choice from many other similar projects of excavation of TV and cinema archives lies in the fact that both Marker and the Black Audio Film Collective represent two “eccentric” directions of independent cinema—which is the reason why they are still so intriguing. As Gill Henderson writes about the works of Black Audio Film Collective, for example, “they were radically different from any other independent film and video of that period” (2007, 7).

In fact, as The Otolith Group brilliantly explains in the books accompanying these excavation projects (2007, 2010), the most fascinating aspect shared by The Black Audio Film Collective’s corpus and Marker’s films was the fact that they were works that defied what their audiences expected from images. Indeed, they confounded not only those audiences who were unprepared or unwilling to be exposed to radical contents and sensitive themes. They also displaced those audiences “who were ready for radical polemics and righteous anger,” but only when these came in the guise of films which cleaved “the well trodden path of [...] social realism” (Henderson 2007, 7).

“How does one begin to say something about a story everyone claims to know?” (Akomfrah, 2011). This was, indeed, the question behind Marker’s *L’héritage de la chouette*, for example, and the Black Audio Film Collective’s *Handsworth Songs* (1986). Both are works to which The Otolith Group dedicates a consistent part of its curatorial effort. The latter is a poetical narration of the 1981 racial riots that took place in the neighbourhood of Handsworth, Birmingham, in the United Kingdom—whose news coverage had been extraordinary, but which still was pleading to be narrated in an autonomous way. The first is a TV-serial in thirteen episodes dedicated to a critical reading of Ancient Greece and the all-too-

white myth of the Greek roots of European culture, in which thirteen personalities linked to contemporary Greece give their own account of themes such as “democracy,” “history,” and the “Olympics.”

In both the works, the will to narrate something about stories around which a huge mass of information had already been gathered—and around which a consistent media-based memory already existed—becomes the chance to explore the role of fictionalization in the practices of memorialisation. *Handsworth Songs* therefore addresses not the “truth” about the race riots, but the survival of an inter-generational memory of racism and antiracism, which is addressed through an innovative use of public images that transform themselves in opaque fragments of a narration and a memory which cannot be other than personal, in-becoming, fragmented.¹³ *L’héritage de la chouette* becomes instead the chance to present Hellenism—and the myth of the white roots of “the West”—as “the inverted twin of Orientalism” (The Otolith Group 2010, 10)—with an intensity that cannot but recall Martin Bernal’s observations on the “fabrication of Ancient Greece” in the first volume of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (published in 1987, when Marker’s filming for the series began). Both the works explore the limits of the document, the interview, the historical narration, the themes of roots and origins by “anticipating an encounter with questions of the absence or unreliability of memory and archives: [a] prescient commentary and meditation on migrant culture and globalization” (Henderson 2007, 7).¹⁴

The curatorial premise behind the Otolith Group’s excavation projects must therefore be understood first of all as a way to remember—and remind—a specific moment in European public culture whose echo on the present is still very strong, but whose memory has been lost. The Group’s first aim is therefore to remember a time when the social and critical pressure brought on by migrations became the terrain where new forms of organization, new ideas of collective narration, and a new and fluid conception of identity in Europe were developed. Moreover, to remember such a moment is a way to remember how—in the words of theorist Mark Fisher

“mainstream media” is not a monolith, but a terrain. It wasn’t because of the largesse of broadcasters that the BBC and Channel 4 became host to popular experimentalism between the 60s and the 90s. No: this was only possible on the basis of a struggle by forces – which were political at the same time as they were cultural – that were content neither to remain in the margins nor

13 A 1988 note by Reece Auguiste on behalf of the Black Audio Film Collectives acts as testimony, for example, to the controversial reception of *Handsworth Songs* even in the black radical cultural circuits. The unrealistic and opaque narration of the events that unfolded in the film was in fact accused of being almost “un-political.” This marks an interesting turning point in black cultural politics around the eighties, which signals the crisis of the paradigm of “social realism” in militant poetics. See Auguiste [1988] 2007.

14 An aspect that deserves more critical attention—but which I will leave unexplored for reasons of time and space—is that of the technical languages of Marker’s and The Black Audio Film Collective’s film. In particular, anti-realistic colouring, un-sequential image layout, and original soundtracks are some of the elements by which the authority of the document and the role of memorial testimony are questioned and exposed to the forces of narration and imagination.

to replicate the existing form of mainstream. (M. Fisher 2011)

Here, the Otolith Group's "monuments to dead television" become archival explorations whose aim is to resume and re-trace the routes of such struggles, to narrate *another*, forgotten story of Europe's contemporary past: a moment that was overshadowed by a very iconic event, such as the fall of the Berlin wall, and slipped out of public memory. A moment, as The Otolith Group writes, "in which the meaning and authority of origin, ancestry, legacy, history, nationality, race, civilization [...] and the idea of the West was being contested" (2010, 8). A moment which only these stubborn remnants can still narrate, emerging from the zones of amnesia of the contemporary media archives.

→ MEMENTO: TECHNOLOGIES OF MEMORY AND ATTENTION

In the introductory section to this essay, I have suggested that the "monument to dead television" has a *double character*: on one hand, it is a regular act of curatorship and appropriation; on the other hand, it is a reflection on the changes that have occurred in the technologies of memory. These two aspects correspond—respectively—to those two levels involved in the construction of a "monument to dead television," to which the Group refers with the terms "excavation" and "reframing."

In the previous section of this essay, which dealt with the notion of the *reminder*, I have discussed the "excavation" level. As has been already established, this level is related on one hand to the content of the Black Audio Film Collective's and Marker's artworks (which means to their original approach to the narration of the post-colonial condition in Europe). On the other hand it is related to the remembrance of a phase in which emerging social forces succeeded in fostering the openings of new production and distribution channels, through which these contents and their languages would reach mass spectatorship.

In this section I will instead focus more specifically on the other level, which is that of "reframing": the specific act of *re*-presentation of such TV works into the space of contemporary art museums and galleries. This change in the distribution platform is in fact programmatically addressed by the Otoliths as key a element of their curatorial premise. Here, as we shall see, the role of museums becomes pivotal in the Group's reflections.

I have chosen to relate this second level to the notion of a *memento*, a reminder that is at the same time critical in its scope. On the level of "reframing," the Group's "monuments" are in fact programmatically aimed at raising critical questions that pertain to the present. As the Group writes in the *Inner Time of Television* book: "[This reframing is an] encounter [with] a moment when the intelligence of television was networked into a form of collective thought. [It is an encounter] whose effect challenge the certitudes and condescensions of the present" (2010, 10). Why have these works disappeared from public TV? Why is such a grand public project (like the one which rendered possible the realization and screening of quality film-works on TV on a national scale during the late eight-

ies and early nineties) no longer a feasible option in Europe?

Indeed, as Mark Fisher has observed, the “reframing” in museum spaces of such artworks—which The Otolith Group so painstakingly recover from oblivion, by recuperating them from the archive of European media systems—suggests a reflection on the changes that have occurred in the media system and in the European platforms for public intervention.¹⁵ As he writes, the screening of films such as *Handsworth Songs* in museums such as the Tate in London—which is now a possibility—was unthinkable in 1985. However, similar, but as if in a mirror reflection, what is unimaginable today is the possibility “of *Handsworth Songs* or its like appearing on Channel 4 now, still less being commissioned” (2011).

The Otolith Group’s “reframings” are therefore to be taken not as mere nostalgic celebrations of the past, but as critical gestures. According to the Group (2010), the reasons behind the progressive disappearance of time and space for cultural intervention on a mass scale on European TV are to be found in the changes that have occurred in the technologies of memory and attention—the media—between the eighties and nineties and today. The Group claims that this disappearance has to be understood in relation to the passage from the broadcasting of Channel 4 and La Sept to the contemporary narrowcasting culture of digital television. As the Otoliths write,

it is clear that the increase in the number of television channels has gone hand in hand with the elimination of time and space for cultural intervention. [...] The move from the broadcasting culture of the late 1980s to today’s culture of narrowcasting implies a shift from a captivated mode of attention towards a mode that media critic Linda Stone calls “continuous partial attention.” (ibid., 5-6)¹⁶

Far from being a conservative reading of media cultures, this account provided by the Otoliths has to be taken as an invitation to think of technologies as entities that have to be considered within those wider social, political, and material assemblages from which they emerge and which they engender. Without denying the existence of a positive continuum in the history of media—from which broadcasting and narrowcasting TV have emerged—the Otoliths also address the holes and gaps

15 Mark Fisher’s article is in fact dedicated to a screening of the Black Audio Film Collective’s *Handsworth Songs* at the Tate London, which is not directly related to any of The Otolith Group’s curatorial projects. Nevertheless, the increasing number of museum screenings of works by the Black Audio Film Collective throughout the United Kingdom cannot be considered as conceptually unrelated to the excavation and recuperation first carried out by the Otoliths.

16 Stone (2009) explains “continuous partial attention” as follows: “[It] is an always on, anywhere, anytime, anyplace behaviour that creates an artificial sense of crisis. We are always on high alert. We are demanding multiple cognitively complex actions from ourselves. We are reaching to keep a top priority in focus, while, at the same time, scanning the periphery to see if we are missing other opportunities. If we are, our very fickle attention shifts focus. [...] Over the last twenty years, we have become expert at continuous partial attention and we have pushed ourselves to an extreme [...]. There are times when [continuous partial attention] is the best attention strategy for what we’re doing; and, in small doses, continuous partial attention serves us well. There are times when [it] compromises us. The ‘shadow side’ of continuous partial attention is over-stimulation and lack of fulfilment. The latest, greatest powerful technologies are now contributing to our feeling increasingly powerless.”

in this continuum. Their positions do not deny the positive resonance of media's general tendency toward openness and heterogeneity, which has increased with the years. Theirs, however, is an artistic-theoretical stance that invites attention to be paid also to the holes in the continuum: the points where it becomes apparent that media are a terrain that is open, exposed to feedback processes, and also to dangerous backlash effects. No media is neutral in its everyday use.

In fact, the Group's concerns resonate strongly with some preoccupations animating a very recent and really intriguing but still scarcely systematized research vector within contemporary critical theory: the study of the ways in which human capacities for attention and memory have undergone a processes of capture, valorisation and destruction in (post-) cybernetic societies.¹⁷ According to the Group, the drive towards being "always on" and continually ready to catch up with fluxes of information that arrive increasingly faster and thicker is not only a characteristic of what are commonly considered as "the new media"—the internet, for example. On the contrary, it is a *threshold* that is present in every media, also the most traditional ones. For the Otoliths, TV has reached the threshold of "continuous partial attention" with digital narrowcasting, which in turn has contributed to hinder the capacity for continuous durational attention and active participation.

According to the Group, the political consequences of this destruction of the capacity to pay durational attention are important. Only durational attention can guarantee participative engagement, which is necessary to build critical mass around complex issues such as the production of new identities and the critique of monolithic representations articulated in films such as those by the Black Audio Film Collective and Marker. Moreover, continuous partial attention affects the capacity for "taking care" and "building bonds;" thus, it affects the possibility of creating, in today's world, collective and participative experiences of collaboration and a shared use of time and space—of which the film cultures of the eighties are instead a terrific example.

It is here that The Otolith Group (2010) reverts to the museum—the contemporary art museum—as the space of potentiality. Can museums and galleries today resurrect such a "dead" kind of spectatorship by offering conditions of attentive participation that is no longer possible on TV? For the Otoliths, they can. The Otoliths suggest that museums should become the spaces in which more and more "monuments" are built. On museum premises, and under their promotion, spectators can recuperate the time to be deeply exposed to those recent, yet already forgotten, aesthetics, which bring with them the traces of past and common struggles for identity and representation. Each "reframing" can become the chance for a "self-conscious" experience; the curatorial gesture of "excavating"

17 The authors who should be referenced here for their work on these questions are numerous, and their background and aims sometimes differ enormously. It is not my goal here to provide a complete list of these authors, or an exhaustive account of their work. However, I will suggest a close look at the critical studies by Lazzarato (2003), and Stiegler (n.d.).

and “reframing” should in fact never be kept obscure to the spectators. On the contrary, it should be declared in the installation and exposition space (2010, 6).

The installation *Inner Time of Television* (even more than the exhibition *The Ghosts of Songs*) is an experiment in this direction.¹⁸ As the Group writes, “to encounter *Inner Time of Television* is to be invited to self-consciously inhabit a reconstructed mode of attention. Faced with a special configuration of thirteen monitors, the viewer comes face to face with a monument to dead television” (2010, 6). This “monument” is composed of thirteen TV screens disposed in the exhibition room. Each of them is set opposite to a seating facility (a chair or a stool), and earphones are plugged into each.¹⁹ On each of the thirteen screens a different episode of Chris Marker’s thirteen episodes of *L’héritage de la chouette* TV serial is broadcast. In order to grasp the installation in its entirety and Marker’s elliptic project as a whole, the spectator is invited to *invest* attention, time and care. The in-text materials accompanying the installation discuss the artwork from the point of view of its relation with a critical discourse on attention and memory.

This “reframing” works by profiting from the museum’s temporal and spatial constraints and tendency towards “slow immersion” in a very significant way. The simultaneity of vision enhanced by the museum and gallery installation functions to make the original seriality of Marker’s TV work apparent in its difference. The seriality of the TV product is indeed re-doubled in the format of Marker’s episodes, which are linked to one another through a “mode of connectibility,” which becomes apparent only through reflection and attentive participation.

As a way to conclude, I will sum up by emphasizing how, once the “reframing” level has been discussed, it becomes clear that the Otoliths’ acts of recuperation of a lost condition of mass spectatorship from oblivion are not exactly aimed at filling a gap in collective memory. In fact, the Group’s goal is only partially that of bridging an interval of amnesia that affects the present. On a close look, the project of “excavation” is aimed at rendering this gap, this interval, this distance between the recent past and the present, productive in its difference. The reference to a “dead” television takes on the uncanny features of a return from the past that troubles the certainties of the present. What if, at the end of the day, the monuments’ final aim is that of reminding us that the cultural struggle for the becoming of European identities is not “new” as it may seem? What if, on a close reading, ideas such as “networked intelligence” and so on were not simply prerogatives of the “new media,” but thresholds

18 For reasons of pertinence, this essay has emphasized the aspects that all the Otoliths’ “monuments” share. However, I am aware of the importance of the differences between them, which will hopefully be explored in further studies. Here I will just suggest, as an example, the importance of mentioning how, whereas the *Ghosts of Songs* is a more “classical” exhibition of which the Otoliths are the only curators, *Inner Time of Television* is an artwork by the Group, which is often exhibited under the curatorial care of external curators in collaboration with the artists.

19 As images 01 to 03 show, the arrangement of the screens may vary according to the exhibition space and the curatorial choices. .



IMG. 01 – *Inner Time of Television*. 1st Athens Biennale, Athens, Greece, 2010. Courtesy of The Otolith Group.



IMG. 02 – *Inner Time of Television*. Turner Prize, Tate, London, United Kingdom, 2010. Courtesy of The Otolith Group.



IMG. 03 – *Inner Time of Television*. MaXXI, Rome, Italy, 2011-2012. Courtesy of The Otolith Group.

that move across time, and signal not just a technological condition but a mode of operation, a political investment in collective practices of memorialization? What if, on the trail of a “monument” to something dead, a way towards the future starts to emerge? This last interrogation will be discussed in the following and concluding paragraph, where I suggest how the “monuments” might be understood as an homage to the past for the sake of the future.

→ HOMAGE: POTENTIAL FUTURES

The TV and cinema cultures of the eighties and nineties, which (from the point of view of the United Kingdom) constitute the core of the Otolith Group’s “monument to dead television,” belong to a moment in time whose relevance for the present age of migrations has been too easily underestimated. Still, they seem to be determined to return to our memory, as numerous other screenings taking place across Europe of these and related artworks seem to suggest.

“Shaped by the triple legacies of cineculture circa 1968, the subcultural permission of 1976 era punk and the demands for media access signaled by the Brixton uprisings of 1981,” these TV and cinematic cultures emerged during a phrase of crisis of for European economy, identity and society (The Otolith Group 2010, 7). They were carved out of a public sphere that was apparently closed off, thus showing the force of grassroots energies to build up new forms of collective participation and, possibly, a *new* social sphere for a minor, potential, in-becoming Europe.

The desires, needs, preoccupation and constraints of that age uncannily resonate with the present historical conjuncture of the global economic crisis. The question that animated the militant yet demanding, social yet fictional cinema of the Black Audio Film Collective and Marker—“How does one begin to say something about a story everyone claims to know?”—still has a tremendous relevance for the issues of migration and memory, and the representational practices involved in the processes of re-telling Europe.

Indeed, contemporary migration seems to be—perhaps today more than ever before—precisely *the* story everyone claims to know about. Overflowing from the channels of disparate media such as television, the web, cinema, newspapers and magazines, it is embodied as image, text, or sound in flash news, blog posts, in-depth documentaries, journalist buzz, “expert” commentary, photographic reports, worried statistics, activist information routes, academic volumes, cinema stories and sonic works—as well as being critically approached, exposed or exhibited through many other different artistic, research and curatorial practices. In a sense, migration, the fibre of that postcolonial urban milieu where the once reassuring and univocal yet violent fairytale about the separation between “the centre” (Europe) and “its peripheries” is no longer tenable (Julien and Mercer 1988), overflows the media archives, the information channels, and the practices and places of representation. Still, the question

of *who* tells *what* story, but also of *how* the story unfolds remains of the outmost importance.

Contemporary migration is certainly at the core of public discourse—which means that it is at the core of a terrain which is neither neutral, nor pacified. In fact, every act of narrating migration that is enacted on everyday media screens—as well as on printed paper, or in exhibition spaces—in Europe is an act of re-telling that is necessarily non-univocal. Every act of re-telling rests on power relations and on the flowing, mixing, or blocking of different fluxes of desire: power and desire to see, to tell, to hide, and so on.... It is from within this abundance that the perceived “boundaries” of Europe are literally carved out: are they more or less mobile? more or less porous? more or less fortified? To tell this story is not only a matter of subject positions (who tells what), but also of the fluxes of semiotic events in themselves and of their circulation dynamics (how the story unfolds). As Maurizio Lazzarato writes in his work on the images that represent migration in Europe,

we live in a world where images proliferate, but where their mode of production is not problematized. It's just assumed as something obvious, self-evident. The fact that there are a few hundred persons producing images for millions of spectators (whether in the case of a film or a nightly news show) is serenely accepted. (Lazzarato 2005, 293)

From the critical standpoint of this essay, such reflections may prove to be strategically crucial also to approach the question of memory and representation from the specific perspective of an interdisciplinary research project on “European museums in an age of migration.” Indeed, if what is envisaged through this research is not only a place—but even more so a critical platform where museums’ inherited approaches to the representation of culture and identity and to the embodiment of memory are put in transit and exposed to a complexity of uncharted and unregistered spaces, times, places—then it becomes necessary to recognize the importance of the acts of re-telling to unsettle any monolithic representation (Chambers 2012). As Iain Chambers writes, “critical transit in this unfolding space is neither definitive nor stable—it is always an act of translation. Who gets to translate [...] is never a neutral question” (ibid., 142).

This was the conundrum faced by the independent cine-cultures of the eighties. From within this crisis, new energies emerged. In their uncanny return, the TV and cine-cultures of our recent past have changed their platform. The Otolith Group’s decision to revert to museums to build a “monument” to a phase of our recent past is therefore particularly interesting. As we have seen, it is an operation which deserves attention first of all for its artistic interest, as a *reminder*: reeling again the archive of the past brings to the fore new memories for old struggles, and revives through old memories new struggles.

Moreover, the Otoliths’ monuments are of critical interest for the present as a *memento*, in so far as they invite us to be attentive to the ways in which our memory and our attention are constructed, shaped, and created within the media assemblages to which we are attached. At a time

when museums are invested by the critical discourse on memory, they are often accused of being “static,” and pressured to open up to the new, fluid forms of memorialization suggested by the archives of the digital age. Paradoxically enough, the Otoliths propose a way to transform these “weak points” of museums into their strong points. The “monuments” suggest that the time and space constraints of the museum are not necessarily in contradiction with the desire towards a more fluid and open agenda. Old spaces can be “othered,” infused with new life, to again become places for the articulation of social and vexed issues.

Finally, the Otoliths’ “monuments” are of instructional importance for a discourse on museums in an age of migrations. The third meaning of the “monument”—the *homage*—refers to the possibility of extending to the future the preoccupations that animate the Group’s recuperation projects. To pay an homage to the past, and to reactivate it in order to reflect on the present, could therefore also be a way to imagine some potential operative ways for future exploration. For example, in the agenda for museums in an age of migrations, shared projects of excavation of the public media archive of postcolonial Europe could become a common practice. What pedagogical and social energies might such a project reveal? What new bonds can be articulated in the space of the museum, while being exposed to similar yet different stories that the media archives can reveal? It is true, and it should not be forgotten, that museums *are not* TV: this implies questions of free access, of public participation, and of mass spectatorship that still need to be articulated. Yet, something may be engendered through this encounter, in the space of the museum, with past struggles on the terrain of public media culture.

A final suggestion seems to stem from the “monument to dead television.” Experiments, that struggle to narrate migration and Europe’s becoming in an autonomous way, are today carried out in the grassroots of media culture. But even these are threatening to soon disappear. Many will not even reach the surface, crushed by the weight of those clichéd images that engulf the media channels of our continuous partial attention. Could museums be the new public platform, not only for the excavation of TV products from the past, but also for the promotion of these high-quality contemporary TV products that address migration and have a hard time being hosted on the television platforms they are aimed at? Could museums become a new channel that would first promote work that is intended for the TV, but which is at the risk of an early death for lack of support?²⁰ And if so, would this be a way to foster a potential new

20 I take the chance to mention here that during the “MeLa” Brainstorming event “Museums, Migrations, Memory and Citizenship”—which was held in Naples on March 14, 2012—the panel “The Migrating Image: Mnemotechnics, Museums and New Media” proposed a first attempt at articulating a discourse on the relation between museums and TV in the construction of an autonomous memory of contemporary migrations in Italy. On that occasion, two works were presented: the documentary “Gone With the Orange”—directed by Nicola Angrisano of the Italian Street-TV Insu[^]TV—on the 2009 riots of the African labourers in Rosarno (Calabria, Italy) and the new forms of racialization in the international division of labour; and the tv series “Appunti per una fiction su Castelvoturno,” shot in Castelvoturno (Campania, Italy) by the Cultural Video Foundation and presented by Viola Sarnelli. These works are different in scope and language

alliance between European public TV and European museums? With this hope, this challenge, this suggestion, and these questions I conclude my critical encounter with the Otolith Group's "monument to dead television."

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from the Black Audio Film Collective's or Marker's artworks here discussed, yet they are a way to tackle the state of independent television today.

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Conclusion



Beyond White Walls

→ LIDIA CURTI

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→ ABSTRACT

The themes of memory, the archive, the relation between past, present, tradition and innovation, are essential to research on the museum in an age of migrations. The interaction between commitment and art, responsibility and representation, recurring in museological and archival institutions, promotes an encounter between aesthetics and ethics. At the core of this discussion lies the relation with the other: a subject-object rendered subaltern in the process of dis-tanciation and appropriation that continues to organise the representations of diversity. From such premises, this essay follows an itinerary that concentrates on the “language” of archiving practices: the museum as space-theatre or event-encounter, and its interaction with pasts, presents and futures, genres and genders, black and white, in a movement between becoming and immobility. The changes produced by the “irruption” of the other, producing an interruption of the archive, and the movement from colonised object to postcolonial subject in museological and exhibitionary systems—where prestige resides precisely in representations of alterity—becomes the basis for a discourse still to be realized. Much contemporary art—I refer in particular to the exhibition Indian Highway at the MAXXI in Rome in 2012—emphasizes transit, exchange and hybridity across media, places, cultures, identities and subjects towards a new conception of citizenship – suggesting ways, if not highways, that, emerging from the art work, invest the existing structures of exhibiting and archiving.

PREVIOUS PAGE – Pushpamala N and Clare Arni, “Lakshmi Shooting Lakshmi”, project Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs. Bangalore, 2000-2004

→ A BROKEN MEMORY

Memory lifts its smoky mirror: 1943
 Single isinglass window kerosene
 Stove in the street barn halfset moon
 8:15 a.m. Eastern War Time dark
 [...]

I am a woman standing in line for gasmasks
 I stand on a road in Ramallah with naked face listening
 I am standing here in your poem unsatisfied
 Lifting my smoky mirror

Adrienne Rich (1991)

If any one faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest,
 I do think it is memory. There seems something more speakingly incom-
 prehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in
 any other of our intelligences. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so
 serviceable, so obedient; at others, so bewildered and so weak; and at others
 again, so tyrannic, so beyond control! We are to be sure, a miracle every
 way; but our powers of recollecting and of forgetting do seem peculiarly
 past finding out.

Jane Austen (1814-1816)

The themes of memory and the archive, of the relation between past and present, tradition and innovation, the work of art and its exhibitionary locations, are essential to this research on the museum in an age of migrations. Our work relates to the ongoing critique of traditional archiving practices and methodologies, and to the attempts to renew their basic criteria, as well as to perspectives for a possible future suggested by cultural and postcolonial theory and the current research on migratory movements.

Central to these themes is the concept of the “interruption” of the archive, the interval, the cut in the hegemonic criteria of cataloguing and archiving: “the site of histories, lives and sentiments yet to be registered and narrated” (Chambers 2012, 151). The archive therefore not as a continuity in tradition, ways of life and thought, but rather as a critical reflection and historical interrogation. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1995), Michel Foucault argues against those who believe in the continuity of history, and conceptualizes an opposing network of constant change: a system of relations, connecting different sites and conflicting subjects, in a vision of contemporary society based on heterogeneity and heterotopias. In analyzing the cluster of notions that guarantee continuity (tradition, mentality, spirit, uniqueness of the *oeuvre*, the archive), Foucault observes, touching upon topics later to be discussed by Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou: “we must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption [...]. Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of origin, but treated as and when

it occurs” (Foucault [1969] 1995, 25). He does not propose to refuse the presence of origins but to put them on hold, to render them problematic, shaking the acquiescence with which they are accepted and underlining that they are the effects of a process of construction whose rules we need to know. Migration itself may be considered as an interruption of the assumed linear continuity of history and progress, as it underlines the difficulty of containing the development of nations, as well as populations and ethnicities, within fixed, well-determined boundaries.¹

The concept of interruption leads, in my opinion, to the importance of the *event* in museum practices—in other words to the “language” of the museum, considered as a space-theatre, as a representation and a performance, as an enactment: from mere exhibition to complex rite. The focus on the socio-cultural finalities of archival institutions should be extended to their formal languages and performativity. The fact that they are never innocent or unintentional, but usually carefully arranged, is not to be intended in a negative key. Rather, it is to be intended as an opening to more creative ways of organizing and staging an exhibition, an invitation to pay greater attention to the *mise-en-scène* and the role of dramatization. An important feminist contribution is given here in Bracha Ettinger’s art and writings, in her figurative and philosophical elaboration of trans-subjectivity, and her re-thinking of the polarity m/f, in the borderland joining feminism to psychoanalysis and aesthetics. Ettinger’s concept of “art working” renders the idea of the extension of the work of art in itself to a project in action, in movement, a configuration of a time-space-event that she calls “EVENT-ENCOUNTER” (Ettinger 2006). Art instigates thought; the image itself is theoretical entity, a critical interval crossing temporal and spatial immediacies. The performative element carries these expressions of art beyond the gallery and the museum into a space between art and music, poetry and narrative, image and word, aesthetics and criticism.

The meeting between past and present, movement and immobility may lead to the construction of a future memory and a way of re-creating the past, “an interrogative, blank space: the space of a museum yet to come” (Chambers 2012, 142). Its articulation is realized in the intermediate space between conservation and invention, revolution and tradition, death drive and pleasure principle. The logic of repetition is opened to the creation of the simulacrum, the aura of the work of art is re-proposed as re-creation and re-contextualization, the copy of an original escaping the notion of origin: memory as production and not re-production. The archive promotes the production of traces, a question of the future, “of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow [...] if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come” (Derrida [1995] 1998, 36). The contrast between the archive, which may be handed down to us as motionless and immovable, in “the condition of

1 In her work on the image of the migrant in France, Françoise Lionnet, evoking Foucault’s argument, states that the linguistic, temporal and spatial dispersal of the migrant subject questions the grammar of discourse in the Western episteme (Lionnet 1996).

being self-evident” as Foucault would say, and a living archive that is not just a handing down of tradition but something that is enunciated (that sings, sounds, listens) in difference.²

Georges Didi-Huberman, moving along a trajectory that goes from Walter Benjamin to Giorgio Agamben, stresses the importance of the archive as a living entity. He speaks of the importance of unconscious memory, asserting that what survives in a culture is what is most repressed and obscure in that culture. After the experience of walking on the volcanic crater of the Solfatara, in the Campi Flegrei (Fields of Fire) area near Naples, he observes: “we must ourselves be the seismologists and the archaeologists of our field of knowledge. Whether we walk on a ruin, or on a stone that is emitting fumes, there is always something to extract from the ground on which we tread” (Didi-Huberman 2012, 11). Elsewhere ([2009] 2010), he recalls that “survivance”—in Amy Warburg’s use of the term—is what is apparently dead, but comes to the surface in other historical moments, composed of latent things, of sleeping images. Bringing to light what is surviving, resisting in an elsewhere, against the imperatives of the “actual,” means accepting anachronism as the necessary survival of the past in the present.³ Didi-Huberman’s concept of “anachronism” as a character of history, and particularly of the history of art, is founded on the analysis of the co-existence of heterogeneous times in the image. Time differentials do not deny history but show its dialectical force. In front of an image, as ancient it may be, the present never stops its own reconfiguration, in the same way as the past in front of the most recent image: “the image has often more memory and more future than the one who observes it” ([2000] 2007, 13).

Memory is unconscious and not dominated by the conformism of tradition. As Walter Benjamin says, tradition must be separated from conformism: it is the element that can contribute to the formation of our desires and rebellions. Memory is subjected to a constant imaginative process and to the creation of virtual geographies and imaginary realms. Any archive constitutes a re-visitation of past memories, proposing unexpected readings and interrogations. The archival collection, in the act of “taking into custody,” discovers holes and failures, interruptions and deviations, like the path of memory described by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* ([1814-1816] 2000). The present includes fringes that touch both past and present. Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz underlines the continual dynamism of the past in her comments on Bergson’s concept of duration: “the past is not only the past of this present but the past of every present, even the future ones” (Grosz 2004, 178).

2 The reference here is to the European funded project “Villaggio dell’Arte” and to the diffused museum organized in five communities on the Matese mountains, near Naples (see Chambers et al. 2007; Curti 2009). Another example is the “Riso. Museo d’Arte Contemporanea della Sicilia,” a regional museum that from Palermo directs its activity in different places on the island (www.palazzoriso.it). Both projects involved a programme of artist residences in local communities.

3 The disappearance of the fireflies due to the torchlights of industrialism, lamented by Pier Paolo Pasolini, becomes for Didi-Huberman a metaphor for the survival of a past that seems to have disappeared, but shines unseen elsewhere; the nature of their intermittent light points to the unstable and uneven character of survivance ([2009] 2010, 29-41).

“Memory lifts its smoky mirror” is the opening line of Adrienne Rich’s “Eastern War Time” (1991, 35), a poem creating scenes from a troubled period in intermittent flashes on different places and situations—public and private. The recollections of a woman “wired in memory” opens on to visions reproducing the broken path of memory, outlining a history no less valid than the one provided in the linearity of official accounts. As the poet writes, “Memory says: Want to do right? Don’t count on me” (44). This is another memory, governed by affect and poetry. It is not the memory one counts on in institutional reconstructions that do not admit holes, zigzag movements, devious circuits.

→ THE IRRUPTION OF MIGRANTS

We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption [...] Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of origin, but treated as and when it occurs.

Michel Foucault ([1969] 1995)

The interaction between commitment and art, responsibility and representation—recurring in museological and archival institutions—is ultimately to be referred to the encounter between aesthetics and ethics. At the core of this, there is the relation with the other: a subject-object made subaltern by the process of distancing and appropriation that too often dominates representations of diversity. The museum in postcolonial times is located in the “in-between” space (Bhabha 1990), in the interstice and the interval (Trinh 1992), in a field of differences—those of the colonizer and the colonized. This unavoidably concerns both past and present, as the consequences and the traces of today are rooted in the colonial past, in a transnational and transcultural area between the West and the rest. The confrontation with diversity becomes problematic, no longer univocal and unidirectional—subject and object are sometimes interchangeable—thus posing questions on the right to objectify the other.

It is important to accept the possibility of the other’s refusal to appear in a context inspired by an exotic and orientalist perspective; our look is refused, the other as object looks back, erasing the dream of her/his passivity that Western art has often harboured after Delacroix. The unconscious, the unsaid, the secret—the unconditioned right to secrecy—is the subtext of any exposition (Chambers 2012; Ettinger 2006). The filmmaker and anthropologist Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests that one must be an object among objects, in a circle of looks, erasing the difference between the observer and the observed. The criteria must be that of proximity and closeness, rather than that of domination and control. To avoid objectifying the other means speaking “not of”, but “close by.” Not by chance the book title collecting Trinh’s film scripts is *Framer Framed*; the observer becomes observed, frames the object and is framed herself: “What I see is life looking at me/ I look through a circle of looks” (1992, 105). In the symposium on slavery (Musée du Quai Branly, May 2011) called *Exposer*

l'ésclavage, the term “exposer” calls attention to the ambiguity of this semantic area tied to legal suggestions: exposition, denunciation, revelation, (de)monstrate, monstrosity.⁴

The confrontation with alterity, already in existence, is more urgent today. Migration is not a new phenomenon in human history, but it now gives rise to a new order of instability in the production of deterritorialized subjectivities. It cannot be read in a univocal manner, as besides the deprivation brought by the loss of human resources and by affective estrangement, there is a space for transformation and development. Migration is not only about loss and abjection, but also about the expression of desire. The relation between migration and memory is a to and fro movement linking the identity of the migrant to her new condition.⁵ Avtar Brah has given an excellent illustration of this in “The Scent of Memory,” by following the thread of autobiography on many levels, including her own, as a link between the “then” and the “now” ([1999] 2012).⁶ Moving from sociology to psychoanalysis and cultural studies, she imagines the isolation of Jean Lott—the Southhall white woman who had committed suicide at 57—mirroring her own isolation in a diasporic space as a student of Asian origins living in the same area, while questioning white and Asian women and trying to understand the problems of “us” and “them,” and in general of race, gender and class in London and other inter-ethnic cities. With her interviews and research and her reading of her son’s autobiography, she was trying to carry on a “dialogue between and across ‘consciousness’ (or conscious agency), ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’” (ibid., 10). Migrancy is a condition connecting the present of the passage to the past of origins, and to the aspiration of the future, making subjectivity a complex contested process that involves the social and the psychic, the conscious and the unconscious. The complexity of the process is underlined by Brah’s subtitle for the essay, in which the strangers are, at one time, “our own and others.” Likewise, the Freudian analytic scene is not so much after reconstructing the origin, digging out what is hidden in the unconscious, as it is about the unravelling of the process between

4 The capacity of the Musée du Quai Branly to interrogate itself was publicly tested in the show *Exhibitions, l'invention du sauvage* (2011-12), that reconstructed the history of women, men and children brought from Africa, Asia, Oceania and America to be exhibited in the Western world in circuses, theatres, cabaret performances, fairs, zoos, and—last but not least—museums.

5 The very definition “migrant” runs the risk of evoking an impenetrable surface, freezing complex mutable beings in the passage between origin and destination. Without the movement and the difference of identities and languages that is privilege of the condition of the fugitive.

6 Brah’s 1999 article has been republished in the recent *Feminist Review* special issue on “Recalling. The scent of memory” (Brah [1999] 2012). Commencing from the publication of Tim Lott’s *The Scent of Dry Roses* (1998), on his mother’s suicide, the essay is based on the interviews and research Brah carried on as part of her doctorate thesis in the seventies in Southhall, a popular area of London that since the post-war period had seen the arrival of many immigrants. Among the articles presented in the *Feminist Review* Special Issue—all commenting on Brah’s works and militancy—Stuart Hall, in the wake of Kobena Mercer, defines the diasporic space as a “syncretic dynamic” set in motion by de-colonization and global migration. Hall also reminds us that the “post” in postcolonial is not so much what comes “after,” as the *aftermath* of colonization/decolonization pushing people into exile due to poverty and hunger, civil war, illness, ecological disaster or political persecution (Hall 2012, 29).

then and now. It aims at narration rather than explanation.

For Arjun Appadurai, memory is precious for migrants. He considers the diasporic archive a new form of agency, a desiring machine, and a link from personal to collective memory. In the wake of Amyarta Sen's "*capabilities*," he sees in the capacity to aspire "a collective point of strength" (Appadurai 2011, 48). This archive is an intervention, a social project, the outcome of imagination, and expresses future aspirations rather than recollection. His reference is unavoidably to the electronic media, as they, together with mass migrations, mark the present epoch, "not because they are technically new forces but as forces straining (and sometime con-straining) the work of imagination" (7). However, as he writes in "Archive and Aspiration," Appadurai considers *all* archives as collective tools: "the creation of documents and their aggregation into archives is also a part of everyday life outside the purview of the state" (2003, 16). Personal diaries, whether published or not, family photo albums or the more immediate cellphone pictures, individual libraries, oral storytelling and community museums—they all contribute to the collective and active construction of an open archive. In comparison with museums, still considered useful means for the conservation of the past, this new archive, with its possibility for interactive users to enter, edit and contribute, is for migrants a place of debate, a tool of everyday life, a break between memory and desire. It is a voice-agency-debate, working against the framing of immigrants as victims of the society they have arrived in. They become the memory of intentional communities rather than of default communities like the nation.

The deterritorialization of the migrant, her/his living among cultures, renders problematic the relation of the museum to the nation. Hannah Arendt questioned the nation state being founded on the right of inclusion and exclusion; in her wake, cultural and postcolonial studies have elaborated the necessity for the search of a new concept of citizenship.⁷ The museum in relation to the nation is discussed by Stuart Hall (2002) who opposes the meaning of the word "heritage" in English—tradition or the spirit of a nation—that commonly refers to works and artistic productions whose value is given by their relation to the past. "National Heritage" is in fact its usual denomination, in the same way as "nazionale" is often the formal attribute for museums and libraries in Italy. In the wake of Raymond Williams—who in *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1961) had criticized Matthew Arnold's notion of culture as "the best which has been thought and said in the world"—Hall proposes an interpretation that would include "the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity, alongside the conservation of the past," referring to new and transgressive cultural forms (Hall 2002, 73). The national archive thus becomes a discursive practice always open and in constant construction. Here a study of the developments of postcolonial museums and libraries invariably points to a different kind of future citizenship.

7 See, among others: Bhabha 1990; Butler and Spivak 2007; Mezzadra 2006; Rigo 2007.

→ INDIAN HIGHWAY

The changes produced by the “irruption” of the other, and the movement from colonised object to postcolonial subject in museological and exhibitionary systems, where prestige resides precisely in representations of alterity, can be the basis for a discourse still to be realized. A recent exposition on Indian contemporary art presented at the MAXXI in Roma, *Indian Highway* (curator Giulia Ferracci), has somehow implied that such a future is not too distant. Much contemporary art places its emphasis on transit, exchange, the hybridisation of media, cultures and identities, suggesting ways, if not highways, that from the work of art invest existing structures by proposing the new and the transgressive alongside the conservation of the past. Most of the works in the exhibition present a transformation of current artistic practices, interrupting the circuit museum-gallery-auction-market, largely through agencies and foundations promoting artistic productions, among which the Triangle Arts Trust in London (Hoskote 2011) or the Goethe Institute.

Indian Highway is an itinerant exhibition that began at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2008 and has then moved from place to place. It is close to the formula of the itinerant museum, a project recently proposed by the Centre Pompidou; the expression of the unease occasioned by the rigidity of fixed structures. The title is inspired by the great Indian highway linking rural and urban communities—a symbol of the migrations within the new India recalling the Great Trunk Road, the centre of Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901). At the end of the nineteenth century, when the British colonial empire refused to acknowledge the first signs of decline, it was the macrocosm and microcosm of Indian society, a kind of prism for the colonialist to look on that mysterious land, in a mixture of superiority and fascination; today the term can refer to the information highways, ever-present in the languages of these artists. Alongside Bangalore, home of a noted digital concentration, there is, so they say, the largest network of motor roads existing; both the emblem of the power of the modern nation-state that is often a target for these artists.

The prefix “*trans-*” is a sort of keyword, evoking the fluid, unstable character of many works founded on transit and exchange, reflecting a process open to reprogramming. Photography, drawing, graphic novels, cinema, video, installations and performances often co-exist in the same work, in a syntax common to video-art and guided by a general poetics of the image. I am referring here particularly to the four authors who were the object of a special accompanying event, *Reframing Indian Identity*, organized by Viviana Gravano e Giulia Grechi at the MAXXI, in which I gave a presentation. Their activity is a good example of this mixture: Abhishek Hazra e Tejal Shah’s usage of installation and performance; Sarnath Banjeree’s of drawing and writing or painting and pictures; Pushpamala’s of performance, sculpture and photography.

The transit among different identities becomes a transit among subjects and between subject and object, in the nuances of gender and race. Shah’s works return insistently to the “trans-formation, trans-mutation, trans-



IMG. 01 – *Indian Highway*. Tejal Shah, from *Hysteria—Iconography from Salpêtrière 2007-2009*. MAXXI—Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome. Photo: Sebastiano Luciano. Courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI.

figuration” of each of the sexes into its opposite—a face in one of her videos transformed through the alternate addition of jewels or a beard. She chooses the *hirja* trans-sexual community as inspiration and setting, a queer world where nothing is fixed. In her works bodies are multiplied in a series of changing racial and sexual identities with reference to bio-power, and particularly to pseudoscientific morphological classifications. *There is always something absent* (2007–2008) deals with the use of the female body in Charcot’s studies of hysteria and his anatomical theatre, and is inspired by the story of Augustine, interned in the Salpêtrière hospital from 1875 to 1880. In a counterpoint of past and present—yesterday’s reclusion, commented by the scientist’s clinical notes, and Indian female conditions today—Shah links a historical episode to her own society. The pictures shown at the MAXXI, *Hysteria—Iconography From The Salpêtrière 2007-2009*, show the bodies of contemporary Indian women and men in the pathological poses drawn from Charcot’s treatment of madness and anatomic positivism, that renders the archive actual.

Attention to the relation between knowledge and power in the constitution of the subject returns in Pushpamala N.’s images of women, this time more precisely directed at ethnographic devices. She shows the theatrical components of the photographic poses in the images of herself as a model, underlining the artificial construction of what is considered “natural” and “real,” a recurrent motif in many of the works. She deconstructs pseudoscientific criteria superimposing their tools on faces and bodies: photographic parameters, metrical instruments, anatomic measuring devices appear as phantasmatic presences in the icons of “femaleness.” By turning an ironic look on photography and contesting its documentary “truthfulness” as (ab)used by ethnography, she puts in question her own art and its expressive means.⁸ Her project *Native Women of South*

8 Gravano (2012) has underlined the absence of self-awareness in the use of anthropological instruments, speaking of photography as porno-graphy. This subject is also pursued in Grechi 2012.

India: Manners and Customs (2000–2004) offers a gallery of stereotypical images of Southern Indian women, from mythology to contemporary icons, playing with notions of subject and object, framer and framed, black and white, true and false, in baroque excess. The double is a fundamental structure: “I, me, myself” she says of her poses, echoing Trinh T. Minha’s “woman is and is not, at one time other than me and my other self” (Trinh 1994, 23). Like Trinh, Pushpamala uses her own body, as both subject and object of the camera.⁹

The politics of knowledge, with its relation to power and its instruments, is a theme recurring in Abishek Hazra’s works. In *Index of Debt* (2009), he shows the gap between scientific models and the complexity of the real, attacking the so called objectivity of scientific research, of its labels, its traditional means alongside its “novelties,” exemplified by the index cards of South Asian Studies, a much boasted new academic discipline. In the video *Radio Jena* of the same year, through the format of a visual fable, he shows the intersection and juxtaposition of diverse, but potentially linked, historical phenomena: from Darwin’s evolutionism, reinterpreted by the naturalist Haeckel, to Hegel’s philosophy of reason, down to Nazi eugenetics. To complete the chain, he adds the occidental vision of India as the childhood of the west, including contemporary forms of yoga, that he considers part of the orientalist and colonialist version of an authentic, immutable, traditional India—due as much to the machine of global entertainment as to today’s Hindu fundamentalism.¹⁰

The experimental character of these artistic languages goes along with political and social commitment. Present social conditions, accelerated economic development, excessive urbanization and the consequent marginalization of the subaltern masses, are all dominant themes: in the background lies the question “how did we get to here?” Contemporary migrations cross India in all directions, pass the borders towards the West, where the artists have in part obtained their formation and find inspirations and models, not without detachment and irony. Indian contemporary culture is thus marked by the presence of Occidental thought, sometimes contested, other times acknowledged. Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said and Ranajit Guha appear in *Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* in Hazra’s *Upstate New York* (2009).¹¹ Jean Genet is Tejal Shah’s inspiration in *What are you?* (2006), with its narrow lanes, dark halls, mysterious *cul-de-sac* that are the urban background to the hirja community. Famous characters appear in Sarnath Banerjee’s graphic novels, with sudden interventions in the degraded urban landscapes, not without comic effects. Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Karl Marx guar-

9 Likewise, Hazra stresses the role of the “embodied witnessed presence” of the artist. In his video *Laughing in a Sine Curve* (2008), he gives a physical and emotional expression to a mathematical curve using his own face in the passage between laughter and tears.

10 Yoga is present in the breath rhythm accompanying the audio, with written intervals commanding: “inspire-expire.” Thus the spectator ironically participates in the action that is the object of the satire, as part of that Western vision.

11 This performance offers a counter history of Indian independence, going from Gramsci to Subaltern Studies, centred on Ranajit Guha’s fundamental book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983).



IMG. 02 – Pushpamala N.
Still from the video *Indian Lady* (1997).
Courtesy of the artist.



IMG. 03 – Pushpamala N.
Still from the video *Indian Lady* (1997).
Courtesy of the artist.

antee the presence of Theory with a capital “T.” On the other hand, an exasperated localism emerges in his cartoons that draw a contrapuntal urban geography: Delhi in *Corridor* (2004), and Calcutta in *The Barn Owl’s Wondrous capers* (2007), recall the concept of “urban sprawl [...] as site of possibility and conflict” (see Capasso, this volume). Banerjee’s black humour is directed against a centralized state that, in continuity with the political imperialism of the past, ignores marginalized masses and cancels the local in favour of a new global liberalism. Banerjee’s “urban warriors” survive as islands on the margin of the city: its meanderings are their territory, and their resistance lies simply in “*hanging around*”. Digital Dutta, a character in *Corridor* also appearing in the *Harappa Files*

IMG. 04 – Dayanita Singh, Wallpaper Installation (Dream Villa 11), 2009, MAXXI—Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome. Photo: Sebastiano Luciano. Courtesy of Fondazione MAXXI.



(2011), a series of visual micro essays present in the MAXXI exhibition, has learnt about life in northern Calcutta slums as well as from Roland Barthes who taught him not to believe that only what you see is real—again the negation of the real-artificial binary.

On the whole it seems to me that the exhibition has to some extent transmitted its transmaterial and transmedial character to the museum. Video and images have been inserted in walls and ceilings, remodeling corridors and perimeters, particularly in Sumakhi Singh's installation.¹² The mix of sound, installation, and multiple videos on steps and scaffoldings in the case of Raqs Media Collective's *Steps Away From Oblivion* proposes a conceptual space for an anti-mimetic and divided spectatorship. The long curving wall punctuates the progression of the exposition with the giant replicas of Dayanita Singh's poster for the Serpentine, in memory of its beginnings.

Some of the artists came to the MAXXI to participate in the making of the exhibition, among them N.S. Harsha with his figurative "mantra" painted on the plaza floor outside the entrance. Placing themselves between Mumbai and London, Delhi and New York, the artists denied clear and delimited belongings, underlining the limits of a national reference: the exhibition from its beginnings was inspired by Édouard Glissant's concept of "*mondialité*." Most of them suggested a plurality of roles, as the Raqs Media Collective who define themselves artists, curators, philosophers and agent provocateurs.

12 Her installations surpass the borders of metaphor, reality and illusion, and reach effects of space-time dislocations. She uses strata of papers covering wall surfaces and opening, through holes and cracks, onto miniature creations: painted images, sculpted scenes, videos and animated drawings.

→ BORDERLANDS

The accent on memory and migration, on nation and belonging, alterity and citizenship, on the mobility of bodies and objects, can suggest possible alternatives in archival and exhibition strategies and their opening towards the future. The examples in this volume have come from museums based in a community or installations that suggest mobile localizations, as well as from media technology mixing sound and sight, touch and feeling, the here and the elsewhere simultaneously, both inside and outside the four white walls. A community museum like the one in Cape Town described by Alessandra De Angelis suggests the opening of the historical memory of apartheid to local interventions, between recovery of the past and construction of the future, proposing a different link between museum and nation and a new conception of participant citizenship. Other examples of community art practices, tied to social action and proposed as an alternative to institutional spaces, are given by a.titolo with CeSac, the experimental centre at the French-Italian border; by Federica Timeto with subRosa and Women on Waves (WoW); Michaela Quadraro with SudLab and other collective projects and multilayered artworks. They all speak of site specific productions, of curatorial experiences placed offcentre, whether on borders or at the periphery, of activities between social militancy and art-making of an experiential kind—a move towards museum making rather than museum visiting (see a.titolo, this volume)

The discussion of the “antimuseum” is also very strong in the small Lampedusa Museum of Migrations, organized by the Associazione Askavusa with the artist Giacomo Sferrazzo. This one-room museum creates an aesthetics out of the relics of shipwrecks and of the objects forgotten or lost by the migrants: with its criteria of improvisation, juxtaposition and disorder it proposes a deliberate counterpoint to linear and objectifying expositions.¹³ Sferrazzo talked of this experiment in words and songs at the MeLa Brainstorming in Naples on March 14, 2012. In this volume, De Angelis discusses this experience in “A Museum on the Margins of the Mediterranean.” The island of Lampedusa—so central above all for migrants from the Italian ex-colonies—has also inspired many other narrative and visual works, transforming the Mediterranean journey into a theatre of shipwrecks and deaths, thus becoming part of our “heritage,” as a sort of counter-narration.¹⁴ There have been quite a few films and videos on this and similar theatres of migration; for our purpose it is interesting to mention here Isaac Julien’s and Zineb Sedira’s works which have centred on the images of the abandoned relics of boats or ships.

That this activity has been transformed in art objects is underlined by the Italian Ministry of Culture contemplating the establishment of a museum of emigration on the island using those relics that until now have

13 For a comparison between this experience and Bristol’s slavery museum which presents a linear and aseptic logic, despite being the result of a public debate and a local movement, see Gatta and Muzzopappa 2012.

14 On this and other artworks that move from the museum to external spaces and back, see Curti 2011.

IMG. 05 – Isaac Julien.
Sculpture for the New Millennium (Western Union Series No. 10) | 2007. Duratran Image in lightbox | 120x293 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro Gallery, London, Metro Pictures, New York and Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid.



been difficult to place and considered embarrassing to display. It is an ironic circumstance, or maybe a positive sign of how counterpractices may modify traditional views of heritage.

Giulia Grechi's and Celeste Ianniciello's essays also invoke alternative practices using the museum as a critical lever on existing ones. Ianniciello sees the possibility of overcoming the paradigm of the nation-state and the local-global binaries in a dialogue of museums with contemporary art language: museums become "worldly" by hosting the local traces of global routes. The installation *Museum of European Normality*, according to Grechi, underlines the problematic of determining what is European identity, based as it is on an ignored colonial past and its present traces in the globalized economy. The work was shown at *Manifesta 7* (that is, at least in intention, an anti-museum art event). It proposed a reflection on what is national and what is not and on the construction of *our* identity, as well as being an ironic survey on the cannibalization of alterity. Anthropological museums often offer an example of exoticism and eurocentrism, using uneven locations, displacement and silences in the appropriation of objects.

The mobilization of the museum may also be obtained through a dialogue between media platforms, according to Beatrice Ferrara. She refers to the activity of film makers such as the Black Audio Collective and Chris Marker in the seventies, and the link between their work and public TV channels such as BBC Channel 4. Successively, she points to the Otolith Group's project of recuperation, in the space of museums and galleries, of these artworks which have almost disappeared from public screening events. Their projects show that today these kinds of activities, originally destined for cinema or TV screens, can be hosted by the museum, giving it a new potential for offering an alternative to mainstream channels, and substituting conditions of attentive participation to the passivity generated by contemporary television. Similarly, Danilo Capasso, with his "Metapolis," proposes new spatial turns in the urban sphere, by turning to an alternative connection between the museum and the city, no longer seen only as physical interfaces. The N.EST (Napoliest) project provides an example of a relational space, which goes from the physical to the digital domain. In this way, it creates a participatory digital collection of local contents archived on the web, able to inspire urban transformation and regeneration.

Feminist perspectives have inspired some of the essays in this volume, in a link from Bracha Ettinger's theory and art to cyberfeminism and other performative activities in favour of women, as well as to the many creative artworks by women described here. This is to suggest that a potential "counter-archive" is attentive to difference: gender, race, geography, culture and others are to be taken into accounts.¹⁵ Race and gender are at the centre of Mariangela Orabona's essay on the (self)representation of the black body, between appropriation and resistance, and on the role of the black artist in the museum. With the black silhouettes of her *Endless Conundrum*, Kara Walker threatens the expectations of the exhibitionary machine, through the representation of her own "excessive" body. The female body creates an alternative archive of the margin and the ephemeral, thus becoming incommensurable with the museum. The works of the three artists analysed in Celeste Ianniciello's essay, Mona Hatoum, Zineb Sedira and Lara Baladi, occupy a similar space. They all start from the experience of migration, and are marked by the idea of trace, passage, precarity. The theme of female exile and of unrooted geographies mirrors the exclusion of women's artistic practices from the rational and linear system dominating exhibitionary traditions, thus revealing the "male" mind that chooses, plans, decides.

The necessity of overcoming borders of many kinds recurring in all these essays became a powerful metaphor in the Naples Brainstorming papers, that are partly reported in this volume: the Mexican border in Woody Guthrie's song, poetically evoked by Iain Chambers; the island of Lampedusa and other frontiers artificially erected by Fortress Europe, not too different from the racialized ghettos of Castelvolturno and Rosarno that were presented in two interesting videos by Cultural Video Foundation and Insu^TV to which Ferrara refers in the concluding remarks of her essay. They gave a powerful testimony of the practices of resistance in the South of Europe, alongside the many accounts of alternative practices of community art centres already mentioned here. They witness the encounter between aesthetics and ethics, political gestures and artistic production, proposing a process and an activity rather than finished works: "art working."

By way of a conclusion I wish to underline the more general problem of the isolation of the context of the museum and such exhibitions in Italy. The symbolic value of these places and the works they exhibit should be valorised and properly promoted in order to become an in-

15 Male and female, black and white, local and global should not be seen as fixed categories, as Avtar Brah points out in *Cartographies of Diaspora*, but rather "as non-essentialist, historically contingent, relational discursive practices" (1996, 16). Yuval-Davis, who indicated the relation of gender, ethnicity and class as a step forward with respect to the generic reference to patriarchy, sees rooting and shifting as the basis of a transversal perspective on the heterogeneity of migrants (1997). Hall has underlined that cultural identities are often fluid and crosscutting, and ethnicity is a process of struggle and negotiation, crossed by differences: cultural diaspora-ization is for him a process "of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and cut-and-mix" (1992, 22). Butler writes of gender and identity performativity in Butler 1990, 1993.

tegral part of the surrounding culture, commencing from the immediate community and going on to the visitors and inhabitants of a city. Site specificity and relation with the context have been repeatedly emphasized in these essays, advocating art exhibitions as “symbols of a public sphere that is changing [...] and at the same time as agents of that change” (see a.titolo, this volume). The economic crisis does not aid such a process, and Italian art institutions move in a cultural and topological void. Furthermore, without a wider recognition of the absence of other histories and cultures within our “own,” the practices that have been advocated in this volume are not sufficient to modify the rules, languages and the scope of existing museums and galleries.

Nevertheless some significant suggestions have emerged: the production of memories with a community, leading to a collective, open archive; the immediacy of electronic languages allowing an ingression in public space; the creation of new and different zones of sensorial vibrations, that abandon obsolete forms of communication; the role of a militant image. As contemporary art practices suggest, it is important to privilege the power of the local against the global, process and narration rather than explanation, dis-order and creolization rather than the search for harmonic recompositions. Offering spaces and structures for artists to participate in the production of events and archival organization, through the creation of residential spaces and economic support, would be a significant step. Even more valuable is the collaborations of curators and artists with writers, actors, dancers in order to produce transversal objects and visions. Exhibitions would then focus less on finished objects and more on processes, on the narration of the cultural context, on the symbolic value surrounding it; that is, not only on the artefacts but also on the processes of the museum, the institution, itself. As a site of inevitable mediation—even if denied or avoided—must we understand that in places such as the museum or the art gallery the subaltern cannot yet speak? There is one certainty: much contemporary art has shown that the subaltern can speak and is not asking to be represented. Rather, it is asking more of us all.

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MeLa* - European Museums in an age of migrations

Research Fields:

RF01: Museums and Identity in History and Contemporaneity

examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

RF02: Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices

transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.

RF03: Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions

investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.

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explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.

RF05: Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions

investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user-centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums

fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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CULTURAL MEMORY, MIGRATING MODERNITIES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES

The intention of the contributions in this volume is to explore the parameters and paradigms of the contemporary museum—its spaces, practices and avowed purposes—in the light of the critical interrogations raised by postcolonial criticism and analyses. How are we to re-think museum studies, exhibitionary practices and archiving procedures within the radical reevaluation of Occidental modernity? Such an investigation witnesses the latter's historical and cultural premises being exposed to questions and possibilities it has rarely authorized. When the unsung bodies, cultures and histories of colonialism and Empire return to ghost the contemporary world—this, too, is “globalization”—then the manner of picturing and framing the memories of that past and present becomes a pressing and contested matter. Are we merely to adjust and enlarge an inherited frame of understanding to incorporate this critical encounter, or is something more required?

With contributions by: a.titolo, Danilo Capasso, Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti, Alessandra De Angelis, Beatrice Ferrara, Giulia Grechi, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, Michaela Quadraro, Federica Timeto.

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COVER IMAGE — Studio Azzurro-Le migrazioni: part of the exhibition celebrating 150 years of the history of Italy, “Fare gli italiani 1861-2011.” Courtesy of Paolo Rosa and Studio Azzurro.

MeLa—European Museums in an age of migrations



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